

LENT 2012

40

DAYS WITH JESUS

## IF ONLY...

"If only you were more like Moses," the thought ran round my head,  
"And could speak with God, as he were a friend;  
And could lead the masses with a mighty hand -  
Wouldn't you be honored then?"

"If only you were more like Wesley," I said to myself again,  
"With an unquenchable desire for holiness;  
And the gifts to inspire men -  
Wouldn't you be remembered then?"

"If only you were more like Esther," I spoke the words in shame,  
"With a courage to risk all for my people;  
And the influence to persuade a king -  
Wouldn't you be powerful then?"

"If only you were more like Whitefield," the voice inside my brain,  
"And could speak the words that would sway the mind;  
And bring millions to repentance from sin -  
Wouldn't you be eloquent then?"

"If only you were more like Daniel," my mocking thoughts refrained,  
"And had faith to stop the mouths of lions;  
And climb out of the pit again -  
Wouldn't you be faithful then?"

"If only you were more like Lewis," my troubled heart bemoaned,  
"And could use the pen to convince the wise;  
While children revered my name -  
Wouldn't you be popular then?"

"If only you were more like almost anyone else," my pouting cry was heard,  
"And could do more, earn more, say more, see more;  
And live in luxury and fame -  
Wouldn't you be happier then?"

"If only, if only," Jesus spoke through the veil,  
"You would seek to know me above all,  
You would have all you need, and my favor you'd see -  
Wouldn't you be at peace then?"

## What is Lent?

Lent is the season of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. Although Lent is often associated with Roman Catholicism, many Christian denominations officially celebrate Lent, and many believers within denominations that do not recognize it officially still choose to observe the practice of Lenten prayer and fasting. Lent is actually 46 days long, **but Sundays are not included for technical reasons related to the "fast days" on the Christian calendar.** Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and ends the day before Easter.

For the past two years, our focus scripture for our 40 days with Jesus has been **John 15:4-5**: *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

This is a perfect Scripture to focus on during these forty days with Jesus. For forty days, do your best to put aside, at least for a few moments each day, the worries and pressures of your life and abide in Christ, letting Him abide in you as well. I know this isn't easy, so here are some suggestions that may help you remember your goal to be with Jesus each day during the Lenten season.

1. Set your watch to beep every 60 minutes to interrupt your day and remind you that you are abiding in Christ, not living for the world.
2. Put a "mark" on your hand, a reminder every time you see it that you are abiding in Christ today. This was a practice of the ancient Jews (Deut. 6:4-9).
3. Set up a reminder on your computer with a favorite Scripture or devotional thought that will flash at intervals throughout your workday.
4. Be intentional about starting each day in prayer. Put a note by your alarm clock or on your bathroom mirror. Carry the note with you throughout the day as a reminder to stop and contemplate God and His abiding with you that day.

5. Work with an accountability partner. Agree to call each other periodically to "check in" on your abiding.
6. If you live with others in a family, use this devotional or another to start or end each day with your focus on Christ.
7. Fast as you feel led, and use the time you would have been eating or participating in a certain activity to focus your time on God.

It may be that you have a better way of reminding yourself each day to abide in Christ. Do whatever works for you. **The goal is to prepare for Easter by abiding with Christ.**

Finally, I've put together this booklet to help you focus your thoughts each day during Lent. This year I offer a devotional thought based on scripture, followed by a suggested "Lenten act" and a prayer. Many of you will be perfectly comfortable offering your own prayer to end your devotion, which is obviously fine.

**These devotional thoughts are not intended to be the only way you stay focused and remain in Christ during Lent,** but hopefully it will help you start and end your day "tasting and seeing" that the Lord is good!

*"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"  
-Psalm 34:8*

## *Index of Lenten Acts*

1. Examine your life and your faith today.
2. Be purposeful about your prayer life today.
3. Set aside time for scripture reading through Lent.
4. Remind yourself today of your standing before God.
5. Do at least one good act directed intentionally toward another today.
6. Pick a day during Lent to fast.
7. Ask God where you should be today.
8. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God today.
9. Inventory your spiritual house today.
10. Call on God today to be your great deliverer.
11. Take time for children today. Consider God's love for them.
12. Make a conscious effort to think before you act today.
13. Remember today that God is a great miracle worker.
14. Ask God for a passion for the gospel today. Be a missionary.
15. Pray for your leaders today. Give your leaders due honor.
16. Strive for purity in your life today; to be an imitator of God.
17. Make it your ambition to walk in the light today.
18. Pray for the unborn and the ones without a voice today.
19. Be a giver today.
20. Use The Lord's Prayer as a model today.

*Days 21-40 will be in Part 2*

# Ash Wednesday

...WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

*“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* -**Matthew 10:36-39**

“Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of our changed relation to God. For the world of fallen men does not honor God. Millions call themselves by His Name, it is true, and pay some token respect to Him, but a simple test will show how little He is really honored among them...Let him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and men, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place most times...However the man may protest, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life. Let the seeking man reach a place where life and lips join to say continually ‘Be thou exalted,’ and a thousand minor problems will be solved at once.” -**A.W. Tozer**

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

Jesus was certainly a man of peace and love who called us to love one another and who offered us forgiveness and peace with God. However, we must not forget that the babe from the manger became a man, and that man called his followers to come out of the world, not to make peace with it. He said some very hard things. Many today would protest and say that God certainly does not want us to love him more than our own families. How could we? Certainly he does not want us to lay down our lives for him when we could simply say with our mouths that we are not his followers and save our lives, which are precious to us. But that doesn't seem to be the case. Jesus placed an exacting call on his followers - all or nothing. Halfway will not do; he wants all of our obedience, all of our faith, all of our strength. It's actually a wonderful call that brings with it great joy and peace. But some, when that

expectation becomes clear, prefer to walk away disappointed with the God who could ask for so much (John 6:60-66).

## LENTEN ACT:

Today's act will take some serious self-awareness and honesty. Take some time today and find a private place to spend time with God. Ask yourself in his presence if you have truly given yourself over to him completely. Is there anything in this world that you treasure above him? If so, that person or thing has become an idol, and it has relegated God to second place, where he will not stay (Isaiah 42:8). God has called us to give ourselves to him completely. Ask yourself the hard questions as you begin your 40 days with Jesus. Do your best to be honest. Does Christ truly have your heart? Would you give all to him? Do your parents, or children, or spouse, or career command more devotion from you than does God? Could you give them up? The amazing thing is that, more often than not, when we give things up to God, he gives them back to us, redeemed and more useful for his purposes.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, help me to be honest with you today. Shine your light into my life, even the hidden spaces, and let me see who I am. Have I given myself to you fully, Lord? Am I harboring idols in my life? I need your strength to be courageous in my walk with you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and make me a bold follower of Christ. Give me the strength to make whatever changes in myself that need to be made in order to place you on the throne of my life and to remove anything that I may have purposely or unwittingly placed there. Make these 40 days of Lent purposeful. Father, take away the idols in my life I pray. Amen.

# The Second Day of Lent

...THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

*Now when Jesus heard about John, he withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed him on foot from the cities. When he went on shore, he saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick...ordering the people to sit down on the grass, he took five loaves and two fish, and looking up toward heaven, he blessed the food, and breaking the loaves he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied...Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowds away. After he had sent the crowds away, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray; and when it was evening, he was there alone.*

**-Matthew 14:13-14, 19, 22-23**

“Whoever has not begun the practice of prayer, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good. There is nothing here to fear but only something to desire.”

**-Theresa of Avila**

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

As you begin your journey into these 40 days with Jesus, it will be good for you to focus on two things that were vital to Jesus; caring for people and communicating with God. In our passage for today, Jesus had just received news of his cousin John the Baptist's death at the hands of a cruel and cowardly king at the request of his blood thirsty step-daughter. It was devastating news. Not unexpected, but devastating nevertheless. Jesus removed himself from the crowds and went off to be alone (and one assumes, to pray). But the people find out and track him down. Filled with compassion for them, he puts his own troubles aside and ministers to them. After healing them and feeding them, he again sends his disciples and the crowds away, and then, once again, goes before the Father in prayer. If Jesus needed to pray like this, seeking the opportunity with as much intentionality as he did, how much more do we?

## LENTEN ACT:

You may, like many people, struggle with prayer. Do you begin praying and after a few moments begin to run out of things to say? Or maybe you get drowsy and drift off. Do you find yourself wondering in the back of your mind if God is really listening? Does your mind wander? Prayer is a discipline of the faith, and like all disciplines, it must be practiced in order for you to become purposeful and proficient. Not that God only listens to “professional” prayers, there's nothing further from the truth. However, as we grow in Christian maturity, our prayers should naturally grow with us. Today, make prayer a priority. Take time to talk to God throughout your day. If necessary, confess to him your lack of desire to pray, or your boredom with it. Maybe you already have a dynamic prayer life; if so, would you consider mentoring a fellow believer in the art of prayer? Remember, prayer isn't only about talking, it is as much, if not more, about listening. We don't listen for the audible voice, but for the inner voice. Often times, prayer leads us back to scripture, where God has spoken his word to us in a very direct manner. Purpose today to make progress in your prayer life, and imitate Jesus in the process.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, as we enter into this Lenten season, I praise you for your good works accomplished through your Son Jesus when he lived among us. I thank you for your continuing acts of graciousness to your people. You are a great God, and your works are mighty to save. I ask that you would help me in my prayer life. As Jesus did good works and spent time in prayer, so I want to do good works and spend time in prayer. Prompt me to pray, Lord, and give me hope in prayer by increasing my faith that you are there and you are listening, and by responding to my prayers that are in accordance with your will. Amen.

# The Third Day of Lent

...FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

*As the deer pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.*

**-Psalm 42:1-4**

"It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn how to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad."

**-C.S. Lewis**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Lent is about anticipation and preparation. The psalmist longed for God. He longed to be with God, to commune with him and worship him and celebrate with him. When we are young in the faith, it takes all our considerable strength to spend even a few moments in prayer or reading the scriptures. Although there may be a great joy in our newfound salvation, and we may love the fellowship of other believers, the daily grind of learning and growing and maturing does not generally come naturally to us. If you are anything like me, to read the psalmist's words about desiring intimacy with God and wanting to remain with him throughout the watches of the night (Ps. 63:6; 119:148) seem like the longings of only a great saint or a man or woman who doesn't have anything better to do with his/her time. The fact of the matter is that spending 40 days with Jesus is just the sort of thing that can help spur us on to a life of love and devotion to the Lord. It is only those who are mature in the Lord, who have lived and longed for God who can truly say that their soul "pants for God." It is in knowing God that we long for God. As Lewis said in our quote for today,

we are in many ways like eggs when we first come to encounter God in faith, but we must soon "hatch" into a life of growth and communion with him. Lent can be practiced by both the novice and the mature. God loves both the same, but he too longs to have a deeper, more abiding relationship with all those who come to know him. He will meet you in your search to know him better, and he will see to it that you find him (Proverbs 8:17; Acts 17:27).

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today, consider committing yourself to set aside at least fifteen minutes per day for the remainder of Lent to read the scriptures and grow in your relationship with God. If you are completely new to your Bible, my suggestion is that you start with the gospel of Mark. In ten to fifteen minutes of reading per day you can finish the gospel before Easter. If you know your Bible, start wherever you please. You may also want to supplement your reading with either this devotional or another, to help you in your understanding of God. As you add scripture reading to your blossoming prayer life (day two in this devotional), you will find that you are learning to abide in Christ more and more, and you will certainly find that the joy and longing for God will come soon to you as well.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Holy Spirit, please fill me this day and illumine your word so that I may know and understand the Father better. Draw me to you so that I may desire to seek you and find you. Help me to abide in Jesus, to long for him and to draw near to him. Let me see clearly that there is nothing better than to be in your presence, Lord. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with me in such a way as to make me a mature follower of God, seeking to know you and to be known by you. Amen.

# The Fourth Day of Lent

...SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

*“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”*  
-Jeremiah 23:5-6

“Consider then, O man! whether there can be anything more wretched and poor, more naked and miserable, than man when he dies, if he be not clothed with Christ's righteousness, and enriched in his God.”  
-Johann Arndt

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

To be clothed in the righteousness of Christ is to be clothed in eternal glory, for the glory that rests on us now, even as a shadow, will become to us the glory that will be revealed in all its splendor in heaven. We clothe ourselves now in Christ's righteousness, in heaven we will become the righteousness of Christ. Here on earth we find that believers are often filled with guilt and remorse because of who we are, primarily because we cannot fathom, let alone see, our perfection in Jesus Christ. It is true - we are corrupt and sinful (“the heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure” - Jer. 17:9), but it is equally true that God has clothed us, even now, in the righteousness of Christ (Isa. 61:10). Johann Arndt was right, nothing compares to the wretchedness of a human being who has died without coming to peace with God, and not the peace we read about in novels or see played out in the movies. It does us no good to say, “I'm at peace with God” if God is not at peace with us. It isn't our opinion that counts, it's his opinion that will stand for all eternity. But if we are at peace with God and he with us, then Arndt's quote can be rightfully turned on its head. Nothing is more beautiful than a man or woman when he/she dies, who is clothed with Christ's righteousness, and enriched in his/her God. The Bible assures us that, if we have come to know Christ, then his righteousness is “imputed”

to us. That's a fancy way to say that it has become ours. True, it is an “alien” righteousness, because it is not ours by our own merit, but ours only because it has been given to us, therefore it is “outside” or “alien” to us. In heaven, it will be ours by virtue of our glorification by God. Here it is imputed to us, there it will be imparted to us. “For our sake God made him who had no sin [Jesus], to become sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore rejoice and do not be downcast, for “the LORD is our righteousness.”

## LENTEN ACT:

Today, remind yourself continually that you are righteous in God's eyes. His love has been cast upon you, and even though you continue to struggle against sin, the war has already been won in Christ. Spend one day rejoicing in your position before God. Resist the mental attacks, both yours and Satan's, that you are wretched, pitiful and poor. Remind yourself and him, “I am clothed in the righteousness of Christ.”

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, I thank you today that I am clothed in the righteousness of your Son, Jesus. Help me to live in that realization, to sense the gratitude that should come naturally to me when I think of such things. I want to live no longer for myself but for you, and for the sake of Christ, who for my sake died and was raised to life. Take away my gloomy thoughts and my words of condemnation, and replace them with thoughts of praise for you and joy at my newfound life. Help me to live at peace with you, and therefore to be at peace with myself.

# The Fifth Day of Lent

...MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*  
**-Matthew 5:13-16**

“Orthodoxy, or right opinion, is, at best, a very slender part of religion. Though right tempers cannot subsist without right opinions, yet right opinions may subsist without right tempers. There may be a right opinion of God without either love or one right temper toward him. Satan is proof of this.”

**-John Wesley**

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

The resurrection of Jesus means very little to us if we simply believe it took place intellectually but never do anything about it. C.S. Lewis rightly said, “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” Jesus is the light of the world. If that be true, then it is of infinite importance that we listen to his words, and obey them. If he truly rose from the dead, he must be reckoned with. He tells us that he isn’t the only light, however, we are too, if we have become his followers. We are salt and light, or we should be. We have been set on a hill, so to speak, like a city, a beacon of hope to the lost world. We do that world no good if we hide our light under a basket. Jesus tells us that “the light” he is speaking of in our passage today is good works. We must be about doing the works that will point to Jesus, who is the Light. Believing only gets us part-way there, we must do something about that belief. Demons believe in Jesus, and shudder at the thought of him (James 2:19). Salt that has lost its saltiness is no good, it will be tossed to the ground and trampled by men. Don’t let that be you. Be salted, and light your world!

## LENTEN ACT:

Today, do something because of your faith. Purposely perform at least one good act directed toward another person. There are a thousand and one possibilities for you to be salt and light today, if you have your mental and physical capabilities and live a typical life. Don’t just believe in God, act on that belief today. Your good works will not earn you heaven, they never will, but once you’ve come to know Jesus, the Light of the world, your good works will disperse that light, and your Father in heaven will be honored and glorified. Don’t allow your faith to be moderately important to you today. Minister to people in the name of Jesus Christ. Do it to glorify your Father in heaven.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sorrow, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I might not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.” -Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Father, on this fifth day of Lent, remind me throughout my day to live out the prayer that I’ve just prayed. Help me to be salt and light to the world today. Amen.

# The Sixth Day of Lent

...TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

*"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*  
**-Matthew 6:16-18**

"Fasting is particularly suited to glorify God. It is fundamentally an offering of emptiness to God in hope. It is a sacrifice of need and hunger. It says by its very nature, "Father I am empty but you are full. I am hungry but You are the Bread of Heaven. I am thirsty but You are the Fountain of Life. I am weak but You are strong. I am poor but You are rich. I am foolish but You are wise. I am broken but You are whole. I am dying but Your steadfast love is better than life."

**-John Piper**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Jesus didn't say "if you fast," but "when you fast." Therefore, for the vast majority of us who are healthy and able to fast, fasting should be a part of our devotional life. Not because it is a requirement to get into heaven, or because it has some magical power to make us wise or spiritually strong, but because Jesus and his disciples fasted, and because God offers to meet us in our fast. The season of Lent is a season in the Christian calendar when fasting is most called for. We pray and fast during Lent, not as some overly pious way of pleasing God, but to prepare our own hearts and minds for the coming Good Friday when we remember Jesus' Passion and the celebration of Easter Sunday. Prayer and fasting have a tendency to focus and sharpen our minds in ways that other disciplines simply cannot match. Although fasting is most commonly associated with food, we can also fast from things and activities. However, be careful not to make this a trite or legalistic practice. The idea is to focus on God and prepare for Easter Sunday in such a way that it will be a day full of

anticipation and joy. We don't buy God's favor by fasting or by prayer, but He does invite us to demonstrate our need and desire for Him by "counting all things as rubbish, in order that we may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). One way to set aside the things that we desire in order to desire Him more is to fast and pray. We clearly do not fast for the praise of men, our passage for today makes that clear. We fast because we hunger for God. We fast because Jesus and the disciples modeled it for us. We fast because it reminds us that our hope is in God, not in food or worldly things. We fast because we long for Jesus more than anything this world has to offer.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Pick a day during Lent to fast. My suggestion is that you fast for a day if you are healthy, or for a meal if you have physical limitations. If fasting from food is not an option for you, fast from an activity that you have come to enjoy. Plan which meal or meals to skip. Skip them entirely, or do it with only juice or water. There are no rules. There is only spiritual hunger being emphasized by physical hunger. Use the time you would have spent eating and read scripture or spend time in prayer. The goal is not just to accomplish your goal of not eating for a certain amount of time, but to set aside time to concentrate on God.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, as I look forward to Easter Sunday and the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, help me to prepare my heart and mind through a fast. I want to know you Father, so my prayer is that you will show yourself to me. Speak to me through your Spirit as I put aside the good things I enjoy in life to focus on my relationship to you. Help me to taste and see that you are good, Lord, in my fasting. Amen.

# The Seventh Day of Lent

...WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 29

*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But his parents were unaware of it, but supposed him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for him among their relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for him. Then, after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When they saw him, they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." And he said to them, "why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?"* **-Luke 2:41-49**

"There was no identity crisis in the life of Jesus Christ. He knew who he was. He knew where he had come from, and why he was here. And he knew where he was going. And when you are that liberated, then you can serve."

**-Howard Hendricks**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Even as a child of twelve, Jesus knew where he needed to be. He wasn't being willfully disobedient to his parents. He loved them and was obedient to them, but he was beginning to see what his calling was, and where he could best fulfill that calling. This passage is the last we'll hear of Jesus' life until he is twenty-seven years old. After this, he would return with his parents to Nazareth and be submissive to them. But here, as a twelve-year old in the temple, he can't help but to be in his Father's house and to teach those who were eager to hear. The event frightened his parents, as it would any parent, but it gives us a glimpse into the life of Jesus Christ as a child. The call of his Father was strong in his life, and his natural response was to be near him. Jesus would have to wait fifteen years to

actually begin his teaching ministry, but on this day, he was where he needed to be.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Do you know where you should be today? What should you be doing as a result of the fact that you know who you are? Take time today to seek God and ask him what he wants you to be doing. I'm not necessarily challenging you to give up your work or to move to another country. The challenge is to be about the work that God has set aside for you to do. Maybe it's to be in the physical location that God wants you to be, as it was for Jesus that day as a twelve-year old boy. Maybe it's a spiritual place. Is he calling you to a closer walk with him today? Is he calling you to set aside time for your relationship with him? To give up some things that have crowded him out of your life? The call may be "big" or "small." Either way, will you respond to that call?

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Lord, where do you want me to be today? Jesus never had an identity crisis, but I do wonder many times what your call on my life truly is. Please reveal yourself to me more and more. Help me to know not only where I should be, but how I should be. Help me to be a better mother/father, husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister, friend, and servant of Jesus Christ. Live through me, and show me how I can better know you. "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long" (Psalm 25:4-5).

# *The Eighth Day of Lent*

...THURSDAY, MARCH 1

*And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke curses upon himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.*

**-Mark 14:66-72**

"Lord Jesus, make thyself to me a living bright reality. More present to faith's vision keen, than any outward object seen. More dear, more intimately nigh, than even the sweetest earthly tie."

**-Charlotte Elliott**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Peter was a grown man, one might even assume a very strong and robust grown man. He was married, had a business of his own, and worked hard with his hands. He had spent many nights out on the sea of Galilee, had braved storms, and was the first to draw his sword in defense of Jesus. Yet here he is weeping bitterly like a child in his sorrow. Peter loved Jesus, and he was sure early this same evening that, no matter what may come, he would stand by him. He had even boldly boasted that he would die for Jesus before he would ever deny him. But when push came to shove, and his own life and comfort was on the line, the bright reality of Jesus' friendship faded into the darkness of the night. If the story ended here, we would assume that Peter did what most of us would do, walk away and never look back, or take the easy way out like Judas and kill himself. Suicide probably looked like an inviting option for him at this moment. Instead, we get reintroduced to Peter on

Easter morning, when he runs to Jesus' tomb at the news that his body cannot be found. His first encounter with Jesus after the resurrection must have been heart wrenching for him, and yet he remained steadfast. Jesus invited him back into his life again, and Peter accepted the forgiveness and moved on.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today is a new day. Don't look back at yesterday and assume that there is no use going forward after what you've done. Jesus invites you into his life today, and stands ready to forgive the treason you've committed. Weep if you must, but then stand up and go out ready to serve. Forget the past, strive toward what is ahead, and press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God is calling you heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13). Do you have reason to seek forgiveness today? Have you reached a point in your life where you think God cannot forgive your habitual sin? Repent, go to God in Christ and seek forgiveness. God is faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from your unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Seek reconciliation with God today, be honest with him, confess to him, and know the forgiveness that is yours in Jesus Christ.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Search me, Father, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. See if there be any sin in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps.139:23-24). Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my sin. Wash me thoroughly from my transgressions, and cleanse me from my sin. I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so you are justified in your words and blameless in your judgment (Ps. 51:1-4). Invite me into your life, O Lord, and give me a faithful heart. Amen.

# The Ninth Day of Lent

...FRIDAY, MARCH 2

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me strength.*

**-Philippians 4:12-13**

“My enemies seldom slackened their hateful designs against my life, however calmed or baffled for the moment...A wild chief followed me around for four hours with his loaded musket, and, though often directed towards me, God restrained his hand. I spoke kindly to him, and attended to my work as if he had not been there, fully persuaded that my God had placed me there, and would protect me till my allotted task was finished. Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus, I left all in his hands, and felt immortal till my work was done. Trials and hairbreadth escapes strengthened my faith, and seemed only to nerve me for more to follow; and they did swiftly upon each other’s heels.” **-John Paton**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Why is it, do you think, that the apostle Paul could do all things in Christ? Why could John Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides islands in the South Pacific, inhabited by cannibalistic tribes, suffer through day after day of hard labor among the tribes, death always but a moment away, and do so with a gladness in his heart? Because Christ was in their lives, and he was giving them strength and hope. Why can Jesus give us strength, hope and courage like none other? Because he triumphed over death and hell at the cross. Because death no longer has a hold on his people, the sting of death having been taken away forever. Jesus endured his own agony and trial, leading to his own death, but glory to God, death could not hold him in the grave. And now, we participate with him not only in his death (through baptism), but in his resurrection as well (Rom. 8:17). You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you if you know him today. Hardships, although

real, will not be fatal to your resolve and hope; and plenty, although appreciated, will not cause you to look to yourself as the giver of good things.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Take a moment today and inventory your spiritual house. Is your hope solely in Jesus Christ, or do you have another hope that has eclipsed him? Are you leery of taking a step of faith in your life and doing something in Christ’s Name because you don’t have a solid hope and foundation in him? It isn’t God’s goal to make you miserable in life and force you to do all the things you don’t want to do. It is, however, his design to call you out of your trust in yourself, or in your riches, or in your own strength, and lead you up to the higher grounds of trust in God alone. Have you learned to be content with little or with much, in need or in hunger? If these descriptions describe only others in your world, take some time today to ask God to challenge you and draw you closer to him. Take some time to read a good biography of a man or woman of God\*, and use them as a model for your own life. It isn’t only missionaries and super-Christians who place their hope completely in Christ. Regular folk like you and me can and should do so as well.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, you are powerful and you caused your Son to triumph over death and the grave, defeating hell in the process. As you promised your people Israel that they would go from strength to strength, so strengthen me. Give me a boldness and a desire to be so filled with your Spirit that I might live my own life like an immortal, knowing that I cannot be stopped until my work in you is done. Amen.

## **\*Recommended Biographies:**

“A Chance to Die: The Life Story of Amy Carmichael” - Elizabeth Elliott  
“John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides” - Banner of Truth Trust

# The Tenth Day of Lent

...SATURDAY, MARCH 3

*"Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify me."  
-Psalm 50:7-15*

"In a word, as my life was a life of sorrow, one way, so it was a life of mercy, another; and I wanted nothing to make it a life of comfort, but to be able to make my sense of God's goodness to me, and care over me in this condition, be my daily consolation; and after I did make a just improvement of these things, I went away and was no more sad."

-Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once preached a sermon on one of my favorite novels. He called it "Robinson Crusoe's Text." He said: "Robinson Crusoe has been wrecked. He is left on the desert island all alone. His case is a very pitiable one. He goes on his bed, and he is smitten with fever. This fever lasts upon him long, and he has no one to wait upon him - none even to bring him a drink of cold water. He is ready to perish. He had been accustomed to sin, and had all the vices of a sailor; but his hard case brought him to think. He opens a Bible which he finds in his chest, and he lights upon this passage, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' That night he prayed for the first time in his life, and ever after there was in him a hope in God, which marked the birth of the heavenly life." Are you feeling weary today? Troubled? Do your part, and God will surely do

his. Here's how Spurgeon went on to explain his text. "God and the praying man take shares...First here is your share: 'Call upon me in the day of trouble.' Secondly, here is God's share: 'I will deliver thee.' Again, you take a share - for you shall be delivered and then again it is the Lord's turn - 'Thou shalt glorify me.' He says, 'You shall have the deliverance, but I must have the glory.'"

## LENTEN ACT:

God is a great deliverer. Call on him in your trouble today. When your deliverance comes, be sure to return to him all the glory that he is due. You will do well to remember that your deliverance may not come in the package you imagined. Praise him just the same. God's ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts. Often times we forget to thank him for our deliverance because it doesn't look like deliverance to us, and when we finally come to the point of understanding that we have been helped, the event is too far in the past for us to take notice anymore. Look for your deliverance, it is on the horizon. God will deliver you in your day of trouble.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, I seek you today. Deliver me from that which holds me prisoner. I look to you for my deliverance, and I trust you to bring to me peace even in the midst of my strife. As I face the struggles of this day, and when I begin to feel the weariness that is so much a part of life, remind me of your presence and your deliverance. I want to hide in you today, Lord, and know the security of being where you are. I pray too for those who are in the midst of their own struggles today. The single mother, the spouse who has received divorce papers, the parents praying for the life of their child, the single person who desires to share life with another, the childless couple begging for a son or daughter. Deliver me today, Father, and them, and I will give you the glory.

# *The Eleventh Day of Lent*

...MONDAY, MARCH 5

*Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

**-Luke 18: 15-17**

"If I could relive my life, I would devote my entire ministry to reaching children for God."

**-Dwight L. Moody**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Most of us don't think much about Jesus' interaction with children, because the Bible says so little about it. But remember as you celebrate Lent, that Jesus was a child. He went through all the stages of childhood that all children go through. That means he played with other children as he grew up, and he undoubtedly had a soft spot in his heart for them like any natural caring human being has. God has given us a natural tenderness for innocence and helplessness. That's why it is so monstrous, even to non-believers, when the sick and evil among us deliberately harm children, the elderly, and the mentally challenged. It creates a particular disdain for us, as it should. Not only did Jesus love children and want to care for them even when he was busy and exhausted, but he used them as an example of the type of trust, faith, and innocence that we must all possess if we are to truly grasp the kingdom of God and enter therein. Like most of us, the disciples felt that Jesus should be spending his valuable time with adults, not children. We repeat this error today when we assume that children should be sent away on Sunday mornings to play so we can worship. We relegate teaching and caring for children to a lesser status. We tend to honor adult teachers but not children's teachers. In reality, we've missed a glaring truth. Jesus loved and taught the little children, and so must we.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today, take time to care for children. Take notice of them, don't dismiss them. Take a moment to watch them, talk with them if you get the opportunity. Ask yourself, what is it about children that made Jesus take special notice? Why must we be like them in order to enter the kingdom of God? If you know a child well, ask them about their thoughts on God. Who is he? What is he like? Maybe you'll want to take a bigger step and consider supporting a child in need through a Christian supporting agency. Maybe God is gently tugging at you to consider adoption and providing a Christian home for a child in need. Maybe you know someone who would like to adopt but is having a hard time coming up with the substantial costs associated with it. Could you help? Jesus said "do not hinder them." Is there anything about you or your life that directly or indirectly hinders children or other "innocents" from knowing Christ? If so, root that out of your life today.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, you are good and kind, caring and compassionate to all of us. You do not make distinctions; male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman are equal in your sight, and for that I thank you. You did, however, show a special care for children, and you've called on us to care for them as well; to teach them, to nourish them, and to protect them. Help me to be the kind of man/woman who cares for the little ones. Also help me to approach you like a child with a faith that believes, with a heart that cares, with a trust that is complete. You've called on me to receive the kingdom of God like a child. I need your help to do that. Lord, if you would have me care for children or the helpless in a direct way, please show me how I might do that, and give me the means to be a help. Amen.

# The Twelfth Day of Lent

...TUESDAY, MARCH 6

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." -Mark 12:28-31*

"If we do not say that we love him above all things, let us at least acknowledge that it is our duty, and would be our happiness to do so." **-Henry Scougal**

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

I've heard people say that they don't like reading the Bible or reading about Jesus because he was never direct and he's hard to understand. Wrong on both counts. Jesus was amazingly direct in his speech, and although he did speak often in parables, he also often gave his disciples the application to those parables, which are also included for us in the Scripture. Incidentally, the parables were for a purpose as well (Matthew 13:10-11). Here Jesus responds to a question as directly as you possibly can. His answer to the question about the greatest commandment? Love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor. He actually went beyond the person's question, giving the top two commandments. If we could manage just these two commandments, all would be well with our societies, our families, our workplaces, our nations. No need for military build-up or counter-terrorism, laws against theft and murder, or private security firms. Jesus lived both out perfectly in his earthly ministry. He lived his own utopia in the midst of absolute chaos, and proved that chaos will have nothing to do with perfection and love, and will kill if it can't have its own way. The great preacher Henry Scougal was right, if we will not love God above all things, we should at least realize that to do so would be the best way to live.

## LENTEN ACT:

Today make a conscious effort to think before you act. Ask yourself, "How would I respond to this situation if I truly loved God and put him before everything?" Be intentional about treating others the way you would want to be treated. What would that look like? To actually stop momentarily, and respond to your wife or husband or mother or father or son or daughter or co-worker in a way that would please you the most if you were on the receiving side. To act with another person's self-interest in mind above your own self-interest. To love God enough to obey him regardless of the outcome for you. Try it for a day, and see if your day is different from your average day.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, I want to love you today with heart, soul, mind and strength. I want to love those people that I come into contact with like I love myself. Both of these desires are incredibly difficult for me. Please come along side me today and help me as I try to obey the two commandments that Jesus said were the most important of all the good commandments you gave. Now to you, our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world, be glory forever and ever. Amen.

# *The Thirteenth Day of Lent:*

.....WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

*Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

**-John 11:25-26, 38-44**

"The faith of the Bible is about a supernatural Person (God) who speaks in a supernatural revelation (the Bible) of the supernatural coming (the virgin birth) of the supernatural salvation (at the cross) which focused in a supernatural experience common to every Christian (the new birth). Against such a background it is very unconvincing to argue that Christians must not look for supernatural interventions from God."

**-Donald Bridges**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

One of the primary ways in which Jesus demonstrated to his contemporaries that he was sent by God was in the performance of great "signs." His ministry was thick with miracles. He demonstrated his power over nature, over sickness and disease, over demonic forces, and over death itself, as we see in our passage for today. His miracles were a sign to unbelievers, and even though many were amazed by him, and some were convinced, not all believed, demonstrating clearly that an ability to minister in a supernatural way won't, in and of itself, bring people to saving faith. God still works wonders, and people are still healed in the name and power of Jesus. The apostolic age, the age of "signs and wonders," may have passed in some unique ways, but healing in the name of Jesus

continues. We serve a supernatural God who still intervenes in his creation and in our lives in supernatural ways.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Take time today to look up these passages of Scripture that speak of Jesus' supernatural works (Mark 4:35-41; Mark 9:14-29; John 2:1-11). Remember throughout your day that God is a great miracle worker; that as the creator and sustainer of all that we know and see, it is not difficult for him to act in a way that reaches beyond his natural laws. He is Lord of the universe, and his arm is mighty to save.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Almighty Father, I ascribe to you glory and strength, I ascribe to you the glory due your name. I worship you in the splendor of your holiness. Your voice is over the waters, and you thunder over the mighty waters. Your voice is powerful, your voice is majestic. Your voice breaks the cedars, it breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. Your voice strikes with flashes of lightning and shakes the desert. It twists the oaks and strips the forest bare, and in your temple all cry, "Glory!" You sit enthroned above the earth as King forever. You give strength to your people. You bless your people with peace.\* Father, don't let me see your great works and turn an unbelieving and blind eye. Heal me of my own doubts and fears. Draw me to you during Lent. Amen.

\*adapted from Psalm 29

# The Fourteenth Day of Lent

...THURSDAY, MARCH 8

*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*  
**-Romans 10:12-17**

"How many there are ... who imagine that because Jesus paid it all, they need pay nothing, forgetting that the prime object of their salvation was that they should follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in bringing back a lost world to God."

**-Lottie Moon - 40-year missionary to China**

## LENTEN THOUGHT:

The cause for global missions goes on. The apostle Paul had been a missionary for almost twenty years. He had planted churches across the Roman Empire, had seen innumerable obstacles and suffered many deprivations and persecutions, including beatings that would have killed many men, and after all that, he tells the Christians in Rome that he was eager to take the gospel to Spain! Paul knew he would die one day, he just wanted to be sure that he died on the mission field, not in retirement on a sunny Greek island. The false teaching of universalism has impacted missions in profound ways. Entire denominations that once sent out thousands of missionaries have now almost entirely stopped their missionary efforts. Here's what one mission secretary of the largest denomination in the world said about missions: *"In the past we had the so-called motive of saving souls. We were convinced that if not baptized, people in the masses would go to hell. Now, thanks be to God, we believe that all people and*

*all religions are already living in the grace and love of God and will be saved by God's mercy."* No wonder the passion for missions has waned so much in America in the past century. Even a cursory reading of Paul's words in Romans 10 instill in us the urgency that he felt for sharing the gospel. "How are they to believe on him of whom they have never heard?" Jesus' commission to Paul to be a missionary can be read in Acts 26:16-18. Read that and see if you can come away from it believing that God has already revealed himself in a saving manner in other religions. Paul did not live and die on the mission field to tell people that they were already saved. Whether we go to the uttermost parts of the world, or to our neighbor next door, or to our son or daughter, our call as Christians is to share the good news that God can and will save us out of our darkness and bring us into the light.

## LENTEN ACT:

If you know Christ, ask God to instill you with a passion for sharing the gospel today. Be careful not to ask for what you really don't want. To be passionate about the gospel doesn't mean that you have to sell all your belongings and move to the mission field, but it does mean that you will look for opportunities to share your faith. It means, at the very least, that you will feel a burden for those who do not know the saving power of Christ, both in the darkest jungles of Peru to your co-worker in the cubicle next to you. Educate yourself in missions and evangelism. Be stirred up by those who have given all so that the gospel might be known. Be intentional about praying for your lost friends and family. If you cannot go in missions, give so that others can. Be a missionary today.

## LENTEN PRAYER:

Father, give me a heart for missions and the gospel. Help me to see the lost like you see them. I pray for \_\_\_\_\_ today, who does not know you. Open their eyes to see your light, Lord. Amen.

# *The Fifteenth Day of Lent*

...FRIDAY, MARCH 9

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.*

**-1 Peter 2:13-17**

“It is easy to criticize and find fault with the conduct of kings, and write furious articles against them in newspapers, or make violent speeches about them on platforms. Any fool can rip and rend a costly garment, but not every man can cut out and make one. To expect perfection in kings, prime ministers, or rulers of any kind, is senseless and unreasonable. We would exhibit more wisdom if we prayed for them more, and criticized less.”

**-J.C. Ryle**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

God has called us to be obedient people, obedient to him and to the authorities that he's placed over us. The Bible tells us that he's placed every authority over us (Rom. 13:1). That means even the presidents and congressmen and women that we didn't vote for and don't want in office are there by God's direction. Although we may disagree with them, we are to obey them when their laws and actions do not force us into sinful behavior. Paul and Peter both call us to be good subjects to the authorities placed over us, and when they wrote these things, the rulers of Rome were pagans who declared themselves gods and were persecuting the church. There's a fine line between obedience and conscientious objection, but the clear truth is that we do not have a right to bad-mouth and disobey anyone that we don't want ruling over us. We are called to live at peace with all men, insofar as it depends upon us. That means today, when you go to school, or to work, or even if you remain at

home, God has placed authorities over you, and you are called to honor them, pray for them, and obey them even when you don't want to. If you don't like your boss, find another job or obey him/her. Those are the options before you. Honor your teachers, honor your parents, honor your president, and in doing so, you honor God.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today, take time to pray for your leaders. Pray for your pastors, your elders, your teachers, your boss, your governmental leaders as well. Get into a habit of praying for them, and honoring them in obedience. The Bible does not call us to blind obedience. If your pastor or president demands that you overlook their sin, or directs you to do acts that are in violation of scripture and your call to obey God, then by all means, do not allow it. Short of that, however, we are called to honor and obedience. Are you in a leadership role today? Ask God to make you a good and wise and godly leader. Are you in a follower role today? Ask God to make you a good and wise and godly follower. Give people their due honor.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, help me today to be a good follower. I want to honor those who lead me. I want to love those with whom I fellowship at church, to honor the leaders you've placed over me. Help me to make their leading a joy and not a burden, whether they be a spiritual leader or a civil leader. I pray for our president today, and for his cabinet, and for the congress. Give them wisdom to lead. Be with our local leaders and with those who serve to protect us as well. Remind me, Lord, to honor those that you've called me to honor. Teach me to fear you properly, to relate to you as the God of the universe, and not as my dream maker or wish fulfiller, but as my King and Lord. Amen.

# The Sixteenth Day of Lent

...SATURDAY, MARCH 10

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.*

**-Ephesians 5:1-7**

“How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp. Every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember, you are God's sword, his instrument. In great measure according to the purity of the instrument will be the success. It's not great talent that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A word spoken for Christ when your conscience is clear is worth 10,000 spoken in unbelief and sin.”

**-Robert Murray M'Cheyne**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

What does it mean to be an imitator of God? Does it mean perfection? Does it mean always making the right decision and never falling into sin? Ultimately, yes, but since the Bible is written to human beings, there must be some way in which we, as fallen people, can still imitate God in spite of our sin. Our passage for today is a difficult one. It calls us to some very high standards of conduct. It calls us to live a life of love, which sounds great, but isn't easy. Then it calls us to purity of the sort that would be difficult for even the greatest saint. It seems as if you look at the vices it calls us to refrain from, feel good about yourself for having that one mastered, only to read the next sentence and fall under conviction. It then goes on to tell us that anyone like this will not enter the kingdom of God, and is guilty of bringing down the wrath of God. So you droop your

head, throw up your hands and walk away with a “let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die” approach to life. It doesn't have to be that way, however. Our text for today isn't a “do this or die” text, but a “live this way because you are loved” text. None of us are capable of living out this type of purity outside of the love of God, and that love has been poured out on us if we know Christ. We must strive for purity, for honesty, for clear thinking and clear talking, but we do it because we are loved, not so that we will be loved. Only those who truly love God care to imitate him.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today, strive for purity in your life. Live to imitate God. Love others, refrain from the sins of the flesh, from the greed that marks us at different times in our lives, from silly and banal talk that does not edify, and remember to thank God for the love he's poured out into our lives. Of course, we should strive to live this way everyday, but today, make it a priority. When you see your reminder that you are abiding in Christ today, remind yourself that you are a child of God and you want to imitate your Father. It's been said that the longest journey begins with the first step, and so it is when we decide to imitate God. It may seem as if you are looking down a very, very long road, but begin the journey with that first step, and take it today.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, I want to imitate you. Help me as I try to do that, lift me up when I fall short, as I surely will. Forgive me for the times when I not only don't imitate you, but when I don't care that I'm not imitating you. Teach me about purity, teach me about contentment and honesty and clean speech. I want to love others as you love them, to care for them as you care for them, to see them as you see them, and I want to do it more and more each day. I need your help, Father. Amen.

# The Seventeenth Day of Lent

...MONDAY, MARCH 12

*“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour.’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man will be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.*

**-John 12:27-37**

“The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, God is the ocean.”

**-Jonathan Edwards**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Jesus was troubled as he approached death, but his prayer was never, “God, save me from this hour.” He was pushed to the limit in the Garden of Gethsemane, to the point of asking God to “let this cup pass,” but he pushed on. As he spoke to the crowds in our passage for today, they asked him to clarify his words, but he did not. Instead, he implored them to walk in his light while they still had the chance, because the “light” would soon be taken from them. Jesus was that light, and even

in his troubled moments he wanted people to come to the light. Jesus wanted them, and you, to be “sons of the light.” Sadly, most of the people did not heed either his warning or his invitation. Even though he had done so many things among them, including many miracles, they did not believe. Don’t follow their example today; follow the light.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

One of the things that buoyed Jesus through his struggles on earth was the hope and joy he had at the thought of returning to his Father in heaven (Heb. 12:2). He never walked in the dark, yet he still looked forward to heaven. How much more should you and I? As Jonathan Edwards tells us, here we see but scattered beams of the light of the world, there we shall see the light himself. We will immerse ourselves not in God’s streams, as we do here, but in his ocean. Today, as a part of your Lent preparations, make it your ambition to walk in the light. Remember that you are walking in the light as a son of the light. Remind yourself often today that you are a child of the light, and ask God to light the path before you (Ps. 119:105).

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Lord, you are a light unto my path. Your words are a lamp to my feet. How I need you to light my path today. Help me to live as a son of the light, and not as a child of the darkness. Remind me, Father, that heaven is my ultimate home, and while I walk the earth, let me do so by walking in the light, as you are in the light. I worship you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and because the Lenten season reminds me that you made me for a purpose - that I might live out my life with you as the light of my life, and that I might end my days knowing that my eternity will be spent with you, where shadows scatter, and where I will not need the light of the sun, because you will be the light of heaven. Amen.

# *The Eighteenth Day of Lent*

...TUESDAY, MARCH 13

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. **-Psalm 139:13-16**

“In the flood of the loss of humanness in our age - including the flow from abortion-on-demand to infanticide and on to euthanasia - the only thing that can stem this tide is the certainty of the absolute uniqueness and value of people. And the only thing which gives us that is the knowledge that people are made in the image of God. We have no other final protection. And the only way we know that people are made in the image of God is through the Bible and the incarnation of Christ, which we know from the Bible...Without the Bible and without the revelation in Christ (which is only told to us in the Bible) there is nothing to stand between us and our children and the eventual acceptance of the monstrous inhumanities of the age.” **-Francis Schaeffer**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

The United States of America is the most permissive of all democratic societies in the modern world when it comes to abortion. The fight for the lives of the unborn used to take place outside the “walls” of the church. Today they rage within the halls of the body of Christ. We are created in the image of God, right from the womb. If you are reading this devotional today with your children, it will be important for you to consider their age and then inform them, if they do not yet know, that over a million children a year are aborted in our own country. Have you considered the ramifications of this truth? It has simply become a “way of life” for all of us. I realize as I write this that some who reads this day's devotion will be offended. What right have I to pass judgment on such a

controversial subject? Do I realize the pain and desperation that young, single mom's go through? What about those who become pregnant through the horrors of sexual crime? Yes, it is a dark, desperate world we live in. A world in which Jesus came to shine the light, but men preferred the darkness because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). Read the passage for today from Psalm 139 again, then consider what God may feel about this institution. How will you think about the unborn? What will you teach your children? How will you balance truth and grace in this delicate situation?

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Today, pray for the unborn. Pray also for those young women and men who are desperate and looking for a way out of an embarrassing or frightening situation. Pray for the pregnant women who are looking at a bad economy and wondering how they will make ends meet. Pray for the countless thousands of women who live with the guilt of abortion and feel as if they've been abandoned by God and his church. Ask God to give you not only a heart of compassion for the unborn, but for the hurting moms and dads too, who cannot take back the past anymore than you can. Ask God to be merciful to them and to this nation. The battle against abortion -on-demand has been largely lost politically; pray then for the individuals, that God might change hearts and minds.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, intervene today on behalf of the innocent ones. The unborn, the abandoned children, the orphans, the mentally challenged who are abused by the thousands every day in our world. Be merciful, O Lord. Give me a heart for the hurting. Help me to extend the hand of mercy even as I speak on behalf of those without a voice. Change the hearts of people, Lord, and start with me today. Amen.

# *The Nineteenth Day of Lent*

...WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. But to those who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to be called children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

**-John 1:6-13**

“Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.”

**-Teresa of Calcutta**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin and his forerunner (Isaiah 40:3). His purpose in life was to be a voice calling out in the wilderness, saying, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him.” Although some confused him as the light, they were wrong, and he told them so. He came to bear witness to the light, the true light, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to light up the world, but the world did not recognize him. Many in his day, and many in our day, choose to live in the darkness rather than in his light. Teresa of Calcutta was a woman who came to share the light of Christ in some of the darkest, dirtiest, and most dangerous places in our world. She lived out her life in those places, sharing the light and love of Jesus with “the least of these.” Although most of us would not agree with some of her doctrinal thoughts, no one can question her commitment to Christ and her willingness to give all for his sake. Being the light was costly for Jesus, and sharing his light is often times costly for us as well. How are we doing when it comes to sharing the light of Jesus to the world as the church? How are you doing as an individual? Jesus called us to “take up our cross daily” to follow after him. Are we doing that? What

does it look like to take up a cross today, in the 21st century? John's life was a life of pointing away from himself and to Jesus. Have you received Jesus? Do you have the right to be called a child of God? If not, now is the time, today is the day of salvation. If you have, how will you bear witness to the light that has come into your life?

## **LENTEN ACT:**

Living as “light” in a dark world generally means being a giver and not a taker. Takers aren't different, everyone is used to living with takers, and therefore they do not stand out at all, unless they are habitual takers or profound takers. Short of being a miser or a hoarder in massive ways, which even people of this world despise, takers don't stand out in our society. But givers do. Jesus was a giver; Paul the apostle was a giver; Pricilla and Aquila were givers. If you think about it, all the great witnesses to the gospel have been givers, not takers. Will you make it your goal this Lenten season to be a giver, not a taker? Not just financially, but a giver of time, a giver of encouragement, a giver of peace, a giver of compassion, a giver of forgiveness and grace, a giver of thanksgiving and a giver of the good news that light has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Be a giver!

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, I approach you today not only to seek your favor, but to give you the glory that is due your Name. I give you glory for your perfections, for your grace, for your mercy, for your power, and for your infinite worth. You are the only living God. I thank you for sending light into our world. Please help me, Lord, to be a man/woman/child who demonstrates your light by being a giver to others. Take away my desire to always please myself. Fill me with compassion for others, especially those who have so little in the way of material comfort, spiritual help, and hope for the future. Teach me to be a giver of all you've given me. Amen.

# The Twentieth Day of Lent

...THURSDAY, MARCH 15

*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen...This then, is how you should pray: Our Father 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. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

**-Matthew 6:5-6; 9-13**

“It is good that we keep some account of our prayers, that we do not undo them in our practice.”

**-Matthew Henry**

## **LENTEN THOUGHT:**

Our passage for today has come down to us as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Of course, it’s better identified as the “disciples’ prayer,” since it was more for them than it was for Jesus, and they were the ones who asked for a model prayer. Nevertheless, it is Jesus’ teaching on how we should pray. You may know that Jesus’ ministry was constantly punctuated by prayer. This obviously raises questions for us about the Trinity or Godhead, if Jesus, who is God in flesh, prays to God, who is God in Spirit. Why does God pray to God? The most obvious answer is to show us an example of how we should live our own lives. We see Jesus as the Son of Man going to prayer at essentially the same times that we are drawn to prayer: when he is physically exhausted, when he is in mourning, when he is preparing for a big decision, when he is questioning the order of things and seeking the Father’s will. Here he answers the disciples’ question matter-of-factly: “You asked me how you should pray? Here’s your answer, pray like this.” He then gives them a model of prayer that we should all emulate. If Jesus thinks this is a good way to pray, then it’s a good way to pray.

## **LENTEN ACT:**

In many traditions The Lord’s Prayer is recited as Jesus gave it to us, word for word. There’s certainly nothing wrong with that when it doesn’t become a magical formula for us or a mindless mental exercise. However, his prayer was more a model, not a liturgical device. Today specifically, and afterward occasionally throughout your life, take The Lord’s Prayer and use it as a model for prayer. If you are doing these devotions with your children, teach them the prayer, put it firmly into their memory. Start your prayers not by asking for your desires, but by acknowledging God for who he is. He doesn’t need the reminder, but you do, and it will be good for you to offer him honor and praise. Praise him for his glory and his holiness. Pray that his kingdom might come to earth, that we might know, in some measure, a glimpse of how it is in heaven, where God’s will is always carried out willingly and immediately. Then pray for your daily needs, and the desires of your heart. Confess your sin, and be willing to think hard about sins of others that you may be holding against them, and offer forgiveness. Ask God for protection against evil, against temptation, and against our enemy, the devil. You don’t have to actually use the exact words; follow the model (praise and adoration, petition for needs, confession and forgiveness, protection from evil) using your own words, and you will learn to pray.

## **LENTEN PRAYER:**

Father, today I want to serve you with gladness, I want to enter your courts with praise, because you are holy, you are God, you made me and all people, and we are yours, the sheep of your pasture! You are good, your steadfast love endures forever, your faithfulness to all generations. May your will be accomplished in my life today, and in your creation as well. Meet my needs today, let me be well supplied, so that I can in turn help supply the needs of others. I confess my sin to you today and ask for your forgiveness. Help me, Lord, to be a forgiving person in return. Protect me from evil today, guard my mind and my spirit. Amen.