

# Lenten Study Guide



Lent with the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking  
Compiled by FFAST

## What is Lent?

Lent is a season of the Christian calendar that lasts 40 days starting with Ash Wednesday and leading up to Resurrection (Easter) Sunday. As we focus on Jesus' sacrifice for us, we take this time to reflect on our lives, doing acts of charity and making small sacrifices. These sacrifices can be done by focusing on prayer, fasting, or almsgiving. Originally, Lent was only celebrated a few days before Resurrection Sunday with individuals focused on fasting and prayer. Following the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., the decision was made that Lent would be expanded to the 40-day observance we participate in now. The reasoning for 40 days of fasting and prayer reflects Jesus' days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness. You may be saying that there are more than 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Resurrection Sunday, and you would be correct. Depending on which liturgical calendar you follow determines two things: first, how much of the Holy Week is included in lent, and second, if Sundays during Lent are included in your Lenten observance. Most Lenten calendars do not include Sundays during the Lent period as Sundays are seen as a time of celebration and feasting for Jesus' raising from the grave, so it is not a day for fasting. We will follow the calendar that does not include Sundays in the Lent calendar.

## What does participating in Lent entail?

There are three pillars of Lent: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. How are each of these observed and why? Let's take a look.

- **Fasting:** Fasting is abstinence from food. Typically, for lent, it is the giving up of one specific food, or food type, for forty days. In the Catholic church, it is required that you give up meat (required days are Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and every Friday during Lent). The Eastern Orthodox church requires that you give up all animal products during Lent. However, Protestants do not follow this specific guideline. Some do give up meat, but others will give up candy, chips, coffee, or anything that they enjoy eating. Others have gone a different direction with fasting and decided that instead of giving up food, they will give up social media (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), fast food, or online shopping. Why are we fasting? There are a few reasons that we are fasting during this period. The first is to follow the example of Jesus after he was baptized. In Matthew 4:1-17 we see Him led into the wilderness where he fasted for 40 days and nights. We will look at this passage more closely during our study, but we see here that Jesus gives us the example of fasting. And while following in Jesus' footsteps is the best thing we can and should be doing, we see many other examples of fasting throughout the Bible, and their reasoning. We see King David fasted as a way to humble himself before God (Psalm 69:10). Moses fasted twice for forty days. Once was in communion with God as he received and wrote the ten commandments (Exodus 34:28) and the other was in prayer asking for God's forgiveness for the people of Israel's sin (Deuteronomy 9:18-19). Both King David and Ezra fasted to humble themselves before the Lord (Psalm 69:10 and Ezra 8:21).
- **Prayer:** King David also shows us another reason to fast and that is because fasting leads to prayer (Psalm 35:13). Part of Lent is to restore our relationship with Jesus and to do that we need to be in communication with him. Prayer is the main way that we communicate with Jesus. The 40 days of lent allow us to focus on our prayer lives, communicating fully with God. When we are feeling tempted to break our fast, we should be turning to God. This helps to teach and reinforce turning to God when we are in need. Beyond asking him for help to get past the temptation of breaking the fast, we should be speaking to him about all things and asking Him to speak to us as well. It is the hope that after the 40 days of Lent that one's prayer life will be stronger, and it will continue past the Lenten period.
- **Almsgiving:** This allows us to connect to the world around us and put others ahead of ourselves. It is responding with compassion and care to the wretchedness we see many people suffer.

Most individuals participating in Lent will take the money they would have normally spent on their fasting item and give that to the poor and needy.

What does Lent have to do with human trafficking?

One of the main purposes of lent is to restore your relationship with Jesus Christ. Part of doing that is examining your actions to see where you are sinning, asking for forgiveness, and correcting those actions. It can be easy for us to say that we are not perpetrators of human trafficking. We do not purchase sex. Nor are we a business or employer that withholds the wages of their employees. Nor have we confiscated either the pay, or passports from a maid or nanny. Sadly though, we all contribute to human trafficking through our various actions. Whether it is the clothes we are buying, our electronics, or where we buy our groceries from, we may be contributing to the problem if we are not doing the proper research to know where the materials we purchase come from and the supply line. (To find out more about your slavery footprint visit [slaveryfootprint.org](http://slaveryfootprint.org)). We can take this time of Lent to reflect on our actions and the best way to make changes in our lives that will have a positive impact on human trafficking. Using the three pillars of Lent we can do this by:

- Fasting: Choose one thing, whether it be a food item or shopping, that you realize has been contributing to human trafficking in some way, to fast from for the 40 days.
- Prayer: Ask God to show you ways that you can have a positive impact on reducing human trafficking.
- Almsgiving: Consider giving your lent donation to an organization that works to fight human trafficking such as FFAST or one of our member organizations.

How to use the Lent Guide?

Starting with Ash Wednesday there will be a daily Bible verse to read, a meditation on that verse, and a short prayer. On Sundays, as we are taking the approach of those before us, that each Sunday is a celebration of the Lord's resurrection, we will do a short introduction to the next week's theme and connect it to lent and human trafficking. The themes for the guide are temptation, darkness, brokenness, sin, repentance, faithfulness, and the cross. We pray that you will find this guide useful in drawing you closer to God and in having a better understanding of how our actions contribute to human trafficking and how we can counter those actions.

## **Week 1 of Lent**

### **Theme – Temptation**

*Introduction on Temptation* - It seems only fitting to begin our Lenten study with the theme of temptation. Jesus understood temptation well. We are told about one time Jesus was tempted directly by Satan (as we will see in our first daily Bible reading). We can assume that given that he was fully man that he dealt with the full range of emotions and issues, including being tempted more than that one time. However, we also see that He never gives in to that temptation. We should learn from this. We are tempted every day. During the next forty days, you will be tempted to break your fast. You will be tempted to forget to do this study for the day. And temptations will follow you out of Lent. You will be tempted to buy fast fashion (fashion that is made cheaply most likely using slave labor), buy cheaper produce (that could be harvested by labor trafficking victims), or even watch pornography (many in these clips are sex trafficking victims). We will be tempted in so many different ways, and whether we realize it or not, those temptations most likely fuel human trafficking. Let us take this time during the Lenten study to understand what our temptations are, how those temptations can hurt others, and how we are to appropriately respond to temptations.

*Prayer* – Lord, we realize that temptation is part of our daily lives. It can be so difficult to stand up to those temptations and reject those things we shouldn't be craving. We pray that you help us refuse any temptation that we encounter. Let us be like you when you were tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Help us to draw on Your Word and You, rejecting whatever temptation we may be facing. We ask that we take this week to closely look at our lives to find out which temptations in our lives contribute to human trafficking. We ask that once we have identified these temptations, we learn how we can counter the temptation so we can reject it. Let our rejecting each of these temptations have a positive impact on ending human trafficking.

*Day 1 (Ash Wednesday)* – Matthew 4:1-11: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But he answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you; and 'on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "all these things I will give You, if you fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'you shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Then the devil left Him; and behold angels came and began to minister to him.

*Meditation* - It seems appropriate to start the Lenten study off with the temptation of Jesus. Throughout His earthly ministry, we get to see how He responds to human issues, giving us a guide for how we too, should respond to them. What does Jesus show us in this passage on one of the ways to respond when directly confronted with temptation? It is to know the scripture. Jesus responds to the first temptation for food by responding with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3b; the second temptation of throwing himself off the pinnacle by reciting Psalm 91:11; the third temptation of worshiping Satan by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13. What does this mean for us? It means that we too should learn the scriptures. We need to learn the promises, the covenants, the judgments, and the blessings that we receive by following Christ and his commandments. Temptations for us will come in many forms. We may be tempted to google indecent pictures of men or women with the thinking "what harm can an internet search do?" We may be tempted to treat someone as lesser for no reason other than their job, pay, house, or car. We may be tempted to ignore signs that someone is being abused or groomed because dealing with it may be just too much time and effort. When we are tempted by these or any other temptation we face, we can remember these verses, fall back on them, and be reminded that temptation is a fleeting thing but God's love, justice, and blessings are forever.

*Prayer* - Lord Jesus, we find comfort in knowing that you faced temptation directly from Satan. Knowing the Prince of Darkness confronted you when you were most likely desperate, yet you were able to reject his offers gives us hope. Lord, we ask that we take courage and strength from your handling of the temptation. Help us learn the scriptures so that when we are faced with temptation we can turn to your word for help. Lord, we ask that we do not deceive ourselves thinking that if we just give in to temptation just this one time it will not hurt anyone. Lord, we know that we are just rationalizing our behavior when we think like that because even if giving in to temptation does not hurt another person directly, it hurts us spiritually. We pray we remember this and reject any temptation presented to us.

*Day 2 (Thursday of the first week of Lent) – Matthew 6:9-13: Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*

*Meditation* - Most of us are quite familiar with these verses and can quote them when needed. Which, as we discussed the previous day, is what we should be doing when we are confronted with a temptation. In addition to that, Jesus again shows us another way in which we are to respond when confronted with temptation and that is to pray. It would be easy to just speed through this prayer thinking it would be enough. And it may be, but we should take Martin Luther’s advice with this prayer and after each petition individually, add our own requests and thoughts to it. When tempted, this is especially helpful with the last sentence: “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We are to pray to avoid temptations. If we follow Luther’s advice, we would then pray for the Lord to protect us from the specific temptation that we are currently facing. For example, while scrolling through social media we see a story about children being taken from a store or cars marked with zip ties, and we are tempted to share the story thinking we are helping to educate our friends and family. It's so easy to just click on that “share” button and move on with our day. But we cannot give in to that temptation, as we need to share truthful information. So, when we are faced with that temptation we need to stop and pray “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Lord, I pray that you help me only by sharing truthful and accurate information. Lord, give me the strength not to click share without doing the research first.” We know that just because we pray to avoid temptations, that they will still find us. When faced with a temptation, we need to pray that God deliver us from the temptation and keep us safe from evil.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are thankful that you have given us an example of how to pray. Lord, we ask that you first keep us from temptation. That we can recognize it when it comes and avoid it. Lord, we ask that if we do find ourselves in a time of temptation though, that we remember that we can, and should, turn to you. That we pray to you. And that if we cannot think of any other prayer to help us, we remember your words and pray “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

*Day 3 (Friday the first week of Lent) – Hebrews 4:15-16: For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Then let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

*Meditation* - As we saw in the previous days, Jesus was tempted, yet he overcame that temptation. Today’s verse is a reminder of that fact. But more than a reminder that Jesus was able to overcome the temptations He faced, we should be comforted that he was able to, because He can identify with us as we struggle, and this allows us to relate to him. He went forty days without food and yet he did not give in to changing the stones to bread. It is easy to think that because of His divinity, the rejection of the temptation was easy. But we need to remember that He was also fully man. We are told in the temptation of Christ that he was hungry when he was approached by Satan to turn the stones into bread. The narrative has Jesus responding quickly to Satan, but we don’t know how strong the inclination was to follow through with the suggestion. After not eating for forty days and forty nights, one can think that the temptation to have a quick meal would be strong. But still, he rejected the

temptation. And we can look to that with comfort, knowing He has been tempted just like we are. So, when we are tempted to buy chocolate made using child and slave labor instead of paying more for ethically sourced chocolate, we can be comforted to know that Jesus too faced temptation and was able to say no. And at the same time, Jesus will look to us with sympathy when we are faced with temptation because he understands what it takes to say no to that temptation. By looking to Jesus' example, and understanding His actions, we can come nearer to Him and find the mercy and grace that we need to help defeat the temptation and the tempter.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that we can turn to you when we are facing temptations. We know that you have suffered through many temptations yourself, many much worse than the ones that we are facing now. And yet, you were able to reject each one, giving us hope that we too can reject each temptation that we face. Lord, we ask that as we face each new obstacle, we turn to you, Lord. That you grant mercy and grace on us to help us ward off and reject whatever temptation that we may be encountering Lord. And that by rejecting temptation and turning to you, we draw nearer to you as well.

*Day 4 (Saturday the first week of Lent)* – 1 Peter 4:12-13: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange things were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

*Meditation* - It would be wonderful if after we come to believe in Jesus that life would be simple and easy without temptations or trials. But this passage reminds us that is not what will happen. We are told that we will be tested and tempted. That these trials we will face are actually for our benefit and part of the reason for them is so that they will help us to share and understand the sufferings of Christ. And what is our response to be to the temptations, testing, and trials we face? We are to rejoice. Why? Because when we identify with Christ in what he has been through, and we are able to overcome with Him we can rejoice in the revelation of His glory. Because it is through His glory, grace, and mercy that we can overcome anything put in front of us. This means that when we are facing the temptation while scrolling through shopping websites looking for that needed clothing item, we can stand strong against purchasing those items that are incredibly cheap and we suspect are made using slave labor. And we can rejoice when we do because not only did we reject the temptation to save a few dollars and said no to slave labor, but we also overcame the trial that was put in front of us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that we are to ask you to keep us from temptation. We learned that when focusing on the Lord's prayer. But Lord, we also know that despite asking for this, we will have to face temptation and trials in our lives. Lord, we ask that as we face each new temptation and trial we turn to you. That we seek your grace, mercy, and glory to overcome whatever trial or temptation comes our way. And that when we do overcome these obstacles, Lord, we rejoice with you, and we can revel in your Glory.

## **Week 2 of Lent**

### **Theme - Darkness**

*Sunday introduction on darkness* - Typically, when darkness is spoken about in the Bible it is used in a symbolic way. God is referred to as the light, so darkness is the antithesis of that, it is the anti-God. It represents sin, temptation, death, and the final judgment. When we have fallen away from God, we have fallen into darkness. When we are in the darkness it is easy to ignore our sins and justify our

behaviors as we do not see them as we should. And the longer that we are in the darkness, the easier it is to ignore our sins and justify our behaviors. As Christians, we need to realize that being believers does not mean that we are not susceptible to falling into darkness ourselves. Let us consider how we treat others who have sinned, especially sins that we consider worse than others. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that approximately 26% of LGBTQ adolescents are rejected by their families and kicked out of their homes. When this happens, they are more susceptible to becoming victims of human trafficking. Instead of rejecting the vulnerable and sending them into a more precarious situation, we need to consider the words of Jesus in John 8:7. When the Pharisees brought the adulteress woman to Jesus for condemnation, Jesus responded by saying “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” We are all sinful beings and have our own sins we are struggling with therefore we need to be careful when we are dealing with another person’s sin. If our response to the person sinning is done in the wrong manner, we can be guilty of sin. Unfortunately, though, we may not see it as sin, just as the Pharisees did not see their actions as sinful, because we are acting in what we believe is righteousness. The more we are deceived by this, the farther into darkness we may fall.

*Sunday Prayer* – Lord, we are so thankful that you, our ever-present light, keeps the darkness at bay. We pray that you do not let the darkness encroach on us. We know though that at times we will find ourselves amid the shadows. Help us so we don’t think that living in the darkness is a comfortable thing and leads us to ignore our sins. Lord, we ask that if we do find ourselves headed into the darkness you send us your light. Let this be through a friend, your word, a sermon, a podcast, or any other way you choose to illuminate our paths for us.

*Day 5 (Monday the second week of Lent)* – John 1:1-5: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

*Meditation* - When we are in darkness, we do not comprehend the light. Consider when we have been in a completely dark room and it is suddenly filled with light. What is our reaction? The standard reaction is to close our eyes and recoil from the light because we initially do not understand what the brightness is. The brightness hurts our eyes. That is the same thing that happens with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is so bright, so pure that when first confronted with his light we initially withdraw from it. We do not want to be near him because we do not understand what He truly offers us. For example, while we know that looking at pornography is a sin, we may convince ourselves that just doing a google search for these images won’t do any harm to anyone. Then we keep doing that justifying that we aren’t clicking on any of the pictures or videos, we are just looking at all the results, so it is ok. But as this goes on, we think that just clicking on one image is fine and won’t hurt anything. These are all sinful for just by searching for these images we are not treating the individuals in the images and videos (whether they are there willingly or not) with the love and respect that God wants us to treat other individuals with. Yet, God will use various means to show us that this is a sin. We will initially reject it and rationalize our behavior, but just as how we get used to being in a bright room after being in darkness, we see that Jesus’ light is the light we want to be in.

*Prayer* - Lord, you are the light to the world. We ask your forgiveness that our initial reaction is to retreat from you and desire to stay in the darkness. As the passage says, we do this because we don’t understand your light. Lord, we ask that you help us to truly understand what your light means, for us

and for the world. Lord, we ask that you help us reflect Your light on the world. And more importantly, we ask that you help us not only be able to comprehend, but also explain what your light means to those around us.

*Day 6 (Tuesday the second week of Lent) – Proverbs 4:18-19: But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.*

*Meditation* - Yesterday we saw that Jesus is the light. Today, we see that as His followers our path is one of light as well. By having this light, we can see what sin may be a stumbling block to us, helping us to avoid it. And we should pray that His light should shine on those all others and be a beacon to others. Especially to those who are not followers of Jesus. Because in their current state, they do not see what is causing them to stumble. They are in the dark. And while in the dark, they justify and rationalize all their sins because they do not truly understand what is causing them to stumble. But we can help educate them. When in a discussion with a friend and they mention that they have purchased an item from a store that practices “fast fashion” and then more than likely uses child labor, we can lovingly enlighten them to that fact. Most, just see a cheap price on clothing and do not think about what causes it to be so cheap.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you keep us in the light. We ask that you illuminate our ways so that we can see anything that may cause us to sin, Lord. We ask that we do not get caught in the darkness where we do not understand what causes us to stumble, Lord. And we ask that our light shines bright enough that it can shine a light on those who are in darkness so that we can begin to understand what is causing them to stumble.

*Day 7 (Wednesday the second week of Lent) - John 3:19-20: This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.*

*Meditation* - Light and darkness cannot exist at the same time. It is just not possible. Light will always overcome the darkness and expose what was hiding in the shadows. Jesus is our light. He exposes our hearts, minds, actions, and motivations for what they really are. That is a scary thought. For God to expose to our own minds and hearts, let alone others, that we have been knowingly complicit in human trafficking by buying the cheaper chocolate despite reading all the reports showing that it uses child and slave labor. And we continue to do it time after time despite knowing this because doing research into ethically sourced chocolate may take too much of our time, we don't want to spend our money on more expensive chocolate, and what does it matter? We know that our actions are making us complicit in the use of child labor, which is a sin. So we hide this and play ignorant because we do not want this to be exposed to ourselves especially, but to others as well. But we know that once it is revealed to the light, making the change will have a positive impact not only on us but also on the children on the cocoa farms.

*Prayer* - Lord, we pray that we do not flee from the light. We understand how and why people would want to flee from your light because it is scary to know that the truth is exposed. To know the hows and whys of our actions and motivations is daunting. And having that exposed to us, let alone others, and you Lord, is a terrifying prospect. But Lord, we ask that you help us come into your light and not flee into

the darkness. We ask that we embrace your light because while our sins may be exposed, we also realize that is where we will find your truth, love, grace, and mercy.

*Day 8 (Thursday the second week of Lent)* – Colossians 1:9-20a: For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For he rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him, all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...

*Meditation* - We have seen in the previous days that people have chosen to stay in the darkness, but that is not what God wants for us. He wants to save us from the darkness and for us to join Him as a saint of light in His kingdom where we will find redemption and forgiveness for our sins. It does not matter if our sins are one of the sins we have discussed in the previous days of looking at pornographic images online, buying fast fashion or chocolate sourced unethically, treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals, or a sin we will discuss in the coming days and even something we won't mention. We find forgiveness and redemption for all sins in Jesus Christ. How did Jesus make it so one can be reconciled to Him? Through His blood on the cross. But why would this atoning sacrifice allow us to come into the light? Because He is one with God and He is God incarnate. He not only rules over all but created all things. He is the beginning of all things and has dominion over all things. And for this reason, His sacrifice makes atonement for our sins.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you have rescued us from the darkness, and it is your desire that we inherit the light. Lord, we are so thankful that you were willing to make peace for our sins by sacrificing yourself on the cross. We realize that it is for your pleasure that we are able to become the saints of light. Lord, let us help others to understand what your sacrifice on the cross was for and that you want all to be saints of the light.

*Day 9 (Friday the second week of Lent)* - Ephesians 5:6-13: Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore, do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the fruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light for everything that becomes visible in the light.

*Meditation* - We have seen over the past few days that darkness is what we choose because we do not wish for our sins to be exposed. But yesterday we also saw that you do not want us to be in the darkness, you want us to be saints of the Light and you did this by sacrificing your blood on the cross.

Once we have become children of the light, we need to reflect this light to others by reflecting all goodness and righteousness, and truth to others. We are to learn what pleases God and what instead is a deed of the darkness. And we are not only to avoid these actions of disobedience, but we should expose them when we find them. Therefore, once we accept the truth and reality of both fast fashion and unethically sourced chocolate, we need to educate our friends and family about these issues and how our shopping can make a positive impact on a person's life. We do need to be careful about exposing sins when we see them though, for we are still children of God and must do this in a loving and Godly way. Whether we expose these disobediences or not, they will one day be exposed as God is light and all things will become visible in His time.

*Prayer* - Lord, thank you for providing us with your Word where we can learn what you say is right, true, and just. Lord, we ask that as children of your light, you help us first, to understand exactly what is right, true, and just. Help us to be a reflection of your light to others around us to help them understand what being a child of the light means, and how they too want to be a child of the light. Lord, when we see actions of disobedience, please help us to expose them. But help us do it in a loving way that best reflects your love and your light Lord.

*Day 10 (Saturday the second week of Lent)* - John 8:12: Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of life."

*Meditation* - Jesus clearly states who he is in this verse. He is the "I am" and by stating this is saying that He is one with God. He goes on to say that He is the Light of the world. He alone is the one that illuminates the world from the darkness. No one else but Him can be the light for the world. In order to enjoy this light, we need to follow him. And by following Him, it means that we will no longer walk in darkness, but instead, He will give us the Light of life. This light shines brightly to show us the way so we do not stumble, and we can avoid those sins that have tempted and plagued our lives. And this should also serve as an enticement to others as well. That by following Jesus, we will have life with Him. Not just life on this earth, but eternal life where we will find redemption and full restoration.

*Prayer* - Jesus, we are so thankful that you are the "I am." That you are one with God. We are so thankful that you are the Light of the world. That there is no other one but you. That all we need to do is seek you out and follow you. And when we do that, you save us from darkness, bringing us into the light. And by being in the light we will have the Light of life. We have eternal life, and most importantly, we have you.

## **Week three of Lent**

### **Theme – Brokenness**

*Sunday introduction on Brokenness* - Brokenness is when our self is fractured. We feel damaged and are unable to be who God desires us to be. When we are broken, we are not in right relationship with God. But what causes this brokenness? It can be from a few different things. First, it can be from sin, whether ours or someone else's. Although, it can also be the result of the circumstances that we are in. Consider victims of sex trafficking. One of the ways sex traffickers control their victims is by breaking down the victim. This causes them to feel like they can turn to no one else but their trafficker. Their circumstances have broken them. Just because a person feels broken does not mean that they are sinning, and it does not mean that they will always be broken. No, Jesus saves us from brokenness. He is the only one who can truly heal us when we are broken. And in His healing us, He brings us closer to Him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we have all experienced brokenness. Whether it be sin or circumstance, when we are dealing with brokenness it feels like there is no one who can put us back together and heal us. Lord, we know that is not the case though. Lord, help us see and understand that only you can truly heal us when we are broken. We pray for every victim of human trafficking out there right now who is in this state. Lord, please be with them. Lift them up and heal their mind, heart, body, and soul. Let them draw near to you and find rest.

*Day 11 (Monday the third week of Lent)* – Isaiah 59:1-2: Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

*Meditation* - Are there times when it feels like we are praying and praying and praying, yet God is not hearing our prayers? We are told here that God’s ear will hear our prayers. So why does it feel like He does not hear us? It is possible because our sins have separated us from Him. The more we sin, the more we move farther away from God, so it seems that He does not hear us or see us. We may be praying for God to provide us with a new job, and it is a prayer that we have been praying for years. We start wondering while God has not answered us yet. One of the possible reasons is because we have a sin, such as ignoring that woman that lives next door that we see once a day, but she refuses to make eye contact, let alone engage in conversation. We know others live there, and suspect she is being exploited but doesn’t want to make issues with our neighbors, so we ignore her. When instead we should be her voice and if we can’t befriend her, report the situation to the local law enforcement of the National Human Trafficking Hotline. That is showing love to our neighbor as instructed by Jesus. If this point of stagnation and not hearing our prayers is where God leaves us, it would be depressing, and we would have to ask what the point of it all is. But we know that is not the end. And this verse reminds us that God does save, and He does hear. We just need to turn to Jesus and repent of our sins for God’s ear to hear us again.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you do hear our prayers. That you want us to come to you with our needs and wants. Lord, we ask that you forgive us of our sins that may be separating us from you. Lord, we repent of them and ask that you hear our prayers, Lord. We do not want your ears to be deaf to us but hear us. Please, Lord, we ask that you reach out to us and save us.

*Day 12 (Tuesday the third week of Lent)* - Psalm 34:18-22: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

*Meditation* - When we are looking at verses in the Bible, especially the Psalms, when possible, it is important to understand the context of the verses. The context of this Psalm is very enlightening and helps us to understand how David could be so positive despite being brokenhearted. The subscript of the Psalm states “A Psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him and away and he departed.” This specific story is told in 1 Samuel 21, but the story truly begins in 1 Samuel 18. While David had initially found favor with Saul, Saul started to become more and more afraid of David as it was clear that God’s hand was on him, and the people favored David. His fear led him to try to attempt to kill David several times, but David was able to escape each time. While fleeing for his life, David left behind both his wife and his best friend. Saul continued to hunt David, which led David to seek

refuge from various kings, and cities, and even hide in the wilderness and caves. One of those times he was seeking refuge he realized that the people of the city recognized him and could inform King Saul. So, to keep himself safe he feigned insanity at the city gate, and in the end, was able to escape. Consider the despair that he must have felt as he had to leave behind his support system including his wife and best friend, to save his life from the man who had once loved him greatly. He says in our verse that he is brokenhearted. Yet, David knew that the Lord is near to those who are in this state. In the end, those who are opposed to the righteous would be condemned. The Lord will redeem those who have remained faithful to Him and to those who take refuge in Him. We can take comfort from this as well. When we are feeling broken and in despair, seeking something to heal the pain we may be tempted to turn to other ways besides God to try to feel better including binge shopping, binge eating, sex, or many other ways for us to attempt to make ourselves feel better. Yet, when we do these things we are only focused on our own pain and hurt and not how our actions may hurt others. And that is a sin. Instead, we should be like David and turn to God, taking refuge in him. Because only He can truly heal our brokenness.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that we can look back on others' lives to see them dealing with the same emotional or spiritual state that we are in and can see how they handled it. We thank you for this Psalm from David. We know that he was brokenhearted. Away from those who he loved dearly while literally on the run for his life. He did not try to do it on his own though and turned to you. Lord, let David's actions here be an example to us. Help us to turn to you when we are broken. And help us to remember his words. That You are near to those who are brokenhearted. That those who hate the righteous will be condemned. You redeem the souls of Your servants and those who take refuge in them. Let these words be an encouragement to us in our times of brokenness.

*Day 13 (Wednesday the third week of Lent) – Psalm 51: Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin, my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part, you will make me know wisdom. Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. By Your favor do good to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.*

*Meditation* - This psalm is another example of knowing the context to help us relate to what David wrote. We tend to think of David as a faithful servant of God, one who was always faithful. But we know that is not true. David gave in to his lustful desires for a woman, Bathsheba, who he sees on a rooftop. Both David and Bathsheba were married to other individuals. Like David, we too may succumb to our lustful desires by either looking at pornography or paying for sex making us feel broken and separate from God. Especially if we are confronted with our sin, like the prophet Nathan confronted David, we, like David, need to acknowledge that this is a great sin that's caused a great separation between us and

God. Like David, we too are broken spiritually and emotionally as we are separated from God and seek to restore our relationship with Him. David realizes that once he is purified, his relationship with God will be restored. This restoration will lead to a renewed steadfast spirit, returning to God's presence, the Holy Spirit returning to him, and a renewed joy of God's salvation. We too should seek the same. Once healed from this brokenness, one cannot help but joyfully share with others about God's salvation and righteousness.

*Prayer* - Lord, we first pray that you help us to remember that the only person that ever lived on this earth that was perfect was Jesus Christ. Help us to remember that those who we call "heroes of the faith" all sinned, but also let us recall that those sins did not define their lives. Lord, help us to remember that when our own sins leave us broken and separated from You. Lord, when we sin, help us to recollect that it separates us from You. Help us to think of that when we are alienated from You; it leaves us broken. But Lord, when we come to you in repentance and You cleanse us of our sins, You renew a steadfast spirit in us; Your presence returns to us; Your joy overwhelms us so much that we must sing and tell others about Your salvation. Lord, help us to consider all of this when we are tempted to sin, and help us to reject that sin, so we are not broken and separated from You.

*Day 14 (Thursday the third week of Lent)* – Isaiah 43:1-2: But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you."

*Meditation* - These are great verses to reflect on when we are feeling broken and separated from God. We may be going through what feels like overwhelming obstacles like we are about to drown in the waters and our head is barely above water. It feels like God is nowhere near us. But what does this verse say? The river will not overwhelm you. How do we have an assurance of this? First, He is our creator. When someone creates something, there is a greater concern for that creation, and they only want what is best for it. Two, He has redeemed us and called us by name. He states clearly in this verse that we are His. When our circumstances have us feeling miles away from God, we need to remember these verses and pray for God to draw us near to him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are our creator and by being our creator you care greatly about us. Lord, we ask that when our circumstances have us feeling like we are drowning, that our head is barely being held above the water, that you seem so far away from us, you help us to remember these verses. Help us to remember that you will not let the water overwhelm us, that the fire will not scorch us. It is so easy when we are in the midst of suffering to feel that we are so far apart from you and that you do not care about us. But these verses help us to remind us that we are yours and you have called us and redeemed us.

*Day 15 (Friday the third week of Lent)* – Revelation 21:4: and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; the first things have passed away.

*Meditation* - Yesterday we finished with this thought that one day our scars, every physical, mental, and emotional scar, will be erased when we are in heaven with Jesus. Those pains we tried to erase with sex, watching pornography, overeating, binge shopping, or whatever false comfort we try to employ, will not work. But this verse gives us the hope of what we look forward to when we reach the new Jerusalem

and the comfort we will find. This specific verse tells us things that we do not have to worry about: death, crying, mourning, and pain. It sounds amazing to live in a place where we do not have to deal with anything that represents brokenness. That these emotions were a result of sin and just like the old Jerusalem, they too will pass away and not exist in the new Jerusalem.

*Prayer* - Lord, we look forward to the day when we do not have to ever experience the emotions and the results of our brokenness. It is an amazing thought, even a baffling one since these are such a part of our lives on this earth, that there will be a day when there will be no crying, death, mourning, or pain. We realize Lord, that these are all things that are a result of sin, and we experience them because we have been separated from you at one point in time. But Lord, your love for us is amazing. We look forward to being with you in the new Jerusalem. We thank you that you love us so much that you want to be there with us.

*Day 16 (Saturday the third week of Lent)* – Psalm 147:3: He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

*Meditation* - In the past few days we have looked at how both circumstances and sins can cause us to be broken and separated from God. We have seen how being separated from God affects us. And if that was where we left it, we would be despondent and depressed. But that is not who God is, or what God wants from us. He does not want us to be separated from Him. Therefore, he treats our wounds and heals our brokenness, bringing us back to Him. Many times, we will try other ways to heal our traumas: food, alcohol, drugs, exercise, sex, etc. But these things, if they bring any relief to the soul and body, only bring us temporary relief, and ultimately take us farther from God. However, God is the ultimate healer. When we turn to Him in our brokenness, He takes care of our wounds and heals our broken hearts. He is the only one that can truly heal us. We may have scars from these things, but those scars can serve as a reminder of what we have been through and remind us to turn to God for healing. And if we do this, we will receive ultimate healing with God in heaven.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that there will be a time when either our sin or our circumstance leads us to be broken. Lord, we do not desire this to happen, but we know that it will. We are so thankful that you are the ultimate healer though. That when we have wounds you do bind them up. That when we are brokenhearted that you can heal it. Lord, please help us not to turn to temporary measures to try and handle whatever we are dealing with. Lord, help us to remember that while they may offer temporary relief, they will not help us in the long run. Only you can do that. Only you will provide us with such healing that one day we will never have the scars from what we are dealing with. And we look forward to the day that we join you in heaven where those scars will no longer exist.

## **Week Four of Lent**

### **Theme - Sin**

*Sunday Introduction on Sin* – The concept of sin is one Christians are quite familiar with. We know that sin was introduced into the world in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil despite being told by God not to. But what is sin? Sin is transgressing against God's law. It is the failure to do what is right, whether unintentional or intentional. It doesn't matter if the sin is more "minor" like accidentally lying to another person or if it is more "major" like forcing a person to work for you and not giving them appropriate pay. As we saw last week with brokenness, any sin separates us from God. When we are separated from God, we are more likely to continue more and

more in sin. We are more likely to ignore His voice calling us back to Him. There is sadly no escape from sin in this world. But we have hope in Jesus Christ. We will see this week that He acted as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins to save us so we can have eternal life with Him.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we know that as it says in Romans 3:23 “we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Lord, the verse makes a point in saying we have all sinned. It is easy to separate ourselves from this verse and focus on the sins that have been committed by all of those around us. Lord Jesus, help us to remember that this means each one of us has sinned. We ask that when we think about this verse we do not just think of other individuals’ sins, but help us to remember our own and seek repentance for them. Lord, help us this week to understand how our sin affects both ourselves and the world. Lord, we ask that as we look more deeply at what you have to say about sin, you show us what our sins are. Let our hearts be opened to your voice. Then let us seek true repentance from you. Let us rejoice in your saving grace. And we ask that you keep us from sin. Let us seek you when we are tempted, Lord.

*Day 17 (Monday the fourth week of Lent)* – 1 John 2:1-2: My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

*Meditation* - As John writes, we are not to sin. But as we all know, even as hard as we try to not sin, we will fail at times. Whether it is something “smaller” like giving into temptation and buying clothing from a shop known for child and slave labor, or it is something “larger” like ostracizing a child and showing them no love, or a number of other sins, we will eventually sin because none of us are perfect. Yet we do not have to worry because we have an advocate. We have Jesus Christ who is righteous and served as the propitiation for our sins. What does propitiation mean? A propitiation is defined as “averting the wrath of God by the offering of a gift.” Jesus Christ offered himself as the gift to appease God. He is the only one who could appease God as well, as He was the only one who lived a holy and righteous life.

*Prayer* - Lord, we first and foremost ask that you help keep us from sin. Please keep us from temptation. Lord, we do realize that at some point though we will fail. Lord, please forgive us when we do sin against you because we do know that any sin we commit is ultimately against you. We are so thankful Lord Jesus that when we do sin that it does not condemn us to hell. We are so thankful that you are our propitiation, Jesus. That you were so willing to sacrifice yourself to appease God’s wrath against us. We are so thankful for your gift to us.

*Day 18 (Tuesday the fourth week of Lent)* – Ephesians 2:1-7: And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

*Meditation* - Here we are told that prior to accepting God, we are living as those who are dead. We are dead spiritually because as it says in Romans 6:23 “the wages of sin is death...” What is interesting about

what Paul writes to the Ephesians is that he says that we are dead in both our “trespasses and sins.” The Greek words used are *paraptoma* and *hamartia* which cover both intentional sins, as well as mistakes and errors. Paul tells us that there are three things that we will continually fight against: the world (“walked according to the course of this world”), the flesh (“we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh”), and the devil (“according to the prince of the power of the air”). We see this fight daily for example in sex trafficking as we are told that prostitution should be legalized (the world), our desire to appease our lusts through pornography (the flesh) and telling ourselves that we can’t do anything to fight human trafficking (the devil). While we were once dead, thanks to God’s mercy and grace, we have been made alive in Christ. We will one day be raised up to be seated next to Christ in heaven overcoming death, but only if we accept Jesus as our savior.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for your mercy and your grace. We know that we do not deserve it, yet you have bestowed it on us. Lord, we know that our sins separate us from you, so much so that we were dead in our sins. Lord, we ask that you help protect us from the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are constantly trying to get us to sin, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Lord, we ask that you help protect us from the prince of the air who wants us to follow him. Lord, let us constantly seek your face. We are so thankful that you made us alive in You and we look forward to sitting with you in heaven.

*Day 19 (Wednesday the fourth week of Lent)* – 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*Meditation* - Whether our sin is intentional or not, our sin will cause us shame. Many times, we do not want to acknowledge our sins because of this shame. It could be as simple as repeatedly going to a nail salon where we know, or are highly suspect, that uses labor trafficking victims. Or it could be more complicated like going to a massage parlor for sex. Whatever our sin is, though, we do not like to admit that we have done anything wrong. But whether we admit to it or not, God knows what we have done. Therefore, we should confess to Him our sins, as he already knows them. And we are told here that when we acknowledge our wrongdoings to Christ he is faithful to us to uphold His promise. He said in Matthew 26:28 “for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This forgiveness, therefore, cleanses us of all unrighteousness and makes us whiter than snow.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that we have sinned. These sins have been against our family, our friends, and other individuals we may not know. Most importantly, we have sinned against you. Lord, we know that you know all of our sins. We ask that you forgive us of these sins Lord. We ask that you are faithful to us and remember your covenant to us that you forgive our sins when we confess them. We beg you to cleanse us and make us pure.

*Day 20 (Thursday the fourth week of Lent)* – James 5:16: Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

*Meditation* - Not only are we to confess our sins to God, but we are to also confess our sins to each other. This is harder than confessing our sins to God as God already knows what we have done wrong. However, many times our sins are hidden from our fellow man. Admitting when we have done something wrong to another person is difficult. Telling a spouse, partner, friend, or discipleship partner that we knowingly buy chocolate made using child labor or visiting strip clubs can be difficult. But when we admit what we have done wrong to another person, they can help us be accountable in not doing

that sin again. Once we confess our sins to them, they should also be praying for us. Prayers are effective and many things can be accomplished through them.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you give us the courage to not only confess our sins to you but also to confess our sins to each other. We ask that you help us to be receptive when others confess their sins to us. Lord, we ask that when someone shows this trust in us that we respect that confidence by not only trying to hold them accountable but mainly by praying for them. We ask that these prayers are effective, let them be healing and help us keep from sin. And Lord, we ask that when we entrust others with this confidence that they also pray for us and help keep us accountable.

*Day 21 (Friday the fourth week of Lent)* – Romans 3:21-23: But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

*Meditation* - The righteousness of God was not a new thing that came into being with Jesus Christ's sacrifice. Paul tells us that both the Law and the Prophets were witnesses to God's righteousness. This righteousness belongs to all who believe and have faith in Jesus Christ. But why do we need to have this faith in him? Because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No matter how perfect we think we are, we are not. We help the oppression of the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, and the poor with our votes and our actions, going against the Bible. No one around us is. They too, commit these sins. We have all sinned and need God's salvation. We see here that the Law, while something we can see God's righteousness in, was not enough to save us. The Law was something to guide us, but we would all fail in adhering to the law. That is why the sacrificial system was established to provide a way for individuals to atone for their sins. But the sacrificial system of the Old Testament could not cover all sins for all people. Therefore, there was a need to provide a fuller sacrifice. The only way that we could receive atonement was by someone adhering fully to the law in perfect understanding of the law. Only a divine person could accomplish that. And that person was Jesus Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so sorry for our sins. We know that no matter what image we present to the world and what each person's life looks like, we are all sinners. We have all fallen short of your glory. Lord, we know this. But Lord, we also know that your love and righteousness have shown through for all time. Your righteousness was witnessed by both the Law and the Prophets. We are so thankful that your righteousness extends to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Lord, we are so thankful for your sacrifice that allows us to experience your righteousness.

*Day 22 (Saturday the fourth week of Lent)* – Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Meditation* - This verse is a well-recited verse by many Christians, but how often do we take the time to consider what is being said? As we saw yesterday, we have all sinned. Today, we see what we get for sin: death. We can have only one master: sin or God. If we choose to have sin as our master, then our master, sin, pays us death. As we saw in previous days, we are led to sin by the world (being told we need the latest cell phone each year despite the materials for the batteries being mined by slave labor), the flesh (wanting the latest cell phone despite not needing it), and the devil (buying the latest cell phone model year after year). But we don't have to despair, as there is another option for our master. The other option is God. When we choose to have God as our master, we do not receive a payment instead we receive a free gift. The gift that God gives us is eternal life. Eternal life with Him. The

complete opposite of what we get if we choose sin as our master. Notice as well that it is a free gift. All we need to do to receive this free gift from God is believe in Him. We do not need good works to receive the gift. We just need to believe in Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so sorry for our sins. We know that when we allow sin to be our master, we receive the only payment that we deserve, death. And not just a physical death Lord, but eternal separation from you. Lord, we do not want that. We are so thankful that you offer us a different option, Lord. We thank you that if we choose you as our master and Lord, you give us a free gift. The free gift of eternal life. Lord, please help us accept this gift. Help us to realize that we do not need to do anything to get this free gift but believe in you. Lord, please help us accept this gift.

## **Week Five of Lent**

### **Theme - Repentance**

*Sunday introduction to the theme* - The fourth Sunday of the Lent season is called Laetare. Laetare means to rejoice and it comes from the Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic traditions where at the opening of the Mass Isaiah 66:10 is read. The first word of the verse in Latin is Laetare. This Sunday marks a change in the focus of lent. You will notice that in the previous weeks, the themes have been more sorrowful, and focused on the problems of the world: temptation, darkness, brokenness, and sin. These will always exist in the world. And if there were no way to overcome these problems, it would be depressing. But we know that Jesus came to overcome these things. And so, with that, we look forward and our themes turn hopeful. It seemed appropriate that as we ended on sin that we begin the next section with repentance. Repentance is not only leaving behind what God has prohibited and returning to Him, but it is coming to God and confessing our sins and seeking forgiveness for those sins. Jesus began his public ministry, as recorded by both Matthew and Mark, by calling people to “repent.” This shows that repentance is a key part of the Christian faith and brings us back into a proper relationship with God. As one of the church Fathers tells us that “a sign of true repentance is that, in the midst of sadness and regret, it carries inner peace of the soul.” What this means is that when we realize we have done something wrong, for example buying the latest cell model each year despite knowing the slave labor used to mine the materials for the batteries in them, it is not enough to ask God for the forgiveness of our sin. It means we must also change our habits and put off buying that new phone for several years.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you not only allow us to repent for our sins, but it is your desire that we do so. We ask that as we go through the study this week that you help to make those sins that we have been harboring clear to us Lord, and that we seek your repentance for our sins. Lord, we are so thankful that we do not need to do anything to repent from our sins, but just turn away from our sins, confess them, and turn to you. Lord, we ask that repenting of our sins will bring us closer to you. Lord, we ask that when we repent, it is true repentance that brings inner peace to our souls.

*Day 23 (Monday the fifth week of Lent)* – 2 Chronicles 7:14: and My people who are called by My name themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

*Meditation* - The night after Solomon finished building the temple, the Lord appeared to Solomon and gave these instructions to the people. While these instructions were given to the people of Israel during Solomon’s reign, we can still take many things from it for us today. First, we are to humble ourselves and

pray to God. We cannot do anything on our own. We need to seek after God. When we seek after God, we are looking to be like him. In addition, we need to turn from our wicked ways. We can pray and we can seek God, but he says here that those things must be met with action as well. If we ask God to forgive us of our sins, but still continue to do those sins, are we truly sorry for them and sincere in our repentance? Or are we just going through the motions? So when we have realized that you have been treating a group of people like less and ask God to forgive us for our actions but not change said action, have we truly repented? God is a loving and forgiving God. He truly wants to forgive us our sins and He will and does. But we need to show that we are truly sorry for the sins we have committed and change our actions as well. And when we do this, God will heal us. The verse says, “heal their land” and we see throughout the Old Testament that when Israel repented of their sins and returned to God, He healed the land. Today though, we should read this as “He will heal us.” He will heal us mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Repenting brings peace to our souls and heals us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you help us. Help us to seek Your face. When we seek after you, we are more aware of our sins and want to be more like you. Help us to do that. Lord, we ask that you help us to know what our sins are and we desire to turn away from them. Assist us in rejecting sin. Hear our calls of repentance, see our actions meet those prayers. Lord, forgive us our sins when you see and hear these things. And when you forgive us our sins, we ask that you grant us healing in whatever need we most need in regard to that sin.

*Day 24 (Tuesday the fifth week of Lent) – Acts 3:19:* Therefore, repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

*Meditation* - This verse was a part of Peter’s sermon that he gave to those who were at the Temple shortly after the resurrection. In speaking these words, Peter is reminding those listening of what they were told in Deuteronomy, which was spoken to the nation of Israel. In the opening verses of Deuteronomy 30, the nation of Israel is told that once they repent, they will be restored to God. But instead of the restoration being just for the nation of Israel, Peter tells all people how to be restored to God. We are told we need to do two things: repent and return. The method of being restored to God has not changed, and Peter is pointing that out. We are to repent – seek God’s forgiveness for our sins. And we are to return. What are we returning to? We are returning to God because when we sin, we have separated ourselves from God. But we need to return to Him, and in doing so restore our relationship with God. With our relationship restored, He wipes away our sins and we will experience times of refreshing from being near Him again. This should be an encouragement to us as we know that we will sin, including shopping at clothing stores known for using unethical workshops and factories, because when we are convicted of our sin we can repent and return to God restoring our relationship with Him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we come to you humbly and seek repentance for our sins. We ask that we not only repent but Lord, help us return to you. We wish to restore our relationship with you as we realize that the only way that we can have true peace is by being in your presence. That is where we wish to be, in your presence where our souls can be refreshed. Lord, as our souls are refreshed, we ask that we realize how much better it is to be in your presence.

*Day 25 (Wednesday the fifth week of Lent) – 2 Peter 3:9:* The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

*Meditation* - God's promises are true. He will deliver all His promises to each one of us. When people hurt us, when they sin against us including belittling us and judging us, we often want quick judgment and retribution. Often though, we feel like God's judgment is slow. But God does not experience time as we count slowness. And despite our human desires for quick judgment, it is good that God's timing is different than ours. First: God desires that each person on earth come to repentance. He wants each one of us to be in a good relationship with Him. Second: we need to be thankful that God's timing is different than our timing. We need to remember that we are sinners as well and we have sinned against other individuals. Just as others have belittled and judged us, we have done the same to others. We would not want the quick judgment that those we have sinned against would be seeking. Instead, we want to have time to right the wrong we created. We must be thankful that God's timing is different than our own, and we have time to repent and restore ourselves to Him.

*Prayer:* Lord, we are thankful that your promises are true. We have so much to hope for because of these promises. We look forward to the day that all your promises will be fulfilled, the greatest promise being that we will be with you. Lord, we realize that while we wish for you to have a quick judgment that it is not our timing that matters, it is your timing. Help us to remember that when we are wanting quick judgment against others, it would mean that we too can suffer from quick judgment at times, and we do not want that. Lord, we are thankful for your slowness so that when we have sinned, we can come to you in repentance. And you want each one of us to come to repentance to be joined with you. Lord, we ask that you help each and every one of us to repent and return to you.

*Day 26 (Thursday the fifth week of Lent) – Matthew 4:17:* From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

*Meditation* - Here we see how important repentance is to the Christian faith. We have seen it as a part of the Temple era, and we have seen it as part of the post-resurrection era. Here we have Jesus' own words for how important repentance is. Repentance was so important that Jesus began his public ministry by preaching it. Why did Jesus say to repent? Because the kingdom of heaven was near. Did He mean that it was coming tomorrow? No, we do not know when it is coming (and as we saw yesterday God's timing is not our timing). Since we do not know His timing, we need to repent of our sins, like buying jewelry that we know is not ethically mined or sourced, to be in right relationship with God when it does come.

*Prayer* - Lord, thank you for coming to this earth and showing us how important repentance is. Lord, help us to repent of our sins. Help us to see what we have done to separate ourselves from you. And when we do see those sins, Lord, help us to turn from those sins and come closer to you. For as you say, the kingdom of heaven is near. Lord, we do not know when you are returning. It could be tomorrow, next year, or in another century or two. But Lord, if we repent and seek your face, then it does not matter when you return because we will be in right relationship with you. And that is what we desire.

*Day 27 (Friday the fifth week of Lent) – Acts 17:29-31:* Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by 'raising Him from the dead.'

*Meditation* - Paul is telling us that the Divine Nature of God cannot be made or represented in any form made by man. It does not matter what the image or idol is made from – stone, silver, or gold – there is no creation of man that can truly and accurately represent God. And there was a time when we were all ignorant, where we had not heard of God or the Gospel, but that time has passed. God has declared to the entire world that all men should repent for there is a coming day where He will judge the entire world. This is a righteous judgment because God appointed, or sent a man, Jesus, to be proof to all peoples that he would die and be raised from the dead. We must repent so He can judge us righteously and fairly.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you sent Jesus Christ to the earth. That he served as proof of your righteousness and your judgment by being raised from the dead. Lord, we know that our judgment should be one of eternal damnation because not one person is good enough to be in your presence. But Lord, we know you are a loving, kind, and forgiving God. That you want us to come to you, that you want us to repent. Lord, we ask that you forgive us of our sins and that in forgiving us our sins you are merciful to us. In that mercy, you give us the judgment that you want us to have, of being with you. We want that as well Lord.

*Day 28 (Saturday the fifth week of Lent)* – Acts 2:38: Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you is baptized in the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

*Meditation* - Peter stated this right after the Pentecost. For people to receive the Holy Spirit they need to perform two actions. The first is to repent. To seek the forgiveness of God for your sins, such as refusing to educate yourself on how your actions impact human trafficking, and to turn away from those sins to come into right communion with God again. The second is to be baptized. Whether this is the physical baptism of water, or the spiritual baptism of the spirit can be left to those with higher degrees of theology than us. What matters to us today is that both the physical act of baptism and the spiritual baptism of receiving the Holy Spirit brings us closer to God. And once we do those two things, we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is an amazing gift as the Holy Spirit was sent to be God’s representative on earth and to be always with us until God returns.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that we do not need to do much to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Lord, we ask that those who have not received the gift of the Holy Spirit learn what a blessing it is to always have the Holy Spirit with us. Lord, we ask that they want the Holy Spirit with them too. Lord, we ask that they repent and are baptized in the forgiveness of sins Lord. We rejoice with each person who does this.

## **Week six of Lent**

### **Theme - Faithfulness**

*Sunday introduction to the theme* – Once we repent of our sins, both asking God for forgiveness and rejecting the sin we were committing, we then must remain faithful to God. That means relying on him and trusting in Him in all situations. Even when it is the hardest to do so when we think there is no way that God is with us, we still must turn to him, we pray, and we realize that in the end and no matter how the situation turns out, if we remain faithful to Him, we will grow closer to him, and our faith will be stronger. It can be difficult when fighting something so pervasive as human trafficking to continue relying on God. It can be disheartening as it looks like there is no progress ever being made on the issue. It can seem like it is getting worse instead of getting better. But we must remain faithful for we know

that God is faithful. His ultimate love and justice and mercy will prevail in the end. And for that reason, we remain faithful.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you are always faithful to us even when we are not faithful to you. We ask that you help us to be faithful. When we are in situations where it looks and feels like you have abandoned us, help to remind us that you are still with us. Your faithfulness knows no end. And as your faithfulness knows no ends, Lord we ask that you help us to remain faithful to you. We know we can never match your faithfulness, but we want to try to remain as faithful to you as you are to us. Please help us to try and attain that.

*Day 29 (Monday the sixth week of Lent)* – Isaiah 40:28-31: Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

*Meditation* - Isaiah 40:31 is a well-recognized verse. It is one of hope and shows God's faithfulness to us if we rely on him. But when you consider the preceding verses, we can be even more amazed at God's faithfulness. We see that he does not grow tired or weary. Compare this to those that should have the most strength and exuberance, the youth. They may be energetic, but they will still tire out and need to recharge. They will still stumble and fall from lack of energy. And they cannot give their energy or strength to those around them. But God is happy to be faithful to us, to give us so much strength and energy that we will not tire out. We will be able to soar like eagles. No matter who or how many people wait on him, His strength does not fail, and He passes that strength on to us. We need to remember this when we grow tired in our fight against human trafficking. He will give us the strength to carry on this fight each day if we are faithful to him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you are everlasting. That you do not suffer from tiredness or become weary. And what we are even more thankful for is that you are faithful to us in that when we wait on you, you share those qualities with us. Lord, help us to be thankful for your faithfulness when you help us to soar on wings like eagles when we can run and not get tired and walk and not become weary. Lord, we know you reward our faithfulness, and we ask that you help us to be faithful.

*Day 30 (Tuesday the sixth week of Lent)* – Psalm 33:20-22: Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. For our heart rejoices in Him because we trust in His holy name. Let your lovingkindness, O Lord, be upon us, accordingly as we have hoped in you.

*Meditation* - Just as we saw yesterday, the Lord rewards our faithfulness to him when we wait on him. This Psalm has us waiting, hoping, and trusting in God. When we do so, He is faithful to us. He is our help. He is our shield, our protection. He does this because of His lovingkindness. We are shown here also how we are to respond to His lovingkindness and faithfulness to us. We are to rejoice. It seems obvious, but when we are in the midst of trials such as facing the temptations of succumbing to watching pornography, it is hardest to wait on the Lord, it is hard to remember to rejoice in His help and protection because we may not be seeing it. But when we realize that He has been faithful, we should rejoice.

*Prayer* - Lord, we do rejoice in your lovingkindness and your faithfulness. Lord, we ask that you help us to remember these attributes and rejoice in them. Lord, we rejoice because when we wait on you, when we trust in you and hope in you, that is when you show your faithfulness to us. That is when you truly show how much you want to help us by being our helper and our shield. You reward us when we turn to you, and we ask that you help us do it when we are in the direst of situations. Lord, please be faithful to us.

*Day 31 (Wednesday the sixth week of Lent)* – Psalm 62:5-8: My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God, my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

*Meditation* - For the past three days we have had a version of the phrase “wait for God.” Today we have a similar phrase of “wait in silence for God only.” What does waiting for God mean though? When we wait for God, we are showing our faithfulness to Him knowing that He will, in His time, follow through in His faithfulness to us and assist us in our times of trouble. Why does He not help us right away? Because we need to rely on Him and be faithful to Him. He is always faithful to us and is always showing His faithfulness to us, so in return, we need to show our faithfulness to Him. Today’s verse says that we wait in silence. Does that mean that we do not pray to him as we wait? No. That is not what David means at all. In fact, the end of the verses says to “pour out your heart before Him.” It means that humans tend to be impatient in our waiting and we will then complain to God. We are not to do that. Instead, we are to be patient because we know that God is our stronghold and our salvation. We can be silent instead of complaining because we know His faithfulness is true and therefore our own faithfulness should not be shaken. And we have trust in this because He is our refuge. So when we have that constant temptation to give in to our sins, such as constantly rejecting a person for their own sins, we are to pray to God to help us love them and accept them. We are to be faithful in praying for help to love our neighbor, just as Jesus did, and God will be faithful to us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know you are faithful to us, and therefore you want us to be faithful in return. How do we show our faithfulness to you Lord? By pouring out our hearts. We ask that we feel free to pour out our hearts to you Lord. We know that we can tell you because you want to hear our concerns, our hurts, and our fears. Lord, we ask that in coming to you with our needs as we wait for you, we do it with the right heart and motivation Lord. Help us not to complain that you are not moving fast enough Lord. Help us to remind us that it is your timing, as you are our stronghold, our salvation, our strength, and our refuge, that we do not need to complain. We are so thankful that you are so faithful to us that you are all these things to us and that in your faithfulness you will continue to be all these to us, even when we are not the most faithful to you.

*Day 32 (Thursday the sixth week of Lent)* – Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

*Meditation:* We tend to think we know everything and what we should be doing in any situation. But we also know that we aren’t perfect, that we choose the wrong options, and we head down the wrong path. For example, all year long we may buy ethically sourced chocolate, but at Halloween, we rationalize buying the bulk candy that we know is made using child labor since it is cheaper, and the kids won’t know the difference. But we have learned time and time again that our understanding is not always correct. But we do not have to be disheartened by this. Because we have God. If we put our trust

in God, leaning on His understanding and knowledge instead of our own, He is faithful to us. He makes our paths straight and easier to walk. It may not be right away, as we need to show our faithfulness to Him, but eventually, our paths will get easier.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for your faithfulness. And we know our faithfulness can never match your own faithfulness to us. But Lord, that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Lord, we ask that you help us lean on you when we are in times of trouble. Let us not trust our own understanding of what is going on, because we cannot see all like you. Lord, we ask that we rely on you and trust you with all our hearts to know what we should do. And Lord, we are so thankful that you will fulfill your promises to us that when we do rely on you instead of ourselves, and when we are faithful to you, you will make our paths easy and straight.

*Day 33 (Friday the sixth week of Lent)* – 2 Thessalonians 3:3: But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

*Meditation* - Once again, understanding the context of the verses we are looking at helps us to better comprehend the true message of this verse. The verse just before this one is Paul asking the Thessalonians to pray for them (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy) because of being attacked by evil men. Yet, despite this, Paul knows that the Lord is faithful. And despite He himself being attacked by these evil men, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God will strengthen and protect them against the evil one. He does not need the reminder, because he already knows this; Paul realizes though that the people he is writing to need the encouragement of God's faithfulness. He knows that they will be attacked by Satan one day, and it may be sooner than they realize if that day is not already here. And just like the Thessalonians needed that reminder, we also need it. Because we will be and are being attacked, daily by Satan. He wants to see us sin, be broken, and join him in darkness. He wants to see us have disdain for what we don't understand, ignore the poor, and focus on increasing our wealth. But God is faithful to us. He will strengthen us against Satan, and He will protect us from him. He will help us to try to understand those who are different than us, help us to find ways to help the poor, and help us be more generous with what He has provided us. We need to remember this.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for your faithfulness. It astounds and amazes us at times that you are so faithful to us. Lord, we ask that you remain faithful to us when we are being attacked by Satan and those who he uses against us. Lord, please strengthen us to stand against Him so we can remain faithful to you. We ask that you protect us from him so that he cannot overcome us. Let him not win in bringing us down into temptation, sin, and darkness. Lord, we ask that we remember your faithfulness, strength, and protection so that we can defeat Satan.

*Day 34 (Saturday the sixth week of Lent)* – Deuteronomy 7:9: Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

*Meditation* - This is one of the greatest promises we have regarding God's faithfulness to His people. And while it was given to the people of Israel, this promise applies to us today as well. First, see how God is described here. He is described as the "faithful God." That is how we are to know him. Faithful. Our God is faithful. Next, He keeps the covenant that He makes with His people, His followers. They are not dismissed at any whim of God. Finally, as long as you continue to love Him and follow His commandments, such as "love your neighbor as yourself" as instructed in Mark 12:31, He will be faithful

to you. And not just to you, but he will show his lovingkindness to generations after you as well. The hope we have from this is amazing, inspiring us to be faithful to him in keeping his commandment.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you are our faithful God. That it is your desire to keep your covenant with your people and followers. Lord, we ask that you remember this desire when we do fall into temptation and sin. Lord, we ask that you help us to not fall into breaking our part of the covenant we have with you. Help us to follow your commandments. And we ask that as we follow your commands you remember your covenant here and show your lovingkindness to us, as well as the generations that follow us.

## **The seventh week of Lent**

### **Theme – The Cross**

*Sunday Introduction to Theme* – We end this Lenten study with a look at what the entire season is leading to the cross and resurrection. This is how we know that our faith is true. We will see the fulfillment of the prophecies that show that Jesus would die on the cross, but while he died one death he would overcome death and be raised again. We will see that the power of death has no control over Jesus Christ. We will see that by Jesus dying on the cross, he took all our sins on Him. It does not matter what sins we have committed. Whether our sins were intentional or unintentional. Whether we have watched pornography, patronize a nail salon that uses human trafficking victims, buy chocolate made with child labor, or purchasing fast fashion not knowing if they use slave labor or not. He served as an atoning sacrifice for each one of us. We no longer need to go to the temple with a physical sacrifice to atone for our sins as His death did that for all. And that is what we celebrate on Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for the cross, for your actions on the cross. Lord, we know that it is only your divine nature and your understanding of what your death would mean for all of us that led you to be willing to sacrifice yourself on the cross. Lord, we will never fully understand what you have done for us, but we are so thankful for it and what it means for each one of us. We thank you that you were willing to sacrifice yourself for our sins, no matter if we commit them intentionally or unintentionally. We are so thankful that death cannot hold you, and that you have overcome. Lord, help us to understand what this truly means for us as we head into this next week.

*Day 35 (Monday the seventh week of Lent)* – John 16:33: These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

*Meditation* - Jesus spent much time towards the end of his earthly ministry preparing the disciples for what was coming. This verse is one of those times. He knows that the disciples do not understand what is happening, but Jesus is doing His best to prepare them. They may not have understood his words when he uttered them, but they would be able to remember His words when they were amid tribulation and take comfort. And what a comfort these words would be to them once they truly understood them. Jesus knows that the disciples will face tribulation and troubles, but it is his desire that they will have peace. He has spoken these words so that they will know that peace. That when the tribulations they will be facing come they will have courage. They can have courage because Jesus has promised that He has overcome the world. Notice as well that he says “I have overcome the world” before He was crucified and rose again. He knew exactly what His actions meant, so much so that even before they

happened that He could speak of it as past tense. He had already overcome the world. Any tribulation they face cannot stand against Him in the long run. And we can take heart from this as well because Jesus did accomplish what he came here to do. When we are in the middle of a tribulation, such as feeling like we are losing the fight against human trafficking, we are to find peace in Jesus Christ knowing that He has overcome the world, and one day His justice will prevail.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you care so much for your disciples and that you tried your best to prepare them for what they would be facing. Lord, we ask that you do the same for us. We ask that we have peace in you because we know that you have overcome the world. We ask that you give us the courage to face any tribulation that we must face because you have overcome the world. Lord, we know that we can face anything because you have overcome the world. Satan may think that he has won but we know the truth. You have overcome the world and we take courage and peace from that.

*Day 36 (Tuesday the seventh week of Lent)* – Philippians 3:10-11: that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

*Meditation* - Paul helps us to understand the true reward that awaits those who come to know the fullness of Christ's death and resurrection. We need to first know Jesus Christ. We need to know His life, His words, His actions, and His miracles. If we do not know how he lived and what he said, we cannot fully understand who he is. And if we do not know who He is, we cannot understand how his actions are important to us. And if we do not understand who Jesus is, then we cannot truly understand the power of His resurrection. If we do not understand these things, then we cannot be in fellowship with Him, even in fellowship with His sufferings. But when we do understand who Jesus is: His life, words, actions, and miracles, then we can be conformed to the death of Jesus Christ. What does this mean? It means that when we are in the midst of suffering, such as feeling like as much as we try to avoid the temptation of pornography and objectifying the opposite sex we continue to do so, really knowing that we too can overcome and will one day attain the resurrection from the dead.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you help us truly understand who you are. What your words and actions truly mean and how we should best follow them. Lord, we ask that you help us to understand the true power of your resurrection. Lord, we want to be in fellowship with your sufferings as by being in fellowship with you we can look forward to a day when we will be conformed to your death, and we too will participate in being resurrected from the dead.

*Day 37 (Wednesday the seventh week of Lent)* – 1 Corinthians 1:18: For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

*Meditation* - We are given two options here: perishing or being saved. It seems like a simple and obvious choice to be saved. But we are told that the promise of the cross is considered foolishness by those who are perishing. They do not and cannot understand the hope and power that the cross has. We see this today. We see that many who do not follow the cross think we are foolish for following it. Christians endure mocking, scorn, and contempt from non-believers. Note, this is not anything new. We see this in this verse and many other verses like in Psalm 123. They do this because they do not understand. But we know differently. We know that it is not foolishness to believe in the cross. The cross is what has saved us. The cross and resurrection are the true representation of the power of Christ. It is our hope, our salvation, our mercy, and our grace.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are in awe of your power. We are so thankful for the cross and its saving grace. Lord, we know that the world thinks that our belief in you is foolishness. We realize that this is nothing new, but that does not mean it is still not hard to bear. Lord, we ask that you give us the strength to ignore those who mock and scorn because we know that their fate will sadly be one of demise. Lord, we ask that we can show them through our actions and words that it is not foolishness to believe in the saving grace of the cross and your power. Continuing on with the foolishness of disbelief will lead to their demise and their perishing.

*Day 38 (Thursday the seventh week of Lent)* – Isaiah 53: “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of the parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted, but He was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging, we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment, He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned to wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge, the Righteous one, My servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

*Meditation* - This is such a poignant passage of what Christ will do for us, and it is even more poignant given that it was written long before Christ was born. He would be a man that would not be your typical leader, who would not be the appearance one would think of a leader or king, because He (and us) would not want it to be his outward beauty that had people following him for they would be following Him for the wrong reasons. He would know the range of human emotions, including the worst ones of being hated and forsaken, and understanding both sorrow and grief. He could identify with all humans in that regard. Despite our lack of respect for him, for we all do not esteem him as we should, he took on everything for us. He was stricken, smitten, pierced through, and crushed for our transgressions and our iniquities. Yet, we are the ones who benefit from this. We are rewarded for his obedience. Because through his actions of pouring himself out to death, despite never having sinned, he was numbered as one of us and interceded for us who all have sinned. Isaiah even called Him the sin offering. Those at the time would know that a sin offering, per the instructions given to the Levitical priests back when the Levitical priesthood was established, needed to be pure. Therefore, the only person who could be a sin offering for the whole of humanity is one who is without sin. And it is through that intercession as a sin offering, we can be justified and brought close to God.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that we can look back at this prophecy and understand it better now that it is in the past. Lord, we realize that you gave up everything to come to this earth knowing that you would suffer cruelty and hatred from those around you. They were told long before who they would be but did not understand the prophesy or those words. But we can understand the prophesy looking back. Lord, we are so thankful that you did take on everything for us. That you were stricken, smitten, pierced, and crushed just to bear our sins and act as our mediator. We do not deserve this, because as this passage says, we all have not esteemed you as we should. Yet, you still loved us so much, that you took everything on for us. We can never truly express how grateful we are for that.

*Day 39 (Thursday the seventh week of Lent)* – Philippians 2:5-8: Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

*Meditation* - Paul instructs us that we are to have the same attitude toward ourselves that Jesus Christ had. And what attitude was that? One of humility. And how did he do that? First, he disregarded his equality with God as something that he did not have to hold on to. That is an attribute of humility. Second, he emptied Himself. This does not mean that He gave up His divinity, because He could never give up His true divinity, but instead He gave up the “appearance” of that divinity so that one could not tell that He was a divine being. That is an attribute of humility. Third, what did he empty himself into? He emptied himself into a “bond-servant.” What does Paul mean by this? A bond-servant is another phrase for slave. Humans, in our fallen nature, are slaves to sin. Therefore, God emptied himself into a vessel that he knew the nature of. He himself did not sin, but it would be assumed by all around Him that He too would be sinful because every creature in that form has been sinful. He is the one exception. Knowing all of that, he still did it. That is an attribute of humility. Fourth, as a divine being, even on this earth, he did not have to die the death that a human had to die. But despite that, he still suffered death in obedience to God. And His death was not a glorious death, but one that was meant to humiliate a person and cause them to suffer, dying on a cross. This is an attribute of humility. And Paul calls on us to have the same humility that Christ has. While we are not able to give up something so great as divinity, we can give up our possessions, wealth, time, and many other things to follow God’s plan for us. We may not be called to die a humiliating death like Christ was called to, but it does not mean we shouldn’t be ready to give our lives for Christ nonetheless. What it does mean for sure is that we need to humble ourselves and follow God’s will for our lives and use Jesus as an example of that.

*Prayer* - Lord, thank you for showing us what true humility looks like. We can never fully grasp what you gave up in your divinity to come to this earth, but we know that it was a lot. Lord, we thank you that you become like us so that we can see how we are to truly live with our fellow man. And Lord, we are so thankful that you were so obedient to God, knowing His full plan for you to be one of death, that you still followed His plan to fulfillment. Lord, we ask that you help us to be like Christ. We ask that you help us to be humble. That we are willing to give up what is being asked of us by you and to give it up willingly. Lord, we ask that we have obedience for you wherever your plan for us leads. We know that you are our guide, and your plan is the ultimate plan. And we know that even if it is a plan that leads to death, the reward with you is a great reward.

*Day 40 (Good Friday)* – 1 Peter 2:21-25: For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He

uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

*Meditation* - As part of this passage, Peter is reminding his audience of what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53, which we read two days ago. He is reminding his readers that despite Christ being the savior and ruler of this world, we are to live as He lived. We will never reach the perfection that Christ was able to live of a sinless life, but nonetheless, we should still live a life that is true and honest, attempting our best to not sin. When those opposed to Jesus spoke falsely of him, seeking to malign him, how did he react? Did He resort to name-calling and seek to malign those accusing him as well? No. His responses were full of truth and honesty. And at times, he was silent. We should do the same. Do not respond with vitriol, but with truth, honesty, and kindness. Christ also did not respond with threats against those who threatened him. He could have easily threatened them with facts of impending judgment and doom, but instead, he said nothing and entrusted his life and death to God, the ultimate judge, and the only true righteous judge. Peter also knew that we would not be able to live the sinless life that Christ live, but that does not mean we shouldn't try to not commit sin. But we know that Christ died on the cross nearing our sins so that we will one day die to sin and be able to live in righteousness. For sin mars and hurts our body, but Christ's wounds on the cross heal those hurts. And today, of all days, Good Friday, where we focus on His death, is the most important thing. That Christ died so that we can live again in Him. And while we may, and will, stray like sheep, we should and return to the "Guardian of our souls", the Good Shepherd, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you provided us with an example of how we are to live. We know that we will most likely never face the persecution that you faced, but that does not make it any easier to deal with. Lord, help us use your life as an example of how we should face those who attacked you. Let us not return kind for kind, but return words of truth and honesty, remaining silent if that is the best option. But today, we are most thankful that you gave your life willingly and entrusted it to God, the ultimate and most righteous judge. We are thankful that you bore our sins when you were on that cross so that we can die to our sins and instead live a righteous life with you. Lord, we are so thankful for that. Lord, we know that we will sin, and we will continually stray away from you. But Lord, we are thankful that you are our Guardian and Good shepherd, that you will always look for us and accept us when we return. Lord, please help us always to return to you.

*Easter Sunday* – Acts 10:34-43 – Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation, the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)- you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him, all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

*Meditation* – The Jews, including Peter, believed that Jesus was coming to establish a new kingdom for Israel and the Jews only. Yet, we know that is not the truth. And here Peter realizes that Jesus came, died, and was resurrected for all people and nations who believe in Him. Peter reminds all of the fullness of Jesus’ ministry that he and others were witnesses to including being anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and power at his baptism and healing those who were oppressed by the devil. Peter also reminds us that despite being put to death on the cross, God raised him up three days later and appeared to those who were close to him for them to know that the prophecies were fulfilled. His final command is for those who bore witness to these things to preach this good news to all people, testifying that Jesus is the one God has appointed as our judge for those living and dead. He is the one who prophets spoke about that all who believe in His name receives forgiveness of sins. And this is the good news that we celebrate this day. We have seen through this Lenten time that we have all sinned. We have given in to temptations (such as objectifying those we are attracted to). We all suffer in darkness (being separated from God by sinning such as buying fast fashion.) We all sin (deciding we need the latest technology each year despite knowing that the batteries are sourced using slave labor. But despite all of this we know that there if we repent of our sins and stay faithful to God, we will be judged with grace and mercy. Why do we know this? Because Jesus died on the cross to be an atonement for our sins. Knowing this, we too, like Peter, should share this good news with those around us. Share the love, hope, peace, grace, and mercy Christ provides for us.

*Prayer* – Lord, we are so thankful that you came to this earth not just for a few, but for all peoples. We are so thankful that you have fulfilled all the prophecies that foretold your coming, life, death, and resurrection. We know that we will all sin, give in to temptation, and suffer in darkness and brokenness. We know that there is nothing we can do ourselves to save ourselves. That if left to ourselves, our judgment would be one of eternal condemnation. But Lord, we know that you are our propitiation and our atonement. You gave your life so we do not have to suffer in eternal hell. Lord, we know that you are always faithful to us, and we pray that you help us to remain faithful to you. And Lord, we ask that you give us the confidence and love to share your good news with those around us so that they too can share your love, hope, peace, grace, and mercy.

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