



Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley, Pastor

LENTEN
MEDITATIONS
FOR 2017

JUST
AS I AM

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
AND FORMATION

Rev. Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams, director





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KEY TO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

KJV – King James Version

MSG – The Message

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NCV – New Century Version

NIV – New International Version

NKJV – New King James Version

NLT – New Living Translation

NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

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MESSAGE FROM PASTOR WESLEY

My beloved Sisters and Brothers, I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Once again, we enter into the season of Lent along with Christians all over the world. This time of prayer and fasting affords us the opportunity to strip away the many distractions in our lives and focus on the journey Jesus took to Calvary. As we pray and fast, we are reminded of the sacrifice Christ made in His life and death for our redemption.



While He walked this earth, Jesus took time to be alone and pray. Following His example, we step out of the normal patterns of our busy days and reorient ourselves by devoting more time to prayer, fasting and seeking God's face. When we are still, we allow God to speak to us anew, reveal the plans He has for us, and refresh us with the Holy Spirit.

As we focus on our reconciliation with God, we also take advantage of the opportunity to reconcile with one another. In this time of national division and international strife, what a gift this season is to us. Over the next 40 days, we can realign ourselves in our relationship with God—and by extension our relationships with one another.

I pray that these meditations will remind you of the enormity of Christ's sacrifice and our call to live purposeful, committed Christian lives.

Amen.

WHAT IS THE SEASON OF LENT?

Lent was first celebrated during the 4th century and began with only a few days before Easter. The early church would baptize converts to Christianity—all those who believed on the name of the Lord—on Easter Sunday only. With time, Lent was extended to several weeks. The 40 days were symbolic of Jesus' preparation and temptation by Satan in the wilderness after His baptism and before the beginning of His ministry. It was a time of purification and separation.

Lent became known as the 40-day period before Easter and begins on Ash Wednesday. Sundays are not counted in the 40 days because the day commemorates the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Since early biblical times ashes have been symbolic of repentance (turning away from sin and turning to God) or of grief in mourning. The ashes were used to make a sign of the cross on the forehead of believers from the charred remains of the palm branches used on Palm Sunday the year before. This extended period of 40 days became a time of prayer and fasting as well as a time of self-examination and inner reflection for the purpose of repentance.

As we celebrate Lent we should remember that what we give up for a short period of time cannot prepare us for how God expects us to live our lives daily in relationship with Him. Perhaps that is why after the Reformation, the discipline of fasting became unpopular. Yet, there were those church fathers and leaders who still wanted to preserve Lent as a time of self-sacrifice; thus, people were encouraged to give up something they enjoyed during Lent.

We suggest during this season of Lent to forget about giving up trivial things. Instead, take on a newfound attitude to live in accordance with God's Word. No amount of fasting, abstaining from physical pleasures or any other form of self-denial can purify us. Our cleansing can only come from the atoning blood of Jesus who sacrificed His life for our many sins.

Get to know Jesus intimately for yourself during this sacred time. Use these meditations—written by the board members of the Christian Life Institute and ministers and members of Alfred Street Baptist Church—to help guide you as you reflect on Christ's great sacrifice and how it impacts your life today. Let the Holy Spirit convert your mind daily and lead you to do and think the things that are pleasing in His sight. Pray, repent and let God work in you and to do His good pleasure.

HOLINESS

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2017
WALKING IN HOLINESS

READ: 1 Peter 1:14–16

KEY VERSE: But as he which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. - I Peter 1:15 (KJV)

Growing up, we all saw someone whom we wanted to be like. For me, it was Lynn Swann, wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers. I envisioned myself running and catching the football like him. I worked hard at getting better to emulate some of the attributes and qualities Lynn portrayed on the football field. I was not able to master all his athletic feats, but I obtained enough to excel in the game while in high school and college.

When God calls us holy, He wants us to emulate Him in everything we do. We will never be able to make ourselves holy because it is not a human attribute that we can obtain on our own. Therefore, God has called those who believe in His son, Jesus, holy. We should strive daily to be like Christ. This requires reading God's word and praying to the Father to develop characteristics in us that emulate Him. We can only do this by the aid of the Holy Spirit. With His help, we can be holy. – **Bernard Grant**

LOOKING WITHIN: Who do I want to emulate? What characteristics do I have that do not resemble Christ?

Father, help me to be more like you by living according to your Word. Let my walk be a testimony to your holiness. Amen.

FAITH

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2017
IN GOD WE TRUST

READ: Genesis 15:1–6

KEY VERSE: And he believed in the LORD, and he [the LORD] accounted it to him for righteousness. - Genesis 15:6 (NKJV)

Abraham was on a journey in the wilderness, following a promise that seemed impossible. Every now and then along the way, God would show up and remind Abraham of the promise. God's promise of descendants, land and blessing stood in stark contrast to Abraham's reality as a childless nomad. Yet he chose to focus on the promise and cling to God's words, as improbable as they were.

Perhaps Abraham was able to imagine beyond his circumstances or maybe he had enough of an understanding of God to trust. Maybe he was just crazy in his faith. But regardless of how he came to trust in God, it worked! God counted it to his credit. He "made himself sure" in God's word and that faith covered the gap between his reality and God's promise.

During the Lenten season, be encouraged by Abraham's story. Remember that trusting in God makes up for all of our shortcomings. Our trust in God covers the distance between His promises for us and any obstacles we face. – **Rev. Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams**

LOOKING WITHIN: What are the areas where I need to make myself secure in God's promises?

Lord, help my unbelief. Show me how to be secure in you and teach me that trusting you is the best way. Amen.

OBEDIENCE

FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2017

A PICTURE OF OBEDIENCE

READ: Luke 6:46–49

KEY VERSE: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” - Luke 6:46 (NIV)

Is obedience the way in which we follow directions of parents and teachers? Sometimes I am asked to do things that I really don't want to do. To avoid punishment, I'll submit – but with a non-cheerful spirit. What does obedience to God look like?

Obedience is accepting God's authority with complete submission in our actions and thoughts. The Bible offers stories of disobedience (Jonah and Lot's wife) and obedience, no matter how strange or dangerous the command (Noah and Abraham).

Familiar with these stories, we still find ourselves fighting our desires and disobeying God. His command over our lives may sometimes be challenging or disinteresting, yet we must obey because He leads with love. At times it may mean that someone will make fun of you or that you will have to choose to be different from others. During these times, remember that God is always watching over and taking care of us. – **Sydney Payne**

LOOKING WITHIN: Do I truly love God enough to unite my heart with His will? What excuses have I made for my disobedience?

Dear God, it is clear that if we're obedient, we'll live a full life with You. Forgive me when I choose to follow my own will. Grant me a heart of obedience, in Jesus' name. Amen.

PEACE

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2017
JESUS' LEGACY OF PEACE

READ: John 14:25–27

KEY VERSE: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. - John 14:27 (NIV)

While approaching our third wedding anniversary, my husband suddenly became very ill and within 30 days he went home to be with our Lord. This kind of devastation was heart-wrenching to say the least. Now, six years later, I have a better understanding and a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. I had to learn to believe in His Word and know that He would give me peace even in trying times.

The peace of the world is temporary. If you are at war with God or estranged from Him, it is a war you cannot win! Christ gave Himself on our behalf and took upon Himself the just wrath of the Father. If you trust Jesus, you will have the unspeakable inheritance of peace with God.

Jesus does not abandon us to our struggles. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won, we can claim the peace of Christ in the most troublesome times. – **Wanda A. Smith**

LOOKING WITHIN: How do I react to obstacles in my search for peace? How will I know when I have received God's peace?

Thank you, Lord, that your Holy Spirit counsels me in all things and reminds me of everything. May I experience the gift of peace that only you can give, even in the midst of trials, tribulation and testing. Amen.

FELLOWSHIP

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2017
THE TIE THAT BINDS

READ: John 13: 34–35

KEY VERSE: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. - John 13:34 (NIV)

Recently, I had a conversation with a member of my church who had left several years ago. As our conversation ended, I put pressure on her to return. “Well, I do miss the fellowship gatherings in the multipurpose room,” she remarked. “JR always cooks good food.”

That statement left me wondering about fellowship. Is Christian fellowship only about the receptions and dinners that we have at church? No! Christian fellowship is the practice of loving our brethren.

The Great Commandment tells us that love of God is joined to love of our neighbors. So we must stop thinking of Christian fellowship as only having potluck dinners, chatting at the grocery store or watching sport events with others. These gatherings have their place if they are connected with doing the work of the Lord. Christian fellowship involves actively doing God’s will – sharing lives and burdens, and encouraging one another.

I believe that this familiar song best sums up Christian fellowship: *Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.* – **Louise L. Nickens**

LOOKING WITHIN: What am I doing to practice true Christian fellowship among my brethren?

God of hope, help me to know my neighbors, to keep my promise, to get up and go where I am needed, bringing Christ’s peace to those longing for your love. Amen.

DISCIPLESHIP

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2017
SHOWING THE WAY

READ: John 8:28–32

KEY VERSE: Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed.” - John 8:31 (NKJV)

The discipline of regulating thoughts, actions and intentions is a challenge children of God will face every day of our lives. The good news is the Father has endowed us with His Holy Spirit to live a life of discipleship. Even more good news is that Jesus Christ is the only standard by which we are measured.

It is that personal, one-on-one relationship with our Lord and Savior that convinces us to practice what we read in the Bible and what we hear from the still and quiet voice that constantly speaks to us, giving direction and admonition. That committed relationship with Christ fuels our behavior, withstands our questions, indulges our emotions and brings us full circle to where we began—face to face with Jesus.

From this space of discipleship, we fulfill our purpose on earth. Starting at the place of our beginning, we meet others at their place of need: showing the love of Christ that sets them on their discipleship journey. – **Brigitte L. Maxey**

LOOKING WITHIN: How does my discipleship encourage the discipleship of others?

*Thank you, Father, for loving me and allowing me to develop into who you destined me to be. Please help me to love others so they, too, will fulfill their purpose on earth. In the powerful name of Jesus.
Amen.*

HOPE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2017

THE WORST THING TO BE WITHOUT

READ: Romans 5:1–11

KEY VERSE: Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for. - Job 6:8 (NIV)

One of my favorite movies is *The Shawshank Redemption*. The character Red, played by Morgan Freeman, has been released from prison after a long stay. At first he is happy and hopeful about life on the outside, until he realizes that being out of prison is not everything he hoped it would be. He wishes to go back to prison.

However, because of a friend who has provided him a place to stay, he does not return. Instead, he leans on the hope that his friend has given him. The friend tells Red to remember, “Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” Although the hope Red’s friend has given him is not a certainty, it is what he clings to.

As Christians, the friend that provides us a place to stay and hope is Jesus. The hope we have in Jesus is a certain and good thing that never dies. As Christians our greatest hope should be to live a life that is pleasing to God and to one day see our friend in heaven. – **Winston Gaskin**

LOOKING WITHIN: Do I abound with hope? How can I keep hope alive in Jesus Christ?

*Dear God, thank you that in these days of trials, hope is alive and well. Help me to spread my hope in you to everyone I encounter.
Amen.*

SACRIFICE

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017
A HUMBLE SACRIFICE

READ: Philippians 2:5–11

KEY VERSE: And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. - Philippians 2:8 (NKJV)

“Wait? How much does this cost again?” I remember as a kid the first purchase I ever tried to make in a store. I saved my allowance for two weeks to buy one of my favorite toys. Unfortunately, though I had enough money for the toy’s price, I had forgotten to include the tax. The price on the label didn’t equal the total cost.

One of the basic tenants that Christians understand is that salvation is free. But we may underestimate what it means to be a disciple. Today’s text teaches us that serving God is not just about what Christ did for us on the cross, but also assuming the same posture of humility if we claim to be His disciples.

One important consideration about sacrifice is this: The “what” we sacrifice for is just as important as the “why.” Christ’s great love for us, even to the point of death on the cross, compels us to consider others more than ourselves. He demonstrates that our sacrifice can only be possible when we embrace a spirit of humility—and are willing to pay the total cost.

– **Minister James Griggs**

LOOKING WITHIN: What shall I render unto God for all His blessings?

*God please help me to see less of myself and, with a humble spirit,
accept the grace for which you obediently died so that I may live.
Amen.*

ATONEMENT

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2017

ATONING PEACE IN THE STORM

READ: Romans 5:1–11

KEY VERSE: For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. - Romans 5:10 (NASB)

Atonement has several meanings. Many people, however, think of atonement as reconciliation or unity. I'd like to offer yet another definition: peace.

Not long ago, I was having a horrible day at work. I was mad at my co-workers. I was mad at the world. I was struggling to find peace. When lunchtime came, it was raining hard. But I ventured out anyway. I was mad, and nothing else mattered!

As I walked to Union Station, I kept praying for peace, praying to hear from God. I got lunch and started back. It was still raining as I headed to the office. Yet while I was deep in despair, it suddenly stopped raining. The birds began chirping and the bees began to buzz. The sun finally showed itself. Then the Son showed Himself. It was in that moment, I realized I was being reconciled to God. I recognized that we—God and I—were entering a place of unity. And in that unity, I found peace. – **Rev. Kevin C. Norton**

LOOKING WITHIN: When you feel the farthest from God, what is your prayer?

Oh God, in my moments of despair, abide with me and grant me your peace. Amen.

WORSHIP

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2017

PASTORS, PREACHERS AND SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

READ: Jeremiah 3:15 and Jeremiah 9:23–24

KEY VERSE: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. - Jeremiah 3:15 (KJV)

How many of us recall a sermon that stirred us deeply because it taught us something new about God's nature and character? Or perhaps we remember a Sunday School lesson that elevated our understanding of Christ, or cherish a hymn because of what we now understand about God's mercy and grace.

Worship is a privilege held by every believer to experience and engage our God. It is special favor granted to believers to approach our King's throne with adoration, praise and thanksgiving. Worship is our response to God's revelation about Himself through His Word. But without pastors, preachers and teachers to instruct us, our ability to worship is limited. We would be like the people of Athens worshipping an unknown god.

The disciplined care and feeding of our souls through instruction nurtures and matures our thinking about God. It is in this crucible of revelation and enlightenment that we avail ourselves to God so that the Holy Spirit may do His perfect work in us, allowing us to worship God in a manner pleasing to Him. – **Nancy K. Myrick**

LOOKING WITHIN: How can I steadfastly seek to learn more about God and worship Him?

Dear Lord, thank you for your love, mercy and grace. Thank you for sending us shepherds who care for us and teach us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2017

KEEP PEDALING

READ: Romans 8:1–11

KEY VERSES: However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.
- Romans 8:9-10 (NASB)

Did you ever want to ride a bicycle? Do you remember when you learned how? In some ways, a life of service to God is similar to learning to ride for the first time. Someone gives you a starting push. You either start pedaling or you fall. The faster you pedal, the smoother the ride. If you stop pedaling, you fall.

Likewise, we must daily work on our faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is the evidence of that faith. If we are without faith, we follow sin and it shows in our living. If we have the Spirit of Jesus in us we have the strength to be righteous. The effect of righteousness is like riding that bicycle. Keep pedaling and the fruit of righteousness pours out. Stop building a life of faith and you fall from the bike. – **Leo A. Brooks**

LOOKING WITHIN: What is just one sign I can see in me today that I have been truly pedaling?

Lord, I want to be righteous by following my faith in you. I sometimes slow down or stop along the way. Please help me to keep pedaling toward righteousness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THANKSGIVING

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2017

HOW CAN I SAY THANKS?

READ: Psalm 51:8–12

KEY VERSE: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. - Psalm 51:10 (KJV)

For years, I suffered with an arthritic hip. Though I worked and traveled extensively, I finally agreed to a hip replacement because the pain was too much. My surgeon jettisoned the diseased portion, then fitted me with a titanium joint and ceramic housing. Eighteen months after the procedure, I remain grateful to God for allowing me to walk virtually pain-free, and for preventing infection and rejection of the implant, even though I still need to exercise to keep the joint flexible and strong.

Just as our bodies sometimes need new parts, our spirits need renewal, our hearts need cleaning, and our attitudes need adjusting to reflect gratefulness. While the Creator is patient as we present our endless wish list as prayer, occasional declarations of appreciation enhance faith and acknowledge His amazing grace toward us. Imagine the Lord's delight when, instead of *gimme*, He hears *thank you*. – **Mike Tucker**

LOOKING WITHIN: Am I grateful despite adversity? How do I demonstrate thankfulness in my daily living?

Dear Lord, I give you glory and praise for healing my body, my mind and spirit on a daily basis. I appreciate your grace and mercy. Please help me to lean on your power in all situations—good and bad—and give thanks.

GRACE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017

PAY IT FORWARD

READ: Ephesians 2:1–10

KEY VERSES: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9 (NJKV)

Grace is a recurring theme in the Old and New Testaments. It generally is defined as an “unmerited favor of God,” freely given by God and not earned by our works. It is a representation of God’s love for His people and a manifestation of His faithfulness to us.

In the Old Testament God’s grace was demonstrated through deliverance from enemies, afflictions or adversity. In the New Testament, God’s grace focuses on the provision of salvation through Jesus Christ.

God’s grace is truly amazing. No situation or circumstance is too hard or too hopeless for the grace of God. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23,24).

God’s graciousness to us should motivate us to be gracious to others: that is, to be kind, compassionate, slow to take offense, and quick to forgive. If we are truly thankful for God’s grace, can we do anything less than share the good news of Christ Jesus with others? – **Clarence A. Miller**

LOOKING WITHIN: How do I show grace to others?

Father, thank you for the grace of salvation. May I likewise be gracious to others. Amen.

RESTORATION

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2017
A BROKEN PIECE

READ: Joel 2:12–17

KEY VERSE: Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. - Joel 2:12 (NIV)

Alone in a room,
Just me and you.
Bruised, battered, bitter and broken,
It's been awhile since we've last spoken.
Forgive me Lord for all my sin,
I need your strength now and then.
Here I stand before The Lamb,
A broken piece is what I am.

Life will blindsides you and leave you stumbling like a drunken man. You didn't get that job you wanted. The doctor gave you some bad news. You found love on a two-way street and lost it on a lonely highway. Looking to put our lives back together we turn to everything but God. We place our faith in people and things that ultimately drain us. Life will leave you on "E."

Every so many miles on your life's journey, you have to take your soul to God so He can restore it. He does not care how many miles you have. He doesn't care how many wrong turns you have made. God wants all your heart so He can fill it up so that you can make it to your next destination. – **Adrian Ferguson**

LOOKING WITHIN: What parts of my life are on "E"? What can make me whole again?

*Dear God, thank you for being a one-stop shop for my broken life.
Amen.*

PRAISE

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2017

ROUND-THE-CLOCK PRAISE

READ: Psalm 113:1–9

KEY VERSE: From east to west, from dawn to dusk, keep lifting all your praises to God. - Psalm 113:3 (MSG)

The Bible says that all of creation resonates with the glory of God. He demands and deserves glory. We can't give God glory, because He already has it. It's fundamental to who He is. We credit Him with the splendor and magnificence that He is due.

A judge becomes glorious when he puts on his robe. A doctor enters the surgical theatre clothed in his uniform and we can admire his brilliance. However, when not in their uniforms they are just like the rest of us. God is never without his uniform. He is always clothed in His robe of glory!

How often should we praise the Lord? The Bible says from the rising of the sun to its setting, His name should be praised. In other words, we should praise Him from the time we wake in the morning. When we put on our clothes, we should honor His name. When He takes us safely throughout the day, we should praise Him.

And when the day ends and we are still alive, safe and gathered again unto our families, we should offer up His name in praise—all the time.

– **Vita Tucker**

LOOKING WITHIN: How is praise a part of my daily walk with the Lord?

Dear Lord, thank you for the roof over my head, the shoes on my feet, the food on my table, the clothes on my back. Thank you for providing all of my needs according to your riches in glory. Amen.

MERCY

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

SERVING WITH A MERCIFUL HEART

READ: Romans 12:3–8

KEY VERSE: If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. - Romans 12:8 (NIV)

Mercy means to show kindness and compassion as well as benevolence and goodwill in tolerance for others. Merriam-Webster dictionary provides synonyms for mercy: humanitarianism, empathy, care, gentleness, generosity and affection.

Deacons are assigned to care for a discipleship group of 200 or more people from varying backgrounds and temperaments. No matter how difficult this task may be at times, we often have to remind ourselves about our God-given role as deacons to be merciful. We must look past the unkind words that are said to us and about us and still show mercy. We must show care when we need care ourselves. We must show gentleness when anger is the natural response. We must show benevolence to help group members in times of need.

It is said that if God brings you to it, He will bring you through it. And He does. The new mercy that the Bible speaks about morning by morning is given so that we can keep serving His people. Thank God for mercy, the gift that He gives to us that we might give to others. – **Patricia Wallace**

LOOKING WITHIN: What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?

*Lord, teach me your ways. Show me how to be a servant leader.
Help me to serve with a merciful heart and with love. Amen.*

LOVE

MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2017

WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1–13

KEY VERSES: Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NLT)

When our son was very young, we would tell him that the world did not revolve around him and that we did not exist to give him everything he desired. We wanted him to learn that Mom and Dad's love came in different flavors. Some he would like and others he would not. The goal was to teach him the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. We quickly learned that sometimes modeling the behavior was a challenge as we had to come clean to him when our behavior was not acceptable.

As Christians, love has everything to do with how we behave. God's divine love serves as the anchor that keeps us from being mean-spirited when we are mistreated and as the compass to guide us to be like Christ. His love causes us to serve others without expecting anything in return. Love is the gift that should govern our interactions. His love is available to everyone because He paid the price on Calvary. – **Paula and Virgil Lewis**

LOOKING WITHIN: How does my daily behavior toward others reflect the love of Christ?

Dear God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, help me bring life to the words of the song "They will know we are Christians by our love." In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

JOY

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2017
COUNT ON HIM

READ: James 1:2–5

KEY VERSE: My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.
- James 1:2 (NKJV)

What do you do when life gets you down? What do you do when things seem to be out of control? Do you talk to friends or do you attempt to figure things out on your own? Or do you give up?

As we mature in our faith walk, we know that God is with us, no matter what. As we grow in Christ, we know that God has a plan for our lives and we do not always understand what the plan is. Today's passage helps us to understand that God wants us to count on Him. God instructs us to have patience through the process. He wants His children to ask for His wisdom and guidance, and He will lovingly supply what we need.

We must learn to allow God to provide direction and be willing to follow. Not listening to the Lord is never a good option. Count on Him—and count it all joy. – **Nancy Doswell**

LOOKING WITHIN: How often do I completely count on God? Would there be different results if I allow God to be in control?

Lord, please grant me the wisdom to know that you have everything under control. No matter what, I will count it all joy. Amen.

PRAYER

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2017 THE PORT IN YOUR STORMS

READ: Jonah 2:1–10

KEY VERSE: When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord;
And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. - Jonah 2:7 (NKJV)

Several years ago, a dear friend of mine was going through a hard time. She had lost her mother and was struggling to cope with her grief. Wanting to comfort her and help her find peace, I wrote this prayer for her.

*My life is in your hands, oh Lord;
I surrender to your will.
When I'm battered by the raging storm,
I hear you whisper, "Peace be still."
I feel your arms enfold me
as the waves come crashing down.
Your saving grace sustains me;
You will not let me drown.
I feel your Spirit deep within;
it fills me to my core.
It gives me strength, against all odds,
to safely reach the shore.
Your loving mercy gives me hope
in the darkest of my days,
and reminds how you've brought me through
so many crashing waves.
So I place my life within your hands;
I surrender to your will.
Oh Lord, you didn't leave me;
Hosanna! You bless me still. Amen. – Lisa Wilson*

LOOKING WITHIN: How strong is my prayer life? When I feel overwhelmed, is God the first or the last one I turn to for support?

*Father, when I am in distress and cannot see my way clear, help me
to remember that your peace is only a prayer away.*

OBEDIENCE

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2017
SUBMITTING TO GOD'S LAW

READ: Ephesians 6: 2–3; 1 John 5:2–3

KEY VERSES: Honor thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. - Ephesians 6:2–3 (KJV)

The Bible provides 10 commandments, which are God's laws of love, honor and respect. The fifth commandment instructs us to honor our parents. As children, we are to obey our parents. However, as we become adults, we are not relieved of our responsibility to care for our parents as needed.

We provided Carolyn's mother, Lucille Floyd, with in-home care for more than five years until severe dementia and safety concerns convinced us it was best to place her in a nursing facility. She always said, "Once a woman, twice a child," meaning as one gets older and loses independence, there is role reversal. The parents become like the children and the children become like the parents. The emotional, financial and physical support needed can be very stressful. However, caring for one's parents is one of the best ways to obey God.

Mom is now 92 years old and is doing well. We visit her regularly and are confirmed in our decision. Submitting to God's law allows us to make the right decisions for ourselves and for our families. – **Gilbert and Carolyn Knowles**

LOOKING WITHIN: How do I apply obedience when it comes to loving, honoring and respecting my family?

Heavenly Father, thank you for my family and friends. Please place more love in my heart, so that I can be more obedient to you and show that obedience at home and beyond. Amen.

FELLOWSHIP

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017

WALKING TOGETHER IN LOVE

READ: John 13:21–35

KEY VERSES: Jesus said, “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and what I told the Jews, I tell you now: Where I am going you cannot come. I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other. - John 13:33–34 (NCV)

Over the years, I have learned that it’s not always what you say but what you do that matters to people. People sometimes see you through eyes of what is perceived, not always through eyes of what is your actual truth. We should think about how we approach, validate and share the love of God with our neighbors—people we encounter every day. We must ask ourselves, am I a person who bears the witness of love? Do I reach people with an embracing spirit, or do I lack in these areas and need to be more definitive with my actions.

God commands us to love one another as He loves us. By doing so, our relationships become more fulfilling and friendships more inevitable. To walk together in love is a true act of fellowship. And accepting one another for who we are children of the almighty God! – **Theron Johnson**

LOOKING WITHIN: Do I walk in love that enables me to be in fellowship with others?

Lord, thank you for strengthening my understanding of what it means to be in fellowship with one another. Amen.

WORSHIP

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2017
CAUGHT IN THE ACT

READ: John 4:21–24

KEY VERSE: God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. - John 4:24 (NIV)

Many believe worship can only occur in a church during Sunday morning services. However, I have sung songs of praise while riding on a bus through rural El Salvador, prayed in a small chapel perched by the Caribbean Sea on the island of St. John, and meditated in large metropolitan Basilicas. Yet, there are moments when true worship can seem elusive and God seems distant. I make attempts at worship but something is missing.

Worship is supposed to come from the heart, not from routine or an obligatory act. When the joy of worship is evasive then it is time to examine my life. I must look within and be truthful with God about where I am and what I am feeling. Am I mad? Am I worried? Am I harboring unforgiveness?

If the act of worship is just that, an act, then strip yourself emotionally bare before God. Worship is not dependent upon a physical place but comes from an internal place of honesty. – **Minister Rosalind Brooks**

LOOKING WITHIN: How have I allowed the ebb and flow of everyday life to interfere with my reverence of God?

Holy God, I come to you honestly and vulnerably, seeking true worship. May my authenticity lead me to a richer and closer relationship with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ETERNITY

MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2017

MORE THAN A MATTER OF TIME

READ: Revelation 21:1–8

KEY VERSE: For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. - Hebrews 13:14 (NIV)

How long is forever? For most of us, forever means a very long time. We think forever is the same as eternity – more time than we could possibly imagine.

But in the Bible, eternity isn't just about time. Eternity is a place. It's where God dwells, and where He will call those who believe in Jesus to live with Him. In the book of Revelation, the apostle John vividly describes the new Jerusalem, also known as the Holy City or heaven, as a place of indescribable beauty where there is no more pain or death.

Don't you want to live there? All you have to do is believe in Jesus and live for Him while we are in this temporary home on earth. God also has a place for unbelievers: It's called hell.

What's your choice? Heaven can be yours – eternity, in both place and time.
– **Barbranda Walls**

LOOKING WITHIN: What comes to mind when I think about eternity? Where am I destined to spend it?

Thank you, Lord, for preparing an eternal home for all believers in your Holy City. I pray that many will accept you as their Savior and live there with you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MERCY

TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2017
DEWDROPS OF MERCY

READ: Psalm 136:1–4

KEY VERSE: O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endures forever. - Psalm 136:1 (NKJV)

In some verses of the Bible, *mercy* is translated as God’s love, steadfastness, compassion, pity and even loyalty.

Scholars say there is no perfect English equivalent capable of capturing the full meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek words, *chesed* and *eleos*. Yet when I hear the word “mercy,” I most often think of a song lyric, not a Bible verse: “We’ll walk in the light, beautiful light. Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.”

Maybe, like me, you’ve sung that line many times and never given it much thought. But why does the writer relate mercy to dew and how exactly do those “drops” shine bright? Dew is formed as warm ground cools and radiates heat into the atmosphere. The water vapor in the air condenses from a gas to a liquid. That condensation is dew.

Maybe that’s a helpful way to think about God’s mercy. When our lives get too hot and heavy — when we are overwhelmed, and our troubles are boiling over — the heat of our situation triggers beads of God’s love and compassion. That’s because God chooses to be in relationship with us even though we do not deserve it. He never abandons us, whatever we are going through. – **Geri Coleman Tucker**

LOOKING WITHIN: How have I felt the restorative power of God’s mercy? Have I, in turn, been merciful to others?

Dear Lord, thank you for new mercies each day. Amen.

FAITH

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2017

FAITH NOT FEAR

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:1–8

KEY VERSE: For we live by faith, not by sight. - 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV)

Over the years, I have come to understand that faith and fear are related, but they cannot co-exist. Consider this: Faith and fear are the belief in future events that are unknown.

According to a quick Internet search, faith as an intellectual process “is the acceptance of something as true on grounds other than personal observation and experience.” I believe and accept the biblical meaning from Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Our attempt to understand the unknown is based on our natural desire to control situations and their outcome. Think about your short- and long-term goals. You might say, “Tomorrow I’m going to do this, next week I’m going to do that.” Oftentimes, circumstances are beyond our control and the outcomes are unknown. Think of how often you’ve been stuck in traffic on I-495 or delayed by the Metro. These circumstances are out of our control, and faith or fear will appear. But the decision of where to place our focus and energy is up to us. We can thank God for His grace and mercy, but He expects us to put our faith in Him. – **Chuck Thomas**

LOOKING WITHIN: What can I do to ensure that faith wins out over fear when I face circumstances out of my control?

Father God, please help me to walk by faith and not by sight. May my faith in you overcome fear every time. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

SANCTIFICATION

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2017

SHOW UP

READ: John 4:1–26

KEY VERSE: God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. - John 4:24 (NKJV)

At noon day, Jesus meets a woman by the side of a well who is often ridiculed, despised and rejected. We don't think of her as an ideal example because as the story goes she had "five husbands and the one she was with was not her own." We often judge her mistakes and criticize her choices, but Jesus gives her a rare insight.

On this day and many others, she could have easily stayed home and given up hope. However, every day she pressed her way to the well. She showed up amidst their hatred and her failure. She showed up.

This is the beauty of sanctification. You don't have to be perfect when you meet Jesus. You don't have to have it all together. Your regrets may be many, but if you show up each day, if you seek God every morning, if you keep on walking when you feel like lying down and dying, if you keep striving for spiritual maturity God has a reward for you. To worship in spirit and truth is to keep on showing up and striving for better. – **Minister Elijah L. McDavid III**

LOOKING WITHIN: What steps can I take today to make progress in my faith walk?

*God, give me strength to show up in the middle of my sorrow,
holding on to the blessed assurance that you're not finished with me
yet. Amen.*

THANKSGIVING

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

A SIMPLE SONG

READ: Psalm 9:1–2; 28:7; 95:1–6

KEY VERSE: I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. - Psalm 9:1 (NIV)

I nearly cried when our 4-year-old latched onto and repeated out loud a recent song I played for her by Tim McGraw called “Humble and Kind.” The chorus: “Hold the door, say please, say thank you. Don’t steal, don’t cheat, and don’t lie. I know you’ve got mountains to climb, but always stay humble and kind. When the dreams you’re dreamin’ come to you, when the work you’ve put in is realized, let yourself feel the pride, but always stay humble and kind.”

OK, I admit it – I did cry. The lyrics are powerful in their simplicity. The YouTube video includes emotionally moving scenes from Oprah’s *Belief* project. When listening to the song I can’t help but to give thanks to God for the good things He’s done and the great things He’s doing.

One way to say thank you to the Lord is by contributing to God’s work. Let us give thanks for the chance, and thanks for the resolve to help see it through. – **Eric J. Steiner**

LOOKING WITHIN: How do I thank give thanks to God for His love?

Thank you, God, for loving me so much. Help me to remember every day to give thanks to you for my many blessings. Please remind me to be thankful, and to stay humble and kind.

PRAISE

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

EVERY BLESSING DESERVES ABUNDANT PRAISE

READ: Psalm 145: 1–4

KEY VERSE: I will praise you every day; yes, I will praise you forever.
- Psalm 145:2 (NLT)

Recently I had the unenviable task of trying to persuade a major airline not to charge me a \$200 change fee for a trip I had to cancel at the last minute. I called the airline and braced myself for the worst. After all, airlines nickel and dime you for everything, right? Well, I'm happy to report in this one instance, that wasn't the case. Once I explained my plight to the customer service representative, she waived the fee and patiently stayed on the phone with me for more than an *hour* to help me rebook my trip.

Before hanging up, I thanked her profusely, but that wasn't enough. While saving money was great, I immediately praised God for the patience, kindness and compassion of the customer service rep. By God's grace, He connected me with the right person, with the right temperament at the right time. It may seem like a small thing, but praising God for victories both simple and spectacular helps us stay grateful and appreciate all of our blessings. Praise is what God created us to do, and we should always offer it, no matter the size of the blessing. – **Jemarion Jones**

LOOKING WITHIN: How often do I offer praise to God for the “simple things” in life?

Thank you, God, for everything you've done for me. It's easy to praise you for the “big” blessings, but help me to remember that blessings come in all shapes and sizes. Amen.

RESTORATION

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2017

RESTORE MY SOUL

READ: Psalm 23

KEY VERSE: He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness. For His name's sake. - Psalm 23:3 (NKJV)

When I was a child, I had a bicycle that I truly loved. The color, stickers, tires, handle bars and seats made me feel that this bike was equivalent to any luxury vehicle on the road. But one day the bike began to have issues. The stickers began to peel. The color began to fade and the tires became worn. I had finally come to a crossroad for my bike: to either dispose of it or restore it. I decided to restore, because of the bike's value and worth to me.

In Psalm 23, King David describes the value of the Lord in his life. He confesses that God is his shepherd, guide and restorer. This is an awesome reassurance that God makes Himself available to lead, guide, shelter and restore. In times of trouble, weakness, sadness, depression, sickness, confusion and fear, just like I did with my bike, God chooses to restore us. It is because of His love for us and the value we hold in His heart. I can always turn to God in prayer, run to His arms, and He will restore my soul!
– **Minister Tavis Hundley**

LOOKING WITHIN: Who or what do I turn to for help when I am in need?

Dear God, I acknowledge that I need you in my life. Please continue to lead and guide me. I pray that you also restore me when I have been depleted from life. Amen.

HOLINESS

TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2017

JOURNEY TO PERFECTION

READ: 1 Peter 1:13–16

KEY VERSE: But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. - 1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV)

Be holy in everything you do. Sounds impossible, doesn't it? We are to be holy because God is holy. How can we succeed at this? What does God's holiness mean?

We know that God's holiness is good and represents the perfection of God. Everything about God is perfection. His love is perfect love. His grace is perfect grace. His mercy is perfect mercy. It is God's very perfection that sets Him apart from everything else.

So when we are called to be holy, we are called to be set apart like God. We are to be different from the world in which we live, a reflection of the God we worship. If that still feels impossible, there is good news. Whenever God asks us to do the seemingly impossible, He provides the way. We are not alone in this life's journey. We have the Holy Spirit who has come to inspire, guide and enable us to progress toward holiness every day. What seems impossible to us is made possible by God who saves us. – **Minister Harriet Jackson**

LOOKING WITHIN: What blocks or impedes my journey towards freedom from the power of sin in my life?

Gracious Father, fill me with your Holy Spirit and free me from the power of sin. Help me to live as a reflection of your holiness and may my life would point toward you. Amen.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2017

CHOOSING RIGHTEOUSNESS OVER FRETFULNESS

READ: Matthew 6:25–34

KEY VERSE: But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. - Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

We worry and fret about so many things—and with good reason. Relying on ourselves and our capacity to provide for our needs soon leads us to realize that we have placed our confidence in pretty flimsy stuff.

Jesus teaches us that another option is available. Rather than living with anxiety, we can rest in the reliability of God. This is possible when we pursue God's reign and righteousness. Righteous living looks like this: sharing generously with those who are in need, prayerfully submitting ourselves to God's will for our lives, and prioritizing eternal rather than carnal things. When we live this way, God works on our behalf.

– **Rev. Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley**

LOOKING WITHIN: What will it take for me to live righteously and trust God for the things that I need?

Providing God, you have proven that you are trustworthy. I confess my sin of failing to rely on you for the things that I need. Forgive me for worrying and consuming when I should be seeking your reign in the world. Help me to live righteously—in the power of the Spirit, to the glory of God, in the service of Jesus. Amen.

JOY

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2017

JOY IN DANCE

READ: Psalm 149

KEY VERSE: Let them praise his name with dancing. - Psalm 149:3 (NIV)

It was December 2016 and the hour had finally come for me to dance in the Christmas program *Because This Child Was Born* at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. After many months of practicing and a lot of hard work, it was show time. At first, I was extremely nervous. I was worried about pointing my toes correctly, leaping on cue, and moving in the right direction. As soon as I stepped on the stage I was at peace. I smiled and felt a wave of joy as I started to dance. I felt joy because I was able to tell the story of Jesus' birth through dance and freely praise His name.

The Bible says, "Let them praise his name with dancing." This scripture reminds us that we were created to worship God!

In the end, I didn't just dance for fun or to be seen on the Kennedy Center's stage by hundreds of people. I didn't even dance to brag to my school friends about the awesome experience. Dancing, for me, was more than a show. Dancing is my way of worshipping God and inviting others to worship Him with me. – **Sydney Green**

LOOKING WITHIN: What ways can I worship God on a daily basis? How can I share this joy with others?

Dear God, please let your praise continually be on my lips and in everything I do. Amen.

DISCIPLESHIP

FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2017

INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLESHIP

READ: 2 Peter 3:15–18

KEY VERSE: But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. - 2 Peter 3:18 (KJV)

Discipleship is a choice that we make to try to live in a Christ-like manner. It is a personal decision to be both a follower of Jesus Christ and a student of the Word of God so that we can grow spiritually. The decision to be a disciple is the first step in the process of maturing as a Christian. The process takes time. It is sequential and must be intentional.

We are also called to make disciples. In nurturing our relationship with Christ, we must help others to be more Christ-like. Discipleship is a lifelong commitment to spreading the gospel to those who have not heard.

– **Charles J. Monterio Sr.**

LOOKING WITHIN: In my life and behavior, do I see signs that I am growing in Christ?

Father, I depend on your voice to lead me to the place where I should be. Your presence is the only company I need as I walk down this narrow path. Lord, it is your fellowship that I crave to help me on my way. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2017

A CHANGE OF HEART

READ: Matthew 18:21–35

KEY VERSES: Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive Him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” - Matthew 18:21-22 (NKJV)

It’s hard for me to forgive someone who has done me wrong. The reason it’s so difficult is because I feel that they will not change. I convince myself that there is no point to forgiving them.

Last summer, I learned what it means to forgive a friend. I was upset when a friend said some things to me that I did not like and that hurt my feelings. I refused to talk to him for more than a month even after he asked for my forgiveness. Then, I prayed about the situation, discussed it with my parents and my heart began to change. I forgave him for what he did, even though it still hurts. I am so glad that God forgives me quickly and he forgives me every single time I ask for His forgiveness. – **Necholus Ogden III**

LOOKING WITHIN: What if God did not forgive me continuously? How can I learn to forgive quickly and often?

Lord, please help me to forgive others no matter what they do and help me to see the reasons in forgiveness. Amen.

GRACE

MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2017
A FAMILY UNITED

READ: Ephesians 4:1–8

KEY VERSE: But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. - Ephesians 4:7 (NIV)

God's grace is always available to us, but because we are so busy we sometimes miss opportunities to experience how His goodness will enrich our lives. A recent event in our family brought this into full view.

In 2014, my daughter Terri called me for advice. A college friend who worked for a state Department of Human Services had told her about a 55-year-old man who was petitioning for assistance in finding his birth family. The more the friend researched, the more she was convinced the man was part of my husband's family.

After communicating with the man for three months, Terri was also convinced that he was a Collins. She and I arranged a dinner to break the news to her dad in person, and to his sister by telephone.

Terri and her father finally met the man with a bit of anxiety. But upon seeing him, there was no question that he was indeed family. He was so delighted to find us, and so were we! God's grace brought us all together.

– **Doris Hutchinson Collins**

LOOKING WITHIN: What opportunities have I missed because anxieties have kept me from believing that God's grace is sufficient?

Dear God, thank you for the faith to believe that your grace will see us through our troubles and provide gifts we have done nothing to earn. Amen.

SACRIFICE

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2017

WHAT SHALL I RENDER?

READ: Psalm 116:12–14; Romans 12:1

KEY VERSE: Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. - Romans 12:1 (NIV)

I didn’t realize it at the time, but as a child I learned sacrifice through the annual fundraising campaign of our local YMCA in Philadelphia. My father was on the Board of Directors, so his involvement included the entire family. The campaign generally ran from late winter to early spring, and I was convinced that it was linked to Lent. It was after all, the Young Men’s Christian Association. In my mind, raising money to send poor kids to camp was as much a part of our Lenten obligation as getting ashes or fasting.

In hindsight, the timing was probably coincidental, but I had unwittingly touched on a deeper truth about being a Christian. God requires sacrifice. And the best gift we can give Him is ourselves, in joyful obedience to His commands. Jesus told us to care about the least among us. So my family and many others were being obedient as we gave freely of our time, talent and tenth for those in need. – **M. Tia Johnson**

LOOKING WITHIN: Do I ask myself enough, “What shall I render?” And is the answer, “Me”?

Lord, help me to understand that sacrifice is acceptable to you when it is brought with an attitude of obedience and devotion, and that the greatest gift I can give you is myself. Amen.

SALVATION

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2017

SALVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS

READ: Psalm 37:38–40

KEY VERSE: But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble. - Psalm 37:39 (NKJV)

As a little boy, I had favorite hiding places. They were places that I could go and be covered and no one would find me. Sometimes it was behind a bush, or in our basement, or under a stairway. While there, I felt protected from the world and “saved” from discovery, especially when I was in trouble!

Such was David’s expression about the righteous being protected by the Lord, and saved from the dangers of the world. He speaks of the salvation (saving power) of the righteous, those who have committed their lives to following God’s will. That’s why it’s so exciting and revealing to live in God’s will and way in times of the uncertain and disastrous events around us. The Lord is our strength in the time of trouble. In Him we find our hiding place and our strength to cope with a dangerous world. While those who don’t follow God are destroyed, we’re safely kept and strengthened in our daily walk with Him—forever! – **Rev. Samuel Nixon Jr.**

LOOKING WITHIN: To whom do you go to regroup and find your strength to meet the challenges that are before you?

Lord, thank you for being the one who provides my strength for each and every day that you’ve given me. You are the saving one, my salvation, forever and ever. In Christ Jesus, I pray. Amen.

REDEMPTION

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2017

GOD'S PROPERTY

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:23; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

KEY VERSE: For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. - 1 Corinthians 6:20 (NKJV)

Jesus redeemed us when He paid the incredibly high price to purchase our freedom on the cross. While His supreme sacrifice freed us from the power and the penalty of sin that does not mean that we have the right to do whatever we want. We are God's property.

When we purchase things—whether they are small everyday items or major ones, such as cars or houses—we expect those items to function in a manner that is consistent with their creator's design and intended purposes.

In the context of our relationship with Christ, our design and intended purpose is to glorify Him in body, mind and spirit. As such, our actions, words, service, worship and faith should bring perpetual honor and praise to God. – **Rev. Joyce Willoughby**

LOOKING WITHIN: What can I do on a daily basis to ensure that my life brings glory and honor to God?

Dear God, I don't deserve the gift of redemption. Thank you for loving me enough to rescue me from the bondage of sin. Help me to live a life that always honors you. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2017

A BLUEPRINT FOR FORGIVENESS

READ: Luke 23:34–46; Matthew 27:46; John 19:26–30

KEY VERSE: Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” - Luke 23:34 (NKJV)

Forgiveness is difficult. We learn not to forgive, in order to prevent being hurt. I still remember the time my cousin ate my piece of fried chicken. I was eight years old and I won't let him forget it. While I've struggled to forgive, Jesus is perfect at it and His seven last sayings while dying on the cross provides a blueprint for forgiveness.

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” Not only did Jesus forgive the people but He proved it by asking God to do the same. Jesus was also aware of their shortcomings and understood their ignorance.

“This day you will be with me in Paradise.” *“Woman, behold your son.”* Jesus didn't abdicate his responsibilities. He was still a savior and concerned for his family.

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” He acknowledged His emotions and directed His feelings toward God.

“I thirst.” He announced His needs, an important step in mending any relationship.

“It is finished.” Jesus achieved His goals. He didn't let the offense stop Him from doing God's work.

“Into your hands I commit my spirit.” He alleviated himself from the burden and gave it to God. – **Minister Lisa Ashe**

LOOKING WITHIN: Who do I need to forgive today? What steps will I take to do that?

Lord, please help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Amen.

HOPE

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2017

BORN INTO HOPE

READ: 1 Peter 1:3–7

KEY VERSE: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. - Peter 1:3 (NRSV)

The old saints often speak of being born again. I always understood that to speak to the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, always focusing on the salvation Christ's death, burial and resurrection assured. Today's scripture causes me to reflect on the fact that Jesus paid for more than our salvation on that old rugged cross and that His resurrection assures far more than our salvation. Being born again gives us access to all Christ's death and resurrection secures.

In this new birth we have living hope and an inheritance that is unperishable. Even through trials we can rest assured that the hope of Jesus lives in us through His resurrection. And as long as we profess that Jesus is indeed alive, hope is living in us. – **Minister Charnika Hayes**

LOOKING WITHIN: Am I accessing all of the gifts Jesus' death paid for and His resurrection assures?

Dear God, thank you for everything that being born again grants to me. I am truly grateful for the living hope I have in you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Lent is the period of the liturgical year from Ash Wednesday to Easter in the Christian tradition. The traditional purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer—through prayer, repentance, almsgiving and self-denial—for the annual commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus during Holy Week, which recalls the events linked to the Passion of Christ. There are traditionally 40 days in Lent. The six Sundays in this period are not counted because each one represents a “mini-Easter,” a celebration of Jesus’ victory over sin and death.

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent and occurs 46 days before Easter. Ash Wednesday dates may differ each year because it is dependent on the date of Easter. Ash Wednesday derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of adherents as a sign of mourning and repentance to God.

Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and in many Christian churches Palm Sunday is marked by the distribution of Palm leaves.

Maundy Thursday is the Thursday before Easter that commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the apostles. The significance is derived from the Latin *mandatum* (*A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you*), the statement Jesus made in John 13:34 by which He explained to the apostles the significance of His action of washing their feet.

Good Friday (“good” meaning pious or holy) is the Friday of Holy Week, observed primarily by Christians commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and His death at Calvary.

Holy Saturday is the day before Easter and the last day of Holy Week in which Christians prepare for Easter. It commemorates the day that Jesus Christ’s body lay in the tomb.

Triduum (TRID-uh-wum) is the period of three days that begins the evening of Maundy Thursday and ends the evening of Easter Sunday. It recalls the passion, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

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