



HUNGRY FOR GOD

...

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

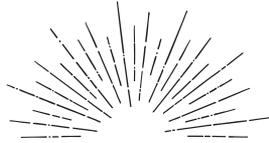
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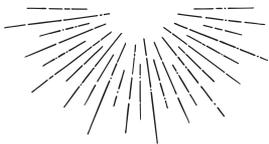
A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
BY THE PEOPLE OF EASTBROOK CHURCH





**“OUR HEARTS ARE
RESTLESS, UNTIL
THEY CAN FIND
REST IN YOU.”**

-ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO



Every one of us has deep longings and hungers that propel us forward in life. Like physical hunger leads us to find food in order to satisfy our bodies, there are deeper hungers within us which need to be satisfied in order for us to experience life at its fullest. We hunger for love, for belonging, to leave a lasting legacy, and so on.

Where do those hungers come from and how can we fill them? The Scripture tells us that God made human beings to enjoy the wonders of creation and one another, but also to enjoy Him. God has placed those hungers within us so that we might ultimately find satisfaction for our hungers in Him. St. Augustine of Hippo famously wrote of God: “Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in You.”

At times, however, we experience the frustration of unsatisfied hungers in life. We try again and again to fill what only God can fill with things that are not God. We try to force created things to become the source of ultimate filling. In this place of frustration, we must *take off* the wrong attempts at filling our desires so that we can first turn toward God and then *put on* what can rightly satisfy our desires. To do this is to go on a journey of re-ordering our hungers around God who alone can satisfy.

We enter into this journey during the season of Lent, inviting God to reshape our hungers and satisfy us with Himself. We will explore the hungers of our souls, how God fills those deep hungers through Christ, and the ways in which we can lean into our hungers to experience life with God more fully and with greater satisfaction. The devotional booklet you hold in your hands is a six week guide written by people within the Eastbrook family to help us draw near to Jesus Christ in this journey of hunger for God as we prepare ourselves for the joys of Easter.

Traditionally, this journey is called Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday and carrying forward to Easter Sunday. Lent is shaped as a forty-day journey, echoing the forty-year journey of Israel to the Promised Land and Jesus’ forty days of temptation in the wilderness. Lent aims to lead us into deeper engagement with God through prayerful reflection, reading of Scripture, and meaningful spiritual practices.

In this devotional, each week begins on Sunday with a theme related to our hungers for that week. There is a brief devotional paired with an activity, or practice, for the week in which we learn to “take off” wrong desires and “put on” right desires that lead us to find satisfaction in God. The daily devotionals reflect the week’s theme and practice, as we engage with God through a Scripture reading, a short devotional, and a series of questions for reflection. These can be used individually, but are also intended for discussion in groups. In the back, you will find a set of weekly readings, questions, and activities geared toward families who have younger children.

May God grow all of us as we embark on this journey together.

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HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

1. Plan a 15-minute window each day when you can thoughtfully do the daily reading. Set a time, create a pattern, and stick to it for the Lenten season.
2. Consider inviting your friends, family, or other small group to join you.
3. Begin each day by reading the passage printed at the top of each page.
4. Read the devotional and reflect on it. Use the “Dig Deeper” questions to talk about it with someone else or to journal on your own.
5. The “Family Talk” section of the devotional (p. 58-66) is written for, and addressed to, elementary-age kids. Each page introduces the week’s theme in a kid-friendly way.
6. Use the digital version of the devotional to reach out to friends online and around the world. Find the online version with sharable graphics at eastbrook.org/hungrydevotional or in the Eastbrook App. Use the Facebook page (facebook.com/eastbrookchurch) or Twitter and Instagram ([@eastbrookchurch](https://twitter.com/eastbrookchurch)) to share ideas. Post your comments or questions and read others’ online.

BEGINNING WITH HUNGER

*“As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?”
(Psalm 42:1-2)¹*

In the story of Israel after the exodus from Egypt, God’s people were hungry for many things. They were hungry for food, so God provided miraculous manna and quail (Exodus 16). They were thirsty for water, so God provided miraculous water from a rock (Exodus 17). They were hungry for guidance from God, so God provided the miraculous Ten Commandments and other instructions (Exodus 20). They were hungry for victory over their enemies, so God provided them with a way through the Red Sea and success over their foes (Exodus 14 and 17). They were hungry for rest, so God instituted the sabbath (Exodus 31).

Yet there were times when their hungers stretched beyond what God would give. They hungered for a god they could control, so they constructed an idol in the form of a golden calf (Exodus 32). God interrupted that desire by sending Moses down to stop that idolatrous feast. There were other times when God’s people reached out for satisfaction in ways God knew would not bring life to His people. Eventually, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness until, purified of their sinful attempts to satisfy their hungers, they were ready to enter into the Promised Land (Numbers 14). They needed to feel their hunger deeply and discover that their hungers could only be satisfied in God.

Today we begin a journey that parallels the forty years of wilderness wandering for Israel. It is a journey in which we will get in touch with our hungers and desires. In this journey we want to allow God to search through our hungers, including ways we attempt to satisfy our hungers that are skewed. We will enter into the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24:

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Through it all, the foundational level of our journey is remembering that only God can satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. Let us join in this journey together as a community, beginning with the prayer of Psalm 42:1-2:

*“As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?”*

Let us say together:
God, we are hungry for You.



WRITTEN BY MATT ERICKSON

HUNGRY ALL THE TIME!

READ PSALM 63:1-5

I love these verses. Our family served as missionaries in Mali, West Africa, and we used this passage when we spoke about our work to American churches.

Mali is one of the driest, hottest places on earth. The work was hard as we studied language and culture in a very difficult context. It was so hot and so dry that I used to wonder how anyone could survive. Women would leave early in the morning to find water for their families, carrying the heavy jugs home on their heads. Water for cooking, drinking, washing, and bathing. Finding, buying, and growing food was always a struggle.

In desperation and weariness, was God real? Could He bring living water and life to the lost? I struggled in many ways there. I was often rebuked in my spirit for my unbelief. Those around me, who had so much less than I did, believed in the unseen. They “saw” God and trusted His power. They praised Him! They lacked food, they lacked water. They knew the toll of illness and death, yet their songs of worship revealed the fullness of being satisfied with God’s love. My Malian brothers and sisters taught me the joy of trusting what I couldn’t see, and of living in God’s beautiful sanctuary of love and glory.

It is ironic that I have struggled with food and weight issues since I was a little girl. All that heart-hunger has only been satisfied in God, who alone is better than food or drink, better than riches, better than life itself.

DIG DEEPER

- Sometimes deprivation can tune us in to God’s amazing provision. When have you known that to be true?
- What things are you using to fill your heart’s hunger? Can you turn them over to God now?

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FEASTING ON THE BREAD OF HEAVEN

READ JOHN 6:45-51

Repeatedly, God has revealed His existence to me through a clear piece of evidence: life always works out best when following Him. Stated another way: disobeying God or losing focus on His guidance never works out well.

Think of your own life: in retrospect, is there a time that you wish you had disobeyed God so that things would have turned out better? The answer for me is “no.” There is not a single situation in my past that I think would have worked out better if I had disobeyed God. His way is always the best way.

And yet, as I look back, my selfish acts and indulgence in sin have repeatedly led to harm, relational brokenness, regret, and shame. Why is this lesson one that we forget and ignore over and over?

God is an all-powerful God. He is a kind and loving God. He knows what is best for our lives. He desires the best for our lives.

In today's reading, Jesus says that He is the bread of life. Walking with Jesus allows us the opportunity to live in the fullness of the all-powerful, kind, loving God. The Christ life is not always easy and carefree, but it is best. Let's reject the notion that we know better than God, because that approach never works out well. Instead, let's choose both individually and as a community to feast on the bread from heaven. Let's rejoice in the truth of who God is as we lean into His greatness.

DIG DEEPER

- Where is your focus? Have you chosen to seek and listen to Jesus, or have you chosen to do things your way? (For more on this, read Romans 8:1-14.)
- Thinking over your life, what is an example of a situation in which seeking and following God would have led to a better outcome?

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WRITTEN BY TIM DELLER

HEALING SPIRITUAL WATER

READ JOHN 4:7-14

I can relate to the Samaritan woman who was thirsty for something more. Several years ago, I was “thirsty.” I was in terrible pain. My neck was pinching my spinal nerve. My neck was droopy to the point that I had to hold it with my hand because I was in so much pain. I was in such agony that I had to sleep in my red scooter; I couldn't sleep in the bed or the recliner. A pressure wound developed, and this was not good. The staff at the care facility where I lived at the time were frustrated about my situation and so was I.

I kept praying and talking to Jesus about all the discomfort mentioned above. I met a doctor who recommended a neurosurgeon. My angels on earth, Wally and June, met with the neurosurgeon and asked him questions. Surgery was the answer, but I had to wait a long time for it, and the waiting period was awful. Yet I knew that I was in Jesus' hands and that the doctor was, too.

On May 31, 2017, surgery was done. I had no pain afterward, but because of high blood pressure and a rapid heartbeat, I had to go into the ICU. Praise God, I was just in the ICU overnight. Jesus was healing me with the spiritual water He poured out on me! When I called out Jesus' name, I put all my trust and faith in Him, no matter how bad the pain was. AWWW! What a blessing!

At this moment my neck is healed. I can hold my neck up without holding it with my hand and my neck is in a normal position so I can turn side to side. Because of my physical limitations, I am not able to come to church often, but the next time I am able to come to Eastbrook, you'll see me sitting in my wheelchair by the piano, holding my neck up high. The spiritual water of Jesus healed me.

DIG DEEPER

- What do you typically look to for relief from the pain and agony we often face in this life? How can you begin to turn towards God more often in these times?





THE HUNGER FOR LOVE

READ EPHESIANS 3:14-21

All of us want to experience love. Sometimes this hunger for love looks like a longing for friendship. Sometimes our longing for love surfaces in the desire for intimacy. At other times, this hunger for love is as basic as the desire to belong somewhere with someone. Near the beginning of Genesis, in the account of God's creation of human beings, we are told that this basic longing for love is seen in the connection between Adam and Eve: *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* (Genesis 2:18).

Elsewhere in Scripture we see that the hunger for love and connection is directly related to the fact that we have a built-in hunger for God. The Psalmist expresses this longing powerfully:

*"You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water."* (Psalm 63:1)

In the New Testament, Paul the Apostle echoes this longing for love in a prayer for early Christians about the significance of God's love in our lives and growth with Christ. *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Our theme for this week is the hunger for love. Throughout this week's devotional, we will explore how hunger for love relates to human love and divine love.

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week's practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do.

TAKE OFF:

This week's practice starts with taking the time to identify some of the false loves in our lives we try to find our self-worth through. You can begin by simply listing the relationships you turn to in order to find love, value, and acceptance in your life. Have any of these become unhealthy in some way? Are any of these causing you to compromise who you are and/or your values in order to be accepted or loved? Are any of these contractual (as long as you do this for me, I'll love you) or codependent (they are enabling or encouraging poor choices in your life)? Pray for God's wisdom in how to respond to what you have identified. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

Take a step this week to enter into meaningful Christian community, whether through an existing relationship with a Christian, a small group of some type through church, or some other means. A meaningful Christian community is one where you can know (and are known by) other Christians, where you can pray for and encourage one another and where together you can interact with the Truth of God (through a study, discussion, etc.). If you need ideas for how to find community like this, please contact the church office, 414.228.5220 or info@eastbrook.org. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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WHEN IN DOUBT...

READ ROMANS 8:37-39 & ROMANS 5:6-11

Have you ever struggled with doubts about your relationship with God? I know I have! As a child growing up, I was always a perfectionist. In school, I was happiest if I knew exactly what was expected of me to get the best grade possible. In gymnastics competitions, I knew which competitors I had to measure up against to gain the best score. I liked to know that my ranking was based on how well I had performed in any given arena. It's what made me feel worthy of acceptance and love.

Most of us learn to think like this from a young age because we live in such a performance-based society. Satan often uses this mentality to make trusting God's grace into a mind-game that sends us into a downward spiral of doubt, leaving us feeling hopeless.

My junior year in high school I attended a Bible camp. That year while listening to the speaker give the altar call and ask people if they had ever "truly accepted Christ as their Savior," I got sucked into one of those mind-games. I started questioning if I had really understood what God had done for me when I "prayed the prayer" as a small child. I wondered if my baptism had been an event that shouldn't have happened yet. I feared that I had not "gotten saved" right.

Of course, none of this was true. I sat and talked through my doubts with my counselor and she pointed out that I was too focused on my own actions to secure my salvation. She helped me shift my focus to the fact that Jesus died for us even though we were utterly unworthy and could never measure up. A few weeks after that conversation, God actually put today's scripture passages on my heart along with the song "In Christ Alone." In times of doubt I still use this text as a reminder that I have a restored relationship with the Creator because of Christ's work and not my own.

DIG DEEPER

- Have you ever struggled with doubt in your relationship with God? If so, what caused your doubts?
- What are some practices that can help dispel doubt in your life? Explore these practices in your life and see how God uses them.

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HE'S THERE IN THE GAP

READ PSALM 73:21-26

My life was falling apart when I came to the U.S. in January of 2016. It was bitter cold and was snowing every day. When I was looking outside the window, it was all bleak and white. However, I felt like I was falling into a big black hole. No one could hold me together because I had no friends, no family, and no connections. As a single mom, I was grateful that my son had physical needs, which became the only reason I could get up every day. When my son was at school, I just threw myself in bed and kept asking myself: “Why are you here? What are you doing here?” I realized that I needed to connect with the church in some way but I was unsure how. I needed to make some Christian friends—I needed God!

Soon afterwards, I connected with some new friends at Eastbrook who were involved with ministering to Chinese visiting scholars at UWM. This new community helped me take the natural step of getting baptized later that year. The seed of faith was planted years before through my friend, Luth, and her invitation to the International Church in Shanghai. The beautiful worship songs, the pastor’s preaching, and the people’s willingness to share their faith drew me in immediately and I began this journey of surrendering to Christ.

Sometimes, I still struggle with living cross-culturally. I am sure God is always with me and loves me despite my doubts and anxiety. When education, career or relationships have let me down, God has never once left me. He has shown Himself to me in His Word and faithful in His promises as in Psalm 73:23-26: *“Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.”* God loved me in my lowest points, and He rescued me from myself and eternal separation from Him.

DIG DEEPER

- Has there been a time in your faith journey when you've felt isolated and alone? If so, looking back, how did God keep you through that time? If not, who have been the consistent Christian encouragers in your life? Thank God for them.

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GLORIOUS EXPECTATIONS

READ JOHN 17:20-26

Solitude was simple. Solitude was my armor against years of bullying and damaged hair because I cut it to fit in. Solitude was my protection from years of being picked last, and years of trying to find myself in a sea of people who didn't look like me.

Through a child's eyes, love was simple. It was a parent's promise for the future, a pattern to follow, a dance I thought I knew all the steps to—connection, affection, and then family. Everywhere I looked, achieving "the relationship mountain-top" was frequently presented as something that would validate me, and help me to belong. I believed that learning to love and to be loved in return was the greatest thing to be realized. The inception of that simple idea formed a cynical and predictable cycle in my life.

Reading this passage helped me to reflect on God's mercy in breaking that cycle in my life: to fast from solitude, earthly expectations of myself, and earthly expectations of relationships. The inception, the pattern, the dance, and the simplicity did not define my future. God has continually presented me with a glorious bouquet of family, friends, surrender, and sacrifice that blooms again each morning along with His new mercies. This sustaining bounty keeps His all-consuming, unconditional, passionate love at the forefront of my life. His incomparable love has the power to transcend hurts, wounds, sin, death, and the grave.

Today's passage demonstrates how all believers can move from the great expectations of the world to God's glorious expectations for our lives as beacons of the Gospel and God's love to the unbelieving world. In Jesus' last moments, His desire for believers was that we remain connected, and that His love and glory shine through us as a reflection of God's deep love for us. His desire was that our hunger for intimacy would be filled through the intimacy of the Trinity and the church's unified belief in Him, so that the world may know Him.

DIG DEEPER

- What personal steps can you take to promote unity among believers?
- When you think about your relationships, what unhealthy beliefs or behaviors should you fast from?

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WRITTEN BY ALEXANDRIA HARRIS

HUNGRY FOR THE GOD WHO IS LOVE

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Love is..... so many things. It is difficult, it is humbling, it is amazing, it is the very thing that keeps us alive and reminds us of who we are and what our purpose is. But when I was in college, I confused love with lust. I became addicted to pornography and I gave into that temptation to the point that I had no idea who I was anymore. One day I just sat up and I remember thinking: Who am I? What has happened to me?

Because of this addiction, I had to confess to my family what was going on; and believe me, this was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. As I sat at my parents' kitchen table, with tears in my eyes, bearing my soul and my sin, not knowing whether my family would accept me anymore or not, I experienced something that was pretty amazing...I was met with love. Even though they were disappointed in me, I heard my family telling me that they loved me, that they were proud of me, and that they had been praying for me.

Have you ever had a moment like that? A moment where you are at your lowest and a person, a group of people, or an experience brings you back to earth? That is what is going on in this passage of scripture that we are able to look at today. 1 John 4:10-12 says, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* See, while we were and still are low in our sin, God decides to love us anyways.

Yes, love is difficult, humbling, and amazing. But most importantly, love is God, and God is love.

DIG DEEPER

- Re-read 1 John 4:7-21. Underline all the times that it says the word love.
- Read verses 20-21 again. What brother or sister is God calling you to love today? What will you do in response to this call?

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POSTURE MATTERS

READ PSALM 86:11-13

*Those who look to Him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame. (Psalm 34:5)*

I have been working on my posture. Maybe you have heard that the act of smiling can actually make you happy, or heard theories about the role that our physical posture has on our emotional health. Well, our spiritual posture is also important!

Do you ever feel so discouraged by your unbelief, your seemingly endless battle with sin, or your weariness? Me too! So, when I was assigned Psalm 86:11-13 for this devo, I thought, “Oh, perfect! I sure can relate to feeling like I have a divided heart!” But, here is what I have been learning in this season of life: instead of focusing on the lack of unity in my heart, I need to follow David's example from this passage. First, I recognize this divided heart issue in myself. Then, I confess it to the LORD and ask Him to deal with it—to “*unite my heart*” (ESV). Finally, I turn my gaze to the LORD and worship Him! I recount all of the ways He has been faithful in the past as I stay in a posture of worship and thankfulness. I can rejoice that it is God who gives me a new heart (Ezekiel 36). It is His work in me that gives me hope. By choosing to worship (in song perhaps), it reminds me that God is on the throne. He has the power to help me worship Him with my whole heart.

Just as standing and sitting with good posture allows me to live the way my body is designed to function, dwelling in a posture of worship allows us to live out our created soul function. Isaiah 43:21 states that God made us for Himself, that we “*may proclaim [His] praise.*” May we live out this purpose instead of being pulled down by the allure of sin. Amen!

DIG DEEPER

- What does it mean to you to praise God, “with all your heart?”
- Who is someone you can encourage (and who can encourage you) towards whole-hearted worship?

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WRITTEN BY CHERI MEYER

HE CALLS ME FRIEND

READ JOHN 15:9-17

Over the past 2 years, I developed an enjoyable relationship with a student at UWM from Bangladesh. My acquaintance with him first began when I delivered a load of furniture to his new apartment soon after his arrival to Milwaukee. The furniture was scrappy, but nonetheless he was thrilled to receive these seemingly undeserving gifts. His sincere appreciation drove an obligation in him to begin helping me in the furniture ministry, picking up donations all over the city and stocking Eastbrook's furniture storage area. As we spent time together, you could see his motivation to help me was transformed as we became friends. He was no longer helping out of a sense of obligation, but out of the joy of friendship. I found I could call on him in a moment's notice, stop by his apartment, he would jump in the truck, and away we would go. I remember calling him for assistance without warning one Saturday morning and after apologizing for intruding on his morning, he said "John, when have I ever said NO to you?" I can truly say, he has never said no.

Deep friendship drives an unexplainable hunger to please. In this incredible account of Jesus pouring into His disciples, Jesus transforms our motivation from obeying His commands out of obligation to one that is rooted in a passionate friendship relationship. This is the ultimate pinnacle of our relationship with the living, redeeming LORD. He so desires our sincere friendship, because that friendship doesn't say "no" to Him—it is always yes! Not on our terms but whenever He calls on us. Fulfilling the LORD's commands becomes a joy, and not just any joy, but one that is fully satisfied—Jesus says this joy is "complete." Nothing in this world, no craving, no desire, no hunger can surpass this.

I'm afraid that the pace of our world and our dependency upon, even addiction to, social media, is creating shallow, untested relationships that we refer to as 'friendships.' Are we losing the true definition and meaning of being a deep friend? Ask the LORD: "You call me friend, but am I being a true friend to You?"

DIG DEEPER

- Do you seek joys in things outside of your relationship with Jesus? If you do, go back to this passage and keep reading. Pray for the Spirit of the LORD to teach you to become the friend Jesus called you to be.
- Are you motivated to please God out of obligation, or friendship?

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WRITTEN BY JOHN OSBORNE



THE HUNGER FOR GREATNESS

READ JAMES 3:13-18; 4:4-10

Someone once told me that what they wanted most in life was to be seen and acknowledged for who they were. We can describe that desire as a hunger for greatness or, at least, a desire to be necessary. We all want someone to see who we are and what we have to offer. That hunger for greatness can be appropriate, such as our longing for someone to recognize the uniqueness of how God has made us (Psalm 139:13-14) and also the unique talents and abilities God has placed within our lives (Romans 12:4-8).

However, there are times when our hunger for greatness expands beyond what is appropriate. John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, describes Satan's great sin as "Monarchical pride," signaled by his belief that it is "better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven." The way of Jesus the Messiah is unlike this. He taught differently – "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27) – and He lived differently – "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

The same sort of pride seen in Satan can infuse our human longings for greatness. This is why Paul the Apostle wrote to the church in Rome: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment" (Romans 12:3). Jesus Himself reminds us that we live in a world where hungers are often turned upside down. But in His Kingdom up is down and down is up: "For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest" (Luke 9:48).

James the Apostle comments on this theme: "Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:6-8). Throughout this week in the devotional, we will explore what it means to have an appropriate hunger for greatness that does not expand into pride.

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week's practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do. This week's practice is about fasting from our inclination to draw attention to ourselves and seeking to replace it by dwelling in the acceptance of God.

TAKE OFF:

Take note this week of the ways that you tend to seek attention or turn conversations with others back toward yourself. How many times do you interject or interrupt others with stories of how what they are sharing relates to you? When you dress in the morning, how much of what you wear is intentionally chosen so that you will be noticed? Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

Find ways each day this week to celebrate and build up someone else in your life. Write them a note, throw them a party, brag about them on Facebook, etc. At the end of each day, thank God for specific people and how they have blessed you that day.

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REDIRECTING GLORY TO WHOM IT BELONGS

READ JOHN 3:22-30

When Jesus' disciples started baptizing people nearby, John's disciples weren't happy. They were a loyal bunch, and they believed John alone deserved that glory. John had reason to agree with them. After all, he had been there first; he had been faithful when no one was listening; he had persevered despite opposition. But John didn't agree with his disciples. Instead, he was honest with himself and them. He recognized that he didn't deserve their glory or loyalty, so he redirected them to God by acknowledging what God had given him.

Unlike John, I often convince myself that I deserve others' glory and loyalty. I've worked hard, been self-disciplined, "walked the walk." I am kind; I am self-sacrificing; I am . . . laughing because, when I'm honest, I know that on my own, I am none of those things. Yet, even when the Holy Spirit enables me to admit that to myself, I nearly always hide that truth from others.

Very rarely am I honest with both myself and others. My contribution to whatever success I enjoy is so small. I had no control over where, when, or to whom I was born. My genetic makeup, capacity to learn, and physical health are largely outside of my control. Fruits of the Spirit, such as kindness, gentleness, patience, and self-control, are the result of God's merciful transformation, not my efforts. Apart from Him, I'm calculating, smug, selfish, distant . . .

Of course, it's awkward to redirect another's praise and loyalty from me to the one who deserves it, but, as John did, I need to remember that it's far better to endure a little awkwardness than to rob God of the glory He deserves.

DIG DEEPER

- When are you most tempted to keep God's glory for yourself?
- What are some ways you can redirect the praise and loyalty of a boss, friend, or child to the one who deserves it?

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BACKSTAGE PASS

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

We have been involved in several ministries during our 20-some years at Eastbrook Church. In these ministries, we've generally sought to play a supporting role, rather than be out front. As we submit to the needs of our ministry we relinquish thoughts of self, which frees us to direct our energy toward others. For us there is a poignant irony around writing publicly about our desire to stay in the background; but saying 'no' is not in our wheelhouse either.

Currently, Brian serves in one of the more visible ministries: Worship Teams. The temptation to draw focus to oneself is quite immediate when most of the congregation is facing your way. He's of the conviction that we're all worshipping God together, just facing different directions. Brian has refrained from suggesting songs, for fear he might subconsciously steer the selections toward his guitar playing. Eschewing 'solos' and generally leaving volume levels to the sound team are other ways to avoid the temptation to draw attention to himself. You'll often hear Brian say, "I just play what they tell me to play." He strives to bring excellence before the throne, not greatness to himself.

When Jennifer served with Women Unlimited, her role was more as an administrator, supporting and organizing so the leaders were free to teach God's word without added organizational worries. She derived great joy and contentment from serving rather than striving out of selfish ambition.

While worship is highly visible, and women's ministry brought fellowship and fulfillment, we view our most important ministry to be hosting a Life Group. Hospitality is the epitome of looking to the interest of others, and hosting a group for 10 years has given us the opportunity to practice this weekly. We've learned to value others above ourselves, and this in turn helps us to fix our eyes on God instead of ourselves.

DIG DEEPER

- As you've served, what have you done to intentionally turn the attention away from yourself?
- Are there steps you need to take to redirect the attention being given to you?

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A QUILT OF MANY TALENTS

READ ROMANS 12:1-8

Some years ago, my mother gifted me with a handmade quilt. The quilt is a log-cabin design, with rectangular strips representing wooden logs stacked on top of each other. In the center of each quilt block is a small red square, representing the fireplace, the center of the log home. The interesting thing about this particular quilt is that the pieces are made entirely of random scraps and leftover material of varying colors and patterns. These random pieces are cut, arranged, and sewn together, transforming them into a striking, finished product.

Just as the quilt is a beautiful whole constructed of many different individual parts, so are we and our particular gifts. We are all obviously endowed with distinct and various abilities—and this, we must conclude, is what God intended.

Sometimes, though, it is frustrating or discouraging when we cannot see the entire piece God is creating, though we may have glimpses and see bits and pieces of the whole. I have felt this way, and succumbed to settling into discontentment as I compared the fabric of others' lives with my own.

Our uniqueness, however, is itself a reminder that God has crafted a world of beautiful people with varying gifts, created to reflect Him and His glory to a fraying world with threadbare hope.

We each have a place and purpose in our spheres of influence, our families, our workplaces, the church, and the kingdom of God. Seeing ourselves, our gifts and talents not just for themselves, but as part of a larger, magnificent whole, stitches ourselves more closely to the purpose of the One who made us and placed us in this time and in this place. We have a bigger purpose beyond ourselves, fitting and belonging exactly as He made us, interwoven in a tapestry beautiful beyond our imagination.

DIG DEEPER

- In what areas are you struggling to find your place and purpose? Can you list some areas of gifting that you know God has given you? Thank Him for your unique gifts and ask for direction and guidance in using them. Thank Him that you are part of a beautiful tapestry you cannot yet fully see.

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HUMBLE HORSEPOWER

READ EPHESIANS 4:1-7

In many Bible translations, Ephesians 4 starts with the word “therefore.” If you have listened to many sermons or been involved in a Bible study, you’ve likely heard the question, “what’s the ‘therefore’ there for?” It typically marks a transition from principle to practice, from doctrine to application. “Therefore” is where the rubber hits the road: “All right, baby, let’s do something!”

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul conveys that believers have “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” So, he points the reader to the proper consequence of that truth: to live in a way that is worthy of this high calling in Christ Jesus (v.1). That sounds like a pretty good gig—to go around filled with the power and fullness of God. I can do that!

Let’s put the pedal to the metal and see what this Christ-powered life can do on the open road! Imagine others being impressed with your horsepower, responsive handling, and bold yet appealing image. . . .but then verse 2 comes along and puts a major drag on our enthusiasm. Attributes like humble, gentle, and patient don’t turn heads (much less “completely humble”). It hardly seems worth leaving the garage!

But the truth is that God’s purpose in giving believers “every spiritual blessing” is not to turn heads, but rather to join and elevate hearts. We are commanded to “make every effort” to utilize God’s gifts for God’s purposes (v.3). Thankfully, verse 7 of today’s passage guarantees that Christ enables even the effort we need to live for Him. The grace referenced here is not so much the grace that saves, but the ability to live the unifying, supernaturally powerful life that God calls us to.

So, let’s live humbly, gently, and patiently for the One who is over all and through all and in all!

DIG DEEPER

- What do you think is at the heart of your desire to turn heads or attract attention to yourself?
- Humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance are commands for believers. How does this affect your view of the calling you have received in Christ Jesus?

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OUR HOLY, AWESTRUCK FEAR; HIS PURPOSES

READ PSALM 25:8-14

*"Who are those who fear the Lord? He will show them the path they should choose."
Psalm 25:12 (NLT)*

You are fearfully and wonderfully made. It is difficult to wrap our minds around the fact that God created each of us and is perfecting each of us. God made us on purpose for His purposes. Whenever I consider this truth, a holy, awestruck fear washes over me. And this wondrous fear helps me see God in the seemingly ordinary happenings of life, for nothing is ordinary when God is the One directing our paths for Him to be known to the ends of the earth.

I started running after I was 50 years old. I lost more than 60 pounds, ran two marathons, kept off the weight for four years, and plan to run another marathon. It would be easy for my head to swell with pride for these remarkable accomplishments. And this is the first thing most people see, but there is so much more to it if your eyes are open to the One who orchestrates it all. Yes, I'm proud of what I've accomplished, but that is not my story.

This part of my story began the day I received a "D" in high school gym class because I wouldn't run a mile. Since that time, God has been piecing together my journey so that I would know it was Him nudging me to run one day during my daily fitness walk. Ever since I followed that nudge, I have been overwhelmed as He leads and grows me with each lacing up of my shoes. I am awestruck as God uses this unique part of me to spread His hope, strength and love to those around me in ways I never could have imagined. My accomplishments are all by and for Him...and I overflow with His joy.

DIG DEEPER

- Think of something you have accomplished that you are especially proud of, then look for God's hand before, during and after that moment. How did he prepare you? How did He grow you? How did He reach others through you? Thank Him for working in and through you in this way.



GREAT SERVANTHOOD

READ MATTHEW 18:1-5, 20:25-28

Many of us learned as children that the way to thrive in this life is to identify the person you need to please and follow their rules. While we may not have heard this lesson directly, we can hear it in the undertones of lessons like, “Earn your stripes,” or “There’s no greatness without hard work.” The result of such lessons is that many of us, since before we can remember, have been developing unhealthy habits of seeking affirmation.

Parents can have a significant influence in this development and such is the case for James and John. In Matthew 20, their mother asked Jesus if they could sit at His sides in the eternal kingdom. She wanted them to be great. While her intentions were good, Jesus’ response shows us that she didn’t know what she was asking. She didn’t know what true greatness consists of.

In contrast to worldly leaders full of selfish ambition, Jesus says to His followers, *“Not so with you...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...”* (20:26). How could this be?

Jesus clarifies in verse 28, *“...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom.”* God’s people are to resemble the means by which they belong to Him. The King of heaven climbed down the ladder, emptying Himself in total love to make all who would believe His own. He took the role of a servant and bought us with love.

Not only is servanthood great in the kingdom, Jesus tells us one may not even enter unless they take the lowly position of a child. While the world screams, “Strive for greatness and approval!” God says, “Go back to the beginning, not to make a name for yourself, and simply trust Me.” God is a good Dad, so turn and trust that your dependence on Him is intended and good. Our greatness and affirmation as children have already been granted to us in Christ’s Cross. Therefore, serve as Christ has served you.

DIG DEEPER

- What is an example of something you were taught as a child that told you that you needed to achieve in order to “make it,” or that you needed to gain other peoples’ approval for things to be okay?

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THE HUNGER FOR JOY

— READ ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11; 3:9-14 —

There is nothing quite like enjoying the beauty of a sunset or holding a newborn baby in your arms. To share that joy with another person doubles the joy as together we marvel at the beauty before us. Scripture speaks again and again of the gifts of joy, beauty, and pleasure that God gives us. The Psalms tell us that *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1), and Job describes God as *“the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted”* (Job 9:9-10). In Ecclesiastes, the Teacher describes the joy of human effort as a gift from God to humanity: *“I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God”* (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13).

In the New Testament, Jesus said that He came *“that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10). He is a joyful Savior who brings a joyful Kingdom. This is why the Apostle Paul writes: *“the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17).

Our culture reflects this hunger for pleasure, beauty, and joy in many ways. Sometimes the cultural pursuit of joy unfortunately becomes self-centered due to the pervasive conviction that we can and should pursue whatever brings us joy, no matter the cost to others or society as a whole. That unchecked pursuit of joy often becomes an erratic pursuit of fleeting joy just beyond reach. Sometimes it becomes destructive to ourselves and others. At times, our hunger goes unsatisfied even when we experience pleasure and beauty. Why is that?

Could it be that true joy comes through the self-denying pathway of Jesus instead of the self-celebrating pathway of the world? Is it possible that we will only experience joy when our hunger for beauty, pleasure, and joy is rightly oriented toward the God who made us?

In the midst of His upper room discourse, Jesus tells His disciples that all His teaching in that moment is aimed at one thing: *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete”* (John 15:11). This week we will explore this theme as we journey into the hunger for joy.

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week’s practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do. This week’s response is about fasting from those temporary things we try to find enjoyment in and replacing them with time contemplating the world God has given us to enjoy.

TAKE OFF:

What are the things you typically turn to for joy (e.g., hobbies, purchases, activities)? Which will you step away from this week in order to draw near to God and find joy in Him? Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

Go outside this week to enjoy God’s creation: go on a hike, watch the sunrise or sunset, sit outside and enjoy natural beauty somewhere. If the weather doesn’t allow that, find a book or a website that will allow you to see nature in all of its created beauty. As you do that, take time to thank God for the amazing creativity He put into creation and the enjoyment He allows us to find in it. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

READ ROMANS 1:18-23

This fall we moved into a new house. Most of our boxes are unpacked and we are slowly turning our new house into our home. Part of this process is spending time choosing paint colors and furniture, moving current furniture around to find the ‘perfect’ spot for it. Some decorating decisions are more obvious than others. We need lamps so that we can see after 6 pm. We need chairs so that our family and guests can sit.

Our new house is a blessing and we want to use it to bless others. As we continue to furnish the house, it is easy to see how our focus could change from providing a welcoming place to serve others into a shrine to our success—look at all of our great stuff! Isn’t it beautiful? Don’t we have exquisite taste?

The Creator has given us a yearning to express ourselves. People form wood, clay, glass, and metal, into buildings of extraordinary detail—or complete beauty in their simplicity. We analyze color and form to paint a flower in exquisite detail—breathtakingly lifelike—or to break down its elements into color and line into abstraction. We take 1’s and 0’s and turn them into the ability to share our thoughts and images instantly around the world. We hunger for beauty and take joy in creating.

I think that Paul is not forbidding us from creation itself. Instead, he is warning of carrying our creations to the extreme. Instead of worshipping God with our creativity, we can begin to worship our own creations. Perhaps we worship our creations because it makes us seem greater in our own eyes, or because we become captivated by the beauty for its own sake. But Paul is clear that taking our eyes off of the Creator is actually foolishness if it draws us away from honoring Him. As you contemplate the hunger for beauty this Lenten season, be mindful of Paul’s warning. Are we creating for God’s glory, or our own?

DIG DEEPER

- Do you invite God into your creative pursuits? How would your hobby or passion look different if you used it to glorify God?
- How can your hunger for pleasure and joy be fulfilled by God’s glory?

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WRITTEN BY MEGAN HENDRICKS

EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT

READ EPHESIANS 4:17-5:2

Sin corrupts our natural hungers for pleasure, joy, and beauty. Regeneration of heart and mind through Christ will restore your will and emotions, if you let Him.

Remember in the beginning? God created everything that was made, along with the trappings and treasures encapsulated therein. God designed every single thing. His heart and fingerprints are the Maker's mark of the created order. The pièce de résistance of His creation was the human being. Before He rested, God declared the ultimate "It's ALL Good."

Our hunger for pleasure, joy, and beauty is God-given, but sin distorts and defiles our hungers. In today's passage, Paul issues a sober admonition to believers. The very innate, wonderful characteristics of God's good creation have been corrupted, and are at risk of misuse, exploitation, misappropriation, and overindulgence. I think the most ominous warning is regarding the fact that as you pursue the practice of impurity there is a desire for more and more sin, and increasingly so.

Apart from the Holy Spirit, there is no hope of jumping out of the rut of sin. The Gospel facilitates the putting on of a new self "*created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth*" (v. 24). Led by the Spirit, we are now capable of living how Jesus would. It gives us thick skin and soft hearts. We used to be able only to please ourselves, but now we can show deference, and act in moderation and love. We can be peacemakers and illuminators, in Jesus' name.

As the Spirit renews your mind, pay attention to how He prompts you. Let God inform every notion, every act, every thought. Ask God to make you hungry for what He knows you need, and be blessed as He satisfies you.

DIG DEEPER

- As you meditate on these verses, what hungers in your life need to be regenerated and fixed by Jesus?

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DWELLING IN PEACE

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

I am a self-proclaimed sky enthusiast. I love getting up early to watch sunrises over Lake Michigan. I am often driven by the pursuit of beauty, whether it's the grand expanse of mountain ranges while backpacking, or waking up early to see the waves crashing on Lake Michigan. It's easy to get caught up in something so much larger than ourselves. The beauty that surrounds us and takes our breath away point to its Creator, showing us something so much greater than ourselves.

Yet despite this, sometimes we can still feel unsatisfied, as if something is missing. We jump from one beautiful experience to another, but still feel just as empty inside. We feel a longing for something outside ourselves because we are created by God and can only be completed in God—I've often heard it referred to as a "God-shaped void" in our hearts. All of this grandeur around us points to God, but it isn't meant to replace our need for Him. Paul wrote about this theme of peace in Philippians 4:8-9. We are commanded to dwell on this beauty around us, but more importantly, to focus on God.

I find myself asking God to make me grateful for this emptiness that I've felt, for the "God-shaped void" inside of me. It reminds me that satisfaction is found in Him alone, rather than experiences or emotions or beauty. During this season, as we reflect on what our souls are hungry for, I pray that we would be able to thank God for this void; that we may grow closer to Him as the Creator instead of trying to be filled by the creation that surrounds us.

DIG DEEPER

- Take a moment and reflect on this past week. What are some ways that you've seen beauty around you? How does this beauty reflect the nature of God and what He's created?
- Are there any areas in your life where you try to fill emptiness with what is created instead of our Creator?
- How can this hunger lead us closer to God?

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WRITTEN BY ANDREA BECK

EVERY DAY HAS ENOUGH WORRY

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34

Are you a worrier? Worry is part of my life. What will happen next? How am I doing and what am I supposed to do next? The concerns can spin webs of activity.

As we're reminded daily, we don't control our lives or circumstances, but our decisions, choices and daily actions determine the basis and results of our lives or at least the direction of our lives. The passage today reflects God's sovereignty in our life outcomes. We are reminded to be aware of His sovereignty as we go through our day and to use the gifts He has given us to respond to our circumstances.

As humans, we don't have the luxury of sitting passively and waiting for God to mysteriously feed and clothe us. The human response is to try to be self sufficient but that is exactly what can lead to fretting or a lackadaisical attitude which brings self defeat.

As Christians we are called to move forward to prepare ourselves for service. We are not to worry, yet planning for our lives is an important part of discerning God's will as we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. More importantly, time spent in prayer over concerns and life direction can provide the inner peace to move forward with the preparation and plans that have been thoughtfully considered as opposed to relying on our own power. Rather than pursuing results founded in our own strength and determined effort, we'll find results reflective of the fruit of the Spirit if our plans are centered in our relationship with Jesus. Trust in Jesus and move forward with Him as sovereign Lord.

DIG DEEPER

- Are you seeking the kingdom of God with your plans and preparation or has your planning process become a web of self sufficiency? Give an example.

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ONE THING I SEEK

READ PSALM 27:4-6

“One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. . . . At his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord” (Psalm 27:4-6)

There are two areas of beauty that I have always loved: nature and architecture. My grandma designed her own home in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. As a kid, I would spend hours on the forest slopes, delighting in the bright green mosses, evergreen spruces, and dense ferns that littered the forest floor. My dad, grandmother, brother and I would hike to where the tree line stopped and the jagged grey andesite rock began. At home, I would spend my free hours in grade school through high school, pouring over architectural designs and developing my own plans, studying the likes of Frank Lloyd Wright and Susan Susanka to see human design reflect God’s designs in nature.

Alone, kneeling or prostrate on my face, I enter into the beauty of the throne room of God, worshiping Him for who He is. I spend time only lifting up His name, along with the cherubim and seraphim, giving the Almighty One all the praise He deserves. Rainbows flash from His presence. Holiness radiates from His throne. His Gaze like fire pierces my soul. This is the deepest sense of beauty. This is soul satisfaction. This is what I was made for. All other beauties are good but fade in comparison to this.

DIG DEEPER

- In what ways do you seek soul satisfaction in beauty? How might this be positive? How might this be negative?
- How can the time you spend in the Lord’s presence be the one thing you seek above all others?

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WRITTEN BY KELLY ERICKSON

TRUTH IN BEAUTY

READ PSALM 19:1-6

“There is truth in beauty.” This statement has always felt true to me, but I never really could explain or understand it. We see beauty in people, and we see beauty in creation when a sunset turns the sky blazing orange, pink and purple or when a rainbow forms in the spray of a waterfall. Think of a tulip blooming, or a blue jay poised on the branch of a spruce tree. God’s creation shouts beauty at us. Why?

In these first six verses of Psalm 19, David says that the skies pour forth speech, reveal knowledge, and declare God’s Glory. All without actually saying words.

I am a photographer, and I do the vast majority of my work outside. The sky is always a factor in my photos, affecting the lighting and oftentimes the background color of the images. For this reason some of the most beautiful images I’ve taken have been during sunset or the hour of golden light just before sunset. The sky is one of the most obvious canvases God chooses to display beauty in.

I’ve come to understand that beauty is a representation of the ideal in something; that the fulfillment of something or someone’s ideal self both physically and/ or conceptually is what is truly beautiful. And so, truth in beauty is embodied in the ultimate ideal: Jesus Christ. He was the perfect man, and lived a perfect life. The Book of John opens with the fact that all of creation was made through Jesus (John 1:1-3), so it’s no wonder that His creation reflects the truth of who He is. Because we are created in the image of God, the spark of divinity in each of us causes us to hunger for the truth of who He is; it fuels our hunger for beauty.

His perfection is what grants salvation. We can’t achieve that perfection because of our sinful desires, which is why Jesus sacrificed Himself in our place. But by following Jesus’ example the best we can in our lives, we bring beauty into our lives and interactions with others.

DIG DEEPER

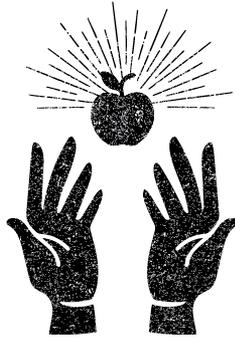
- Take a moment to dwell on the differences between beauty and visual appeal/attractiveness. How does Jesus Christ embody the former?
- What are the areas of your life that don’t reflect the example of how to live that Jesus gave us? Take time to pray and ask God to help you change your life in those areas.

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THE HUNGER TO KNOW

READ PSALM 119:9-16

One of my friends in college was always afraid that if she left one of our gatherings something really fun would happen immediately afterwards, leaving her out of the fun. We would joke around with her about it, promising that we wouldn't do anything really fun until after she left for her apartment. Today, there's a name for that: "fear of missing out." The fear of missing out has become seemingly more pervasive since social media enables us to tell everyone everywhere about the amazing food we are eating, the cool people we are spending time with, and the once-in-a-lifetime vacation we are having. Everyone else can peek into it and experience the fear (or reality) of missing out.

In one sense, the fear of missing out reflects the insatiable desire built within humanity to understand what is going on in the world and in our lives. We scramble to be "in the know" or "on the inside track," and we hate feeling "out of the loop." In his essay, "The Inner Ring," C. S. Lewis wrote that this desire: "It is one of the factors which go to make up the world as we know it ... Unless you take measures to prevent it, this desire is going to be one of the chief motives of your life, from the first day on which you enter your profession until the day when you are too old to care."

This hunger for understanding is built into us by God. We certainly recognize that this hunger to know has led to many important breakthroughs, whether in cancer research, philosophical understanding, or our conception of the physical world. Yet, left to our own devices, this hunger to know often pushes us into a mad scramble to indiscriminately know and be in on everything without stopping to consider what is really worth knowing and why.

In its best sense, this hunger to know leads us into an encounter with that which is beyond us and, ultimately, God. This week our devotional is built around this theme of the hunger to know.

Let us begin with some of the greatest prayers on this theme:

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.” (Psalm 25:4)

“Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth” (Psalm 86:11)

“Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees.” (Psalm 119:12)

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week’s practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do. This week’s response is about fasting from our desire to “know” everything about anything or anyone instantly and replacing it with true knowledge that can only come from God.

TAKE OFF:

Choose to fast from information in some way this week: reduce your access to the news; reduce how often you check your email or social media; avoid gossip forums or conversations. Think about why we so often desire to “be in the know” when it comes to other people or events. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

Replace the time you use to gather information with practices that will help you hear from God, such as regular Scripture reading, prayer, or sitting in silence before God. Make a commitment to change your habits regarding to how much time you spend taking in “news” about the temporary world and how you will begin to spend some of that time learning about God’s kingdom. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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WISDOM IN GOD'S TRUTH

READ ROMANS 1:18-32

I like to do things my own way. I tend to romanticize it as my “rugged Midwestern individuality,” but the truth is, it’s just plain old stubbornness. There have been times, when my wife, Michelle, gives me really solid advice on a project. But sometimes, even though I know she’s right, I continue to do things the way I want simply because I want to do it my way. Out of my willful self-centeredness, I choose to diminish or ignore the truth that’s painfully obvious.

God has revealed who He is to us in obvious and subtle ways, in creation, in His word, and through the life and redeeming work of His Son, Jesus Christ. The truth about God is right in front of us.

Whenever we refuse to acknowledge God’s truth and go our own way, we become dulled, and more and more susceptible to the sin that crouches at our door. His voice grows quieter and quieter in our hearts, until we reach the point where His Spirit is barely audible. Our mission becomes less clear. We turn to idols to attempt to fill the space in our hearts that rightfully belongs to God. Our thinking becomes clouded.

A clear mind is a gift from God. Clarity about our identity, mission, and purpose comes from reverence for who God is, which He has revealed to us. He is glorious. He is righteous. He is powerful. When we acknowledge God and place Him in His rightful place at the center of our lives and submit to Him, our relationship with Him becomes the lens through which we see the world, and shapes our actions. Then, we will grow in wisdom.

DIG DEEPER

- Are there any areas of your life where you refuse to acknowledge God's truth? Where? Why? What does it look like to place God at the center of all areas of our life?

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WRITTEN BY MIKE NUGENT

GOD KNOWS, TRUST HIM

READ 1 TIMOTHY 6:3-6, 20-21

The word hunger, when associated with food, denotes a level of suffering. Hunger can be seen depicted in human lives, from infants to the aged. Great numbers of people succumb to it. There is no joy in this hunger.

But hunger for understanding and love of God can bring amazing, unquenchable joy. It happened to me, through heartbreak.

When my mom suffered a near-death medical emergency, she spent significant time recovering in the hospital and rehab facilities. The day that she became disabled, my dad placed me in a strange home with a female caregiver. Suddenly I was separated from dad and my seven brothers—alone. My tears and pleading to return home came to no avail. At age 10, no explanation made sense. Alone, I grappled with unanswered questions. The overwhelming pain seared me. A stain of rejection rested on me.

Crying out to God, I relied on the doctrine I knew by heart. Funny, I first relied on a song titled “Jesus Loves Me.” God used this song, like a parachute of healing. My heart sang, “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.”

I dived into the Bible in search of God’s love. God’s love was on full display. I ran right into the arms of Jesus. I landed safely in a cherished relationship with God.

My hunger to seek the love of God has endured for five decades. The Bible’s truths learned, still illuminate my Christian walk.

Rejection is soundly beaten. Mercy reigns. I am a new creation and ransomed. Because of Jesus, I’m not ashamed to proclaim the gospel to the world.

DIG DEEPER

- Which truth about God means the most to you?
- Which truth about God do you struggle with the most?

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CHRIST CRUCIFIED IS GOD'S POWER AND WISDOM

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:17-31

In April 2001, at the age of 40, I visited Eastbrook for the first time as a ten-day old Christian. I can still remember where I sat and what I felt. I knew I'd found a home.

My early experience was wonderful but keeping up was a challenge. While others deftly located Scripture, I'd furiously thumb through the table of contents hunting for Philemon. Sure sounded like the Old Testament. Nope.

Filled with the hunger of a brand-new believer and seeking to be fed, navigating the kitchen wasn't so easy. There were so many names, stories, and truths I'd never encountered. It didn't matter, I still wanted more.

Hunger is good. It motivates. It reminds. It influences behavior. And, when it's more about filling the soul than a belly, terrific things happen. My goal wasn't for the hunger to cease. What I wanted was better understanding.

What I desired was the knowledge and ability to share the Gospel with the grace and ease that mirrored what I drank in weekly at Eastbrook. Stretching back to that first day, I've heard elegantly woven messages delivered without so much as a glance at notes. Yet, there I was attempting to get close without driving into the ditch. Exasperated, I knew 'it shouldn't be this complicated'.

I was right. It took study, prayer, and petition until the absolute simple, terrible, wonderful, painful perfection of the gift at the Cross presented itself in seven easy words: "Christ Crucified is God's Power and Wisdom."

Maybe for you, too.

DIG DEEPER

- What was your "a-ha" moment when the truth of the Gospel first made sense to you?
- How do we complicate our faith life to the point we miss what is plain as day?

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WRITTEN BY DANNY CLAYTON

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

READ COLOSSIANS 2:1-5

I used to not understand why the Cross was the main symbol of Christianity. If we were truly made for more, why would we dwell on a symbol that just reminds us of why we need salvation? Up until recently, I took the Cross entirely for granted. I only knew that I was somehow saved through it, but in the realm of my deep-seated, Western-cultured faith, having a theologically-sound understanding of the Word was far superior. But as we see, today's passage is different. Paul says that what matters more than knowledge is this great mystery of God. I am a first-hand witness to this.

A friend of mine recently challenged me to begin to ponder the Cross on a deeper level, and to be okay with it remaining a mystery. I realized in that moment that knowledge would never satisfy in the way that the Cross could. I was no different than Adam and Eve seeking understanding from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I needed the truth of the Cross, that utter display of love and grace, the greatest act of ministry, to seep down into my heart and soul where it would take root in my life. The Cross needed to come before everything in my life.

Since that time, I have started to reflect on the Cross throughout my day. I now see that every piece of Scripture reflects back to the resurrection. This great mystery of God has become the key to my faith, the anchor of my heart and soul. I still do not understand the mystery of the Cross. Why would God seemingly trade away His Son for me? And why would Jesus go along with it? Yet somehow, that is the key to it. It's through a lack of understanding that my life has changed from the inside, and continues to do a miraculous work in me.

DIG DEEPER

- Reflect on the Cross of Christ. What emotions come to mind? What truths about God come to mind? What mystery still remains for you?
- Find a friend to discuss your response with, so that we might grow and learn from each other, and find passion in the Cross and in Scripture.

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LOVE & KNOWLEDGE

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

As I've grown in my walk with God, I've noticed that there are some truths that you must experience to fully understand. One of these is how neither love nor knowledge can exist without the other. If I love from just a pure sense of compassion, I may actually unintentionally hurt the one I'm trying to love. But if I live in a world bathed in knowledge but lacking love, I am as Paul says, nothing. That's why Paul prays that the Philippians' *"love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight"* (v. 9). But for me, I had to learn this firsthand.

It happened early in my career as I was working with a particular young boy. He was five or six years old, but he carried the anger of a much older person. He was violent and lashed out frequently. One day during one of his outbursts, he kept escalating. But as we were talking I could see him slowly transform. It was as if the anger melted away to reveal a broken and hurting child, and his tension changed to tears and then sobbing. And through the tears, he started calling out to his mother, over and over again. But she wouldn't be coming, because she had passed away just weeks prior.

Knowledge brings understanding, and understanding is only fruitful if it leads to love. Knowing why this boy was hurting was helpful, but it was useless if it did not lead me to step in and love him in that place.

Let your love and knowledge abound, together, and lead you to the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ.

DIG DEEPER

- Who do you need to spend more time with to grow in understanding so that you can love them more?

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WRITTEN BY DAN RYAN

TRANSPARENT VESSELS

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-16

“What can we do to help?”

“Here, you can blow up balloons.”

My friend and I arrived in Guatemala just in time to help our partner church hold their annual vacation Bible School—in December. Strange timing to us, but not in Guatemala, where the long break between school years comes at the end of the calendar year. But awkward in another way, too. Mere hours before stepping off the plane, my team and I had just organized Eastbrook’s annual Advent night—a huge responsibility requiring hours of preparation and coordination of many different pieces. Now, with only a handful of Spanish phrases, I was at the mercy of a teenage translator as I cheered on their energetic leaders. So, within a day and a half, I went from heading up an all-church event to blowing up balloons, handing out art supplies, and walking some of the littlest campers to the baño. And that is okay.

In today’s reading, Paul speaks of his coming to the Corinthians humbly and with a simple message: *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power”* (vv. 2-3).

Paul was educated by one of the most respected Torah teachers of the time (Acts 22:3). A natural apologist, he could have overwhelmed the Corinthians with his command of Scripture. Instead, Paul trusted that his Spirit-given words would be understood by those whom God had prepared in advance—those who recognized spiritual wisdom.

For us, this can be freeing. We don’t have to be the ones to have it all together—the ones with the slick gospel presentations, the ones to “win” the arguments. As we consistently walk with Christ, He reveals His heart to us, and we in turn share it with those He gives us. We can be the transparent vessels for the wisdom of God—the mind of Christ—to shine through.

DIG DEEPER

- Re-read verses 12-13. How can you know whether your thoughts and words are really Spirit-given, or from within your own spirit?

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THE HUNGER FOR PEACE

READ LUKE 4:1-13

No one wants to live feeling depleted and empty. We all want to live out of a place of abundance, satisfaction, and peace. We hunger to feel like our lives are on the right track and that everything is ‘right,’ in the best sense of the word. The biblical word for this is peace or, in Hebrew, *shalom*. *Shalom* means more than simply lack of conflict. Instead, it conveys a sense of completeness, success, welfare, and peace. A short definition for *shalom* is that all things are right in God’s world as they are supposed to be.

When Jesus begins His public ministry, he enters into an episode that would not be described as peaceful. Shortly after His baptism by John, “*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry*” (Luke 4:1-2). This temptation is a power encounter between the prince of this world, the devil, and the Prince of Peace, Jesus the Messiah. From start to finish, the three temptations of the devil are classic temptations of humanity, described by Henri Nouwen as the temptation to be relevant, popular, or powerful. Hungry and tired, Jesus experiences all the raging temptations of a peace-less world thrown at Him.

Jesus overcomes the temptations of the devil, however, and we realize that He is a new sort of king with a new sort of kingdom that will move in ways different than the ways of this world. When Isaiah the prophet describes the Messiah as “*the Prince of Peace*” (Isaiah 9:6), we know this is exactly what we need. We need true *shalom* in the midst of our hunger for peace because we cannot ultimately satisfy it ourselves. This realization does not come quickly. Sometimes we must intentionally step back from some things, even normal things like the eating of food, to realize exactly what is going on in our lives.

It is no wonder that immediately before ascending to the Father, some of Jesus' final words to His disciples are: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"* (John 14:27). The Prince of Peace has come to bring us peace, and that is very good news for us.

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week's practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do. This week's practice is focused on what we typically think of when we think of fasting – food. At its core, food is something we utilize for physical energy and strength. But things like caffeine, sugar, etc. can be things we come to rely on more than we should. And, no matter how healthily we eat, a few hours later our bodies will want more. An intentional fast from food reminds us that our ultimate satisfaction in life can only be found in Christ.

TAKE OFF:

Fast from food (in some form), perhaps for one meal a day or for an entire day. If you are physically prevented from completely fasting due to some health concerns, consider if there is a particular food, drink or "treat" you can deny yourself this week. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

In the place of eating the food you are fasting from, take time with God in solitude and silence to experience the peace that God brings. Consider how He provides for you all you need. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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DON'T COVER YOUR EARS AND SING "LALALA"

READ JONAH 3; LUKE 11:29-32

After 20 years and many attempts to move up at the same company, I was finally promoted to a manager role in February 2018. While God has always provided for my family's needs, I will admit that I had been beyond frustrated at my lack of career progress after so many years.

It was a difficult transition into management, as I lost free time and needed to step down from many "extra-curricular" activities. I was overwhelmed those first few months and looked for a way out, be that a different role, new organization, or change in career entirely. In August 2018, I heard a gentle but firm word from the Holy Spirit say, "Who are you to question Me? Your job has been laid out before you. Bring Me to the people you work with and support and work hard for Me." That day I repented for not being content and satisfied with my blessing (He specifically gave me what I had aspired to for so many years). I chose to obey and started to pray more for every member of my team, for leadership, and for others I worked with and could influence. It changed everything when I let go and put my trust in Him.

I can relate to Jonah with wanting to have my own agenda. So much in our culture tells us that success is knowing what we want, designing a plan, and making it happen. If it doesn't happen, our culture tells us we must be doing something wrong. I admit there have been many times I figuratively put my hands over my ears and sang "lalalala," so I wouldn't hear a different plan from my own. I wanted what I wanted. Period.

Luke 29:1-3 reminds me that I have a part to play in God's plan. He doesn't need me to obey, but rather gives me an opportunity and privilege to bring Jesus to my team, my colleagues, and my company. I don't think Jonah had any idea that his obedience would impact so many lives. While my specific call is different from Jonah's, it demands the same obedience. The Bible reminds me that God has a plan for my life, that His purpose is above mine, and that I will find satisfaction when I delight in not only Him but His plan. Peace is only possible when we learn who we are in context of being sons and daughters of the living God and submit to how He wants to use us.

DIG DEEPER

- What space in your life allows you to hear from God (vs. covering your ears)?
- When have you set aside your desires/ambitions for His will in your life?



SPRING OF LIFE

READ JOHN 4:7-26

The Samaritan woman walked to the well to address a physical need for water. As she approached the well, she encountered Jesus, who had become weary from His journey. When Jesus asked for a drink, the Samaritan woman’s immediate response was a question. With confusion she inquires, *“How can you ask me for a drink?”* (v. 9). Jesus appeared to her in a state of physical weakness, to prove that even though He was a Jew and she was a Samaritan, they both shared a common need for water.

Before she came to the well, she was living in brokenness and was looked down upon by her community because of her marital history. Jesus already knew her story and saw her for who she was – a child of God in need of salvation. Jesus did not acknowledge her sin to shame her, but rather to reveal to her the hope and peace He could provide for her. He shared with her the promise of *“living water”* that would never run out (v. 10). The woman knew the water from the well provided transient fulfillment, and she was eager to acquire the water Jesus spoke of that would allow her to never return to the well again.

Jesus does not point out the areas in which we sin in order to reduce us to guilt and shame. Rather, He reveals Himself to us so that in our broken state, we can see the necessity of His presence in our lives and our need for a Savior, just as the Samaritan woman did. The remedies we use to free ourselves from pain and discomfort are temporary and our contentment in them short lived, yet we continuously repeat the pattern expecting different results. When God reveals sin in my life, I find it hard to turn from the sin that controls me even when I know God will ultimately give me peace and satisfaction. I have learned that it is imperative to plant a firm foundation in God’s truth so that when times come that test my faith, I will not look to temporary comforts but will draw from the “living water.”

DIG DEEPER

- How do you alleviate pain when you experience difficulties? What is holding you back from choosing God in these moments?

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PEACE FROM OUR FATHER'S ATTENTION

— READ MATTHEW 6:5-6, 16-18 —

Though I'm an introvert, there's a side of me that really loves to be in the spotlight. It's a battle I endure daily to make sure that my ego doesn't impact my ministry or that my inner peace is dependent on the thoughts of others. I would say I've done a pretty fair job so far, thanks to God's strength and grace, but when it comes to praying in public I still struggle quite a bit.

When we pray corporately it's so easy to focus on performance. There are times when I pray with others and feel like I prayed the worst prayer ever. I get a sense of "peace" if I get feedback from others that says otherwise, instead of receiving the peace that God planned to give me for being obedient and lifting up prayers guided by the Holy Spirit. The "peace" I receive from others' feedback is always so fragile, dependent on a source that could always stop coming.

God simply wants us to pray prayers that line up with His Will and flow out of our love of and dependence upon Him. That's why going into our private place with God to pray is so important. In that place, you can allow your prayers to flow out of your need and desire for Him without any thoughts about what others think. There, God can teach you how to pray and will allow you to taste the true peace that comes from letting your praise and requests rise from your heart in all of its genuineness. Let us be a church whose prayers are music to God's ears, no matter how messy they sound to people around us. Then we'll see God move in ways we never thought of, and will experience true peace that's only found in Christ alone.

DIG DEEPER

- What God-given gifts do you tend to use more for the attention and praise of others rather than the peace and other blessings that God has for you?
- Do you often use these gifts in some way in your private time with God? How can you incorporate this, even if you have to be creative in doing so?

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WRITTEN BY SHAMUND GORDON

CLEAN AND UNCLEAN SATISFACTION

READ ROMANS 14:13-19

I've never been thin. This is partly because of genetics, but partly a lack of satisfaction is to blame. Ever since I can remember, I've been broken and hungry. Hungry for relationship. Hungry for acceptance. Hungry for food. Being that hungry can be disastrous when you're trying to fill a hole with something that God is not in.

So food for me is unclean, yet food cannot be unclean. Nothing is wrong with a slice of cheesecake. I believe God smiled wide when the first person invented it. So how is it unclean for me? This is the conundrum Paul was trying to explain.

He explains at the beginning of the passage what we shouldn't do. We shouldn't judge a person who is doing something we think is unhealthy. I can tell you, nothing makes me want to cry and stick cheesecake down my throat more than someone who tells me I shouldn't be eating cheesecake. Remember, I am hungry for relationship. Hungry for acceptance. Hungry for food. If relationship and acceptance are damaged, I want to fill the need with food.

So what are we to do? We live in a world full of people struggling with all kinds of things: food addiction, alcoholism, impure thoughts. There are lots of broken, hungry people.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The problem is not that we are filling our hunger with alcohol, food, sex, shopping, etc.; it is what we aren't filling it with.

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your life with righteousness, peace, and joy. Those things will fill your hunger like no food or drink ever could. Those things will create healthy relationships with those around you who are struggling as well. God provides true satisfaction.

DIG DEEPER

- When you think of unclean filler things in your life, what do you think of and how do your closest relationships respond to this issue?
- How will you respond to their version of this brokenness?

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ULTIMATE SATISFACTION

READ JOHN 6:25-35

From the time we are young, we're asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" We think and dream about what career we want to have, who we want to marry, how many kids we want to have, and where we want to live. In our minds, we have the idea that once we accomplish these plans, we will feel fulfilled and satisfied. And while these accomplishments may be God's plan and may bring joy in the moment, they will not bring true peace, especially in the midst of difficult times.

In our passage today, the people who saw Jesus feed the five thousand are looking to fulfill their desires with food. Instead, Jesus wants to give them what will bring them ultimate satisfaction: faith in the Father. In the same way, Jesus wants us to seek God first above all else. This alone will bring peace and satisfaction.

There have been times in my life when I have tried to satisfy my desires with things other than Him. I have thought, "If I just have this, then I will be happy." Even now, I continue to seek after earthly desires in hopes of finding fulfillment. I forget that Jesus should be the sole source of my joy. There have also been times in my life when I have chosen to trust Jesus when life wasn't perfect. In those times, I found a peace that only comes from faith in Jesus.

Everyday, we have the opportunity to rest in the peace and fulfillment that comes from Jesus. As we remember the death and resurrection of our Savior, let's choose to find our joy in Jesus rather than pursuing the things of this world.

DIG DEEPER

- What in your life are you pursuing more than your relationship with Jesus? What will it look like to seek Him first in your life?
- What habits will allow you to find your joy in Jesus rather than your earthly desires?

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HELP, I AM LOSING MY MIND!

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Have you ever found yourself at life’s crossroad? An unexpected event happens, and you are suddenly faced with competing choices. At its peak, it feels like you are about to lose your mind. Worry and fear are natural responses to situations beyond our control. I have found myself in this state many times.

Once was in 2011, when my family had to process relocating to the United States. Fear of the unknown took over me. I worried about everything from whether I would be able comprehend the American accent to whether I would be accepted. I finally had to shift my focus back to God through prayer, fasting and trusting His promises so I could find rest for our next steps.

Colossians 3:15 says, *“let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts”* (NLT). True peace comes from Jesus, the Prince of Peace. This peace is available if we put our focus on Jesus and not on our circumstances or our own understanding. The size of your burden doesn’t matter, Jesus is more than enough. He is willing and able to help you through life’s crossroads.

We don’t have to suffer any longer in our worry and despair; we need to call on Jesus. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus offers to give us rest from our burdens if we come to Him. Peace comes with trusting in Jesus and we build trust by letting *“the Word of Christ”* richly dwell within us (Colossians 3:16 NASB).

DIG DEEPER

- What is stealing your peace that you need to bring to Jesus?
- How can we let the Word of the Lord dwell in us? See v. 16. Prayerfully consider what steps you can take daily to allow God’s Word dwell in you richly.

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THE HUNGER TO LEAVE A LEGACY

READ PSALM 78

About a year ago, our family went on a trip to Washington, DC, to take in the historic sites and museums. One thing you cannot help but notice are the monuments to one historic figure after another: George Washington, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and so many more. Each monument tells a story about the legacy of how those figures impacted the nation and generations of people.

We all hunger to leave a legacy with our lives in one form or another. Most of us may not aspire to constructing a monument to our personal legacy in Washington, DC, (let alone somewhere else) but we all still desire to leave a meaningful legacy with our lives. In Ecclesiastes, the Teacher says that God has “*set eternity in the human heart*” (*Ecclesiastes 3:11*). In our hearts God has placed a sense of the eternal, and that sense of eternity connects with our hunger to endure and to leave something that endures after we die.

This hunger to leave a legacy is a gift from God, but it can be bent toward wrong ends. We all know the stories of someone who seems fixated on being important, being remembered, or being praised after death. Ironically, this prideful fixation on being remembered often makes a person sadly forgettable or humorously entertaining. The heart that is rightly ordered with God allows God to build His own legacy in our lives for His glory. As the Psalmist writes: “*we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done*” (*Psalms 78:4*).

In this week’s devotional we will explore how to leave a legacy in our lives that is neither prideful nor laughable, but honoring to God and His ways.

RESPOND THIS WEEK:

Each week's practice will feature some aspect of the process Paul describes for us in Ephesians 4:22-24, where we are to **TAKE OFF** something from our lives that has become corrupted or distracting and **PUT ON** in its place something God wants us to do. This week's practice is focused on how we try to receive recognition from others instead of resting in the knowledge that we are God's children that He loves dearly.

TAKE OFF:

Fast from social media, or some other place where you seek recognition from others, during this week. Choose not to post to your social media accounts this week or check your feeds. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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PUT ON:

Replace your time spent on social media with time listening to God. Ask Him to point out someone you can serve in secret this week. Plan a way to bless them in some tangible way. Use the space below to take note of your experience this week.

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WHERE YOU LEAD ME, WILL I FOLLOW?

READ 1 PETER 5:1-5

When first I read the passage for today together with this week's theme, I saw absolutely no connection between the two. But in pondering the text, a story came to mind that was told to me by a college friend (I'll call him Ed).

Ed was pastor of a large church on the west coast when a mega-church in South America expressed an interest in him for the position of Senior Minister. After two exploratory visits by the Pulpit Search Committee to the US, Ed was told that he'd soon receive plane tickets for him and his wife, Barbara, to visit them in turn.

Time passed — without tickets and without a word. Meanwhile, Ed had invited a colleague named Chuck, much younger than Ed but a well respected Bible teacher, to spend a week at the church teaching both during the day and in evening services. Midway that week, Ed phoned the chair of the Search Committee to inquire about the delay. "Oh," was the reply, "didn't anyone get back to you? We extended the call to another gentleman." Ed sat at his desk stunned. Tears of disappointment and anger began to flow.

Chuck dropped by at that moment and of course heard the story. "Have you and Barb been praying about it?" he asked. Ed wanted to strangle him! "What do you think?! Of course we have!!" To which the younger man replied softly, "Then God apparently has work for you here, not there."

Spiritual "elders" are not biblically defined in terms of biological age. Their wisdom and conduct are grounded instead in a deep understanding of the oft-cited couplet, "Only one life; 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." Chuck, though younger than Ed, was a genuine 1 Peter 5:2-3 elder (see *The Message*).

DIG DEEPER

- Do you have any aspirations in life, any objective(s) you're pursuing with high hopes of success? What role does "only what's done for Christ will last" play in your calculations?



LIVING BEFORE THE FACE OF GOD

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-9; 10:31-11:1

When we are young we think of our lives in terms of years, but as we age we often start thinking in terms of days; even thinking in terms of months seems too extravagant. Other things change as well as we go through the stages of life. God calls us to be his fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9) and reminds us that He has prepared good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). In our youth we intend to do big, important things for God, things that will really make a difference in our world. And often we achieve what we set out to do. As we age and particularly as our physical abilities dwindle, many things are taken away and we realize we can only do small things for Him. In this Lenten study we have intentionally removed some things from our lives and that has been a good exercise, because the reality is that many more things will be taken away as we go through the different stages of our lives.

As an example, for several months my physical activity has been severely limited because of a spinal injury. At the same time my sister-in-law now requires 24-hour in-home care after serious surgery. And my older brother, my only living sibling out of six of us children, is in hospice care at home.

We are now much more vulnerable. But we are left seeing, even through our tears, that little things are important, too: the smile, the hug, the friend who understands, an unexpected phone call from a loved one, the sweet time of fellowship worshipping the King with the communion of saints. These are akin to a cup of cold water for a person who thirsts. Perhaps this is why Ecclesiastes 3:11 can say that everything is made beautiful in its time. Is God breaking our hearts so that He has a lovelier home to live in (Psalm 51:17)? God has set eternity in our hearts and when all of the extraneous activities of our lives are removed, we can see more clearly that we live all of life before the face of God. The Cross is the way to our inheritance and eternal life is the legacy God graciously makes available to us through Christ. Our responsibility at every stage of our lives is to live in that sweet assurance and reflect that hope to everyone we touch.

DIG DEEPER

- What are some things that you really treasure that you don't want to live without? What would you do if they were taken away?

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WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO LOVE GOD?

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9

If the people were to “*love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength*” then they would have been able to follow His commands (v. 5). But how could God get them to Love Him? He did so many things for them over the years and they still didn’t always believe in Him nor draw near to Him. Does that ever happen to you?

In 1 John 4:19 it says, “*We love because He first loved us.*”

When my oldest daughter graduated from high school, we planned a party for her. It was June and the cottonwood trees were in full and usual readiness to decorate our entire neighborhood. The neighbor’s 150-foot tall tree was expected to give out on the day of our party. I prayed and prayed and though it looked impossible, I kept trusting that God would do something. On that day, God sent a northeast wind and blew the seeds into the woods away from not only our house but all the neighbors. Our neighbors commented that it was the first year ever without the “snow.” It was such a small thing but meant so much to me that God would answer this prayer! It made me love Him more!

If we have a relationship with Him, we experience His love in ways that make Him very dear to us! When that happens, we are more inclined to dwell with Him more often. At times, we may lose track of our relationship with Him, but He continues to pour His love on us anyway and draws us back. That is His way!

DIG DEEPER

- During this Lenten time of focusing on Him, think about the ways in which He has poured out His love on you this year. Who are you sharing these examples of His love with?
- Try to think of times where God’s answer to your prayers was a blessing. How did you celebrate this with the next generation?

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WRITTEN BY DOTTIE JOHNSON

BETTER TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

READ ACTS 20:18-35

Years ago when I was a younger man and raising children, every night I would give my girls a blessing before going to bed. I would pray God's goodness over them and bless them with the joy of Jesus. I wanted my children to know God and the great love He has for them. Through these nightly blessings it was a great opportunity to teach them who God is and to pour my faith into them. My hope was for them to know Jesus and love Him as their own. When my girls left home for college and their own life journey, of course it was difficult to release them. Parental protection and love moved me to keep them close. But they were ready to leave and be on their own. I had prepared them for this time.

There are striking parallels in raising children and the story of the apostle Paul in Acts 20:18-35 when he shared his farewell message with the Elders of the church at Ephesus. This was the Church he founded and invested himself in without reservation night and day for three years admonishing each one with tears. Paul taught them and testified to the good news of the grace of God. He did not shrink back from declaring the whole purpose of God. These Ephesian Elders and Church were his children; albeit only for a short time.

In his parting words Paul warned of difficult days ahead for the Church. There would be external threats (he called them savage wolves) and even internal division within the Elders. Paul had done all he could do for the Ephesians and now they would be on their own. Paul held back nothing. He had given everything, not considering his life of any account as dear to himself.

But this is the way of the Cross...to deny yourself for the benefit of those you love. We sacrifice for our children. Paul sacrificed for the Ephesian Church. And Jesus sacrificed Himself for us on a Cross.

DIG DEEPER

- What do you think of living a sacrificial life such as the Apostle Paul or Jesus?
- Who are you willing to live sacrificially towards so that they will know love for Jesus?

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THE LEGACY OF PRAYING FOR WORLD MISSIONS

READ 3 JOHN 1-8

In 1903, British missionary Amy Carmichael wrote the book *Things as They Are* about what she encountered daily in southern India: “the Principalities, Powers, Rulers of the Darkness, Potentialities unknown and unimagined, gathered up into one stupendous Force.” She conceived of it as “a battle-book, written from a battlefield where the fighting is not pretty play, but stern reality.” In it, she exhorted Christians in the West to pray, and warned readers about “an Energy so awful in operation that descriptive chapters are awful, too.”

There is, indeed, something awful about Carmichael’s book—not only as she describes lives given to sin and hearts hardened against the Gospel, but also as she anticipates readers indifferent to it all. In one chapter, she conjures an imagined scene in which blind women and children stumble into an abyss while those who have the power to intervene amuse themselves making daisy chains. “Are we praying, yea agonizing in prayer?” she implores, “or is prayer but a pleasant exercise?”

I read Carmichael’s book and similar books ten years ago. Out of that season grew a women’s group that still meets Thursday mornings to pray for Eastbrook missionaries and the work to which God has called them. While not all believers are meant to go overseas, I believe we’re all meant to pray, to engage in the kinds of spiritual battles Carmichael describes, battles raging where Jesus is not yet known.

In 3 John, the writer praises his friend for faithfully supporting those who have journeyed to preach the Gospel. As a long-time supporter of missions at Eastbrook Church, I long for the Lord Himself to one day commend us for our faithfulness: for agonizing in prayer, for undergirding those who, *“for the sake of the Name, . . . went out.”*

DIG DEEPER

- What steps are you willing to take to engage or deepen your commitment to prayer and the mission of the Church?
- As you reflect on the meaning of Good Friday, how does that impact your willingness to sacrifice, serve, witness, or pray so that others may know of God’s love for them?

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FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

READ PSALM 78:1-7

My husband has always jokingly defined old age as “ten years from now.” We don’t call it “old age” anymore we call it our “senior years.” After turning 75 last year, the realization that I have more years behind me than I have ahead of me has set in as a reality. I can no longer pretend I am middle-aged. Lest this sound like a lament, let me assure you that it is more like a wake-up call. As a believer I have known of the assignment we all have to give testimony to anyone who will listen of the reality of God’s grace and mercy through his Son Jesus. Therefore, as I read passages like today’s I am made keenly aware my responsibility to tell the next generation of the “trustworthy deeds of the Lord.” As a matter of fact, Scripture gives us reminders of this responsibility worth heeding. Psalm 71:18 says:

*Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation,
your mighty acts to all who are to come.*

Yet we see how God’s clear commands (Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6-7) can and are warped by the enemy of our souls. We see evidence of his strategy in using the generational influence for evil. This is how genocides are formed. This is how racial divides are widened. From “generation to generation”...

So, it is all the more urgent for us to take God’s commands to heart – our assignment is clear. No matter our age, no matter if we are the post war generation, baby boomers, Gen X, millennials, or anything in between:

*we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power, and the wonders he has done... (Psalm 78:4)*

*so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children. (Psalm 78:6)*

May all who come behind us find us faithful.

DIG DEEPER

- How can you be intentional in being a positive influence for God’s Kingdom to the generations to come?



WRITTEN BY GERI KOTERMAN

THE FIRST DAY

READ LUKE 24:1-53

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. (Luke 24:1)

the first day:
walking with heavy loads and burdened hearts
to the place His breathless body lay.
every hour seemed so still
since that dark day.

but now, the first day:
their hesitating procession to the tomb
finds the place, but not Him;
and aching emptiness
meets anger's anxiety.

yet, on the first day
two men send shivers of loud light
mingled with a message:
'He's alive like a new day's dawning!'
and they remember His words.

this first day is the third day
that sends the dark day running.

DIG DEEPER

- Take time on this resurrection morning to celebrate Jesus as the Bringer of life and the satisfier of our hungers. Say words of praise and thanks to Him. Sing a song of celebration. Tell someone else what He has done in your life!

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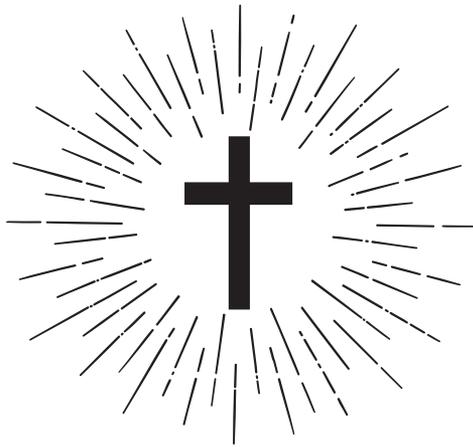
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WRITTEN BY MATT ERICKSON



FAMILY TALK
FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

BEGINNING WITH HUNGER

“That hits the spot!”

Have you ever heard someone say this?

Think about a time when you’ve spent the whole afternoon playing in the snow. You come in the house, shed your snow pants and boots, and you’re *starving!* What would you rather have . . . a popsicle or some hot cocoa and grilled cheese?

Or, how about in summer, when you’ve been on a long hike with your family? You come home, and your mom offers you . . . a hot bowl of chili, or an icy lemonade?

What would *hit the spot*? We say this when something we eat or drink fills our hunger *just right*.

This whole season of Lent—these special weeks leading up to Easter—we’re going to be thinking about what we are hungry for. Not food or drinks or treats, but the kind of deep *wants* that we have. We all want to be loved, we want to feel special, we want everything to be okay, we want to be joyful. All of those *wants* are really “hunger pangs” for Jesus. God has created us so that nothing else will ever “hit the spot” just like He does.

So, how do we fill this hunger? By meeting with God: reading His word, talking to Him in prayer, and watching to see how He shows up in our everyday life. As we do this, we can learn about how He can fill each of our greatest wants. Only He can “hit the spot”!

“A deer thirsts for a stream of water.

In the same way, I thirst for you, God.

I thirst for the living God.

When can I go to meet with him?” (Psalm 42:1,2, ICB)



WEEK 1: SUNDAY, MARCH 10-SATURDAY, MARCH 16

HUNGRY FOR LOVE

When my son Seth was ten years old, he joined the community football team—a very big deal! About a week before the August training camp began, we picked up his schedule, his pads and his uniform. It was so exciting to see our family name written across the back of the jersey, just over a big number “56”. And the helmet—it looked just like the ones that real NFL players wear! Seth was so excited, he slept in his pads that first night!

Maybe you have a uniform, too? A sports team uniform, a scout uniform, a school uniform? Sometimes clubs have secret handshakes or teams have their own special cheers or traditions. We love these things because they *identify us*. They tell the whole world, “Hey, this person belongs to our team! She’s one of us!”

It feels good to have a place where people know us by name, where we “belong.” This is because God has made us to be *loved*. It’s one of our deepest needs. You might not feel lovey-dovey with the rest of the guys on your soccer team, but you *do* know that it feels good to be a part of the team—that good feeling is a kind of love.

Someday you will outgrow your T-ball team or your scout troop, but you will never outgrow God’s love for you. This week, we will be reading Bible verses all about God’s love. Before anyone else ever knew us, God LOVED us! We don’t deserve His love, and we can’t do anything to earn it—He just plain-old loves us! He showed it by sending Jesus to rescue us.

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- Describe some place where you “belong”—your family, a team, a club, your Sunday School class? Why does it feel so good to know that we “belong”?
- How does God show His love for us—in big ways and in small everyday ways?
- God’s love overflows in our hearts, and makes us want to love others too. Can you think of someone who really needs to be shown love this week? How can you do this?



WEEK 2: SUNDAY, MARCH 17-SATURDAY, MARCH 23

HUNGRY FOR GREATNESS

Have you ever had a close-up look at snowflakes? In some ways, snowflakes are a lot alike. They are all cold, tiny, white, and have six sides or points. By themselves, snowflakes don't last long and don't seem to be very important. But, together, snowflakes can make something really beautiful—or they can cause a lot of trouble!

But, here's the thing . . . each snowflake is different from every other snowflake! No matter how alike they might seem, no two are exactly the same!

That's how it is with people. God has made each of them different from all the rest! Even if you are an identical twin, you and your family know the differences between you. Everything God makes—including people—is an original masterpiece!

Some people like to brag about winning, or about being the fastest, or the best, or the strongest. But, when God looks at each of us, He sees “snowflakes”—each beautiful and different from all the rest.

You might think that there is nothing special about you, but God disagrees. He already has special plans for you, and as you follow Him closely, He will grow you into exactly the kind of person—different from everyone else—who can live out His awesome plans!

“I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.” (Jeremiah 29:11, The Message)

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- Name some ways that you feel just like everyone else. Then, name some ways that you feel different from everyone else.
- Has God allowed some really hard things to happen to you? How does it help to know that God has good plans for you—plans to bring you out of trouble?
- How does knowing that God has created everyone to be His masterpiece change the way you treat others?



WEEK 3: SUNDAY, MARCH 24-SATURDAY, MARCH 30

HUNGRY FOR JOY

So, sometime this year you have a birthday coming up! What's that one special gift you're asking for? Or, is it a special party—bowling, a pool party, a bounce house? What are you most excited for? (Or, did you just have a birthday? Think back on it—What was the best thing about it?)

A lot of the time, we think that when we have that one more thing, life will be complete! We'll be totally happy, and we'll never ask for another thing again.

Until we do.

Because, cool toys and awesome experiences are great for a little while, but then, something even BETTER shows up. *Now, if we could just have that . . .*

King Solomon was a man in the Bible who had *everything!* When he first became king, Solomon asked God for wisdom, so that he could be a good king. God was pleased with this prayer, and He gave Solomon amazing wisdom, plus so much more. Solomon built an incredible temple for worship, and a pretty nice palace for himself! He had 1,400 chariots, 12,000 horses and a whole fleet of trading ships bringing him cool things from all around the world—things like gold, silver, ivory and even baboons! (See 1 Kings 10:22-23, 26.)

But, here's what Solomon said years later, when he became old: *“The person who loves money will never have all the money he wants. The person who loves wealth will not be satisfied when he gets it.” (Ecclesiastes 5:10, ICB).*

In the end, Solomon understood that, if all we're hoping for is that *one more thing*, it will disappoint us after a while. But, Jesus' joy does not disappoint. As we grow, God changes our ideas of what brings us real joy, and we learn that His joy is better than anything we put on a birthday list. It carries us through all the seasons of our life.

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- Some of the best “gifts” we have been given do not come in boxes. What are some of the best non-thing gifts you've been given?
- Look out your window. What are some God-made things that give you joy?



WEEK 4: SUNDAY, MARCH 31-SATURDAY, APRIL 6

HUNGRY TO KNOW

Have you ever lain in the grass on a summer night and looked up at the stars? You begin to wonder things like: *How many stars are really out there? How far away are they? Why are some bigger than others? Are they bigger than our house . . . our country . . . the planet earth?* No matter how many years of school we finish, there are still so many things to wonder about!

Sometimes, it's frustrating not to know what everyone else seems to know. Has this ever happened to you: you walk up to your mom or dad or older siblings and you ask them what they're talking about. "Never mind," they tell you, "You're too young to understand." *It drives you crazy!*

God has given us amazing minds—minds that are curious and that want to learn new things. Have you ever watched a baby crawl around and put *everything* into his mouth? He's just trying to learn about the world around him! See, we are made in God's image. Because God Himself is a scientist, an inventor, and an artist, we were created to learn about the world by experimenting, inventing, and creating, too.

God gave us these curious minds so that we would want to know Him. God is *soooooo* big, so powerful and so loving—it takes our whole lives to learn about Him. The apostle Paul says that Jesus is like a "mystery," and that He is full of secret "treasures" (Colossians 2:2-3).

Our whole life can be a treasure hunt to know more of God and His word!

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- What are some "big" questions you have about God? Talk about them together as a family.
- Remember that the apostle Paul said that knowing Jesus is like a secret treasure. What are some "jewels"—some special truths about Him—that make you want to praise Him?



WEEK 5: SUNDAY, APRIL 7-SATURDAY, APRIL 13

HUNGRY FOR PEACE

How do I know that my toys won't be lost on the way to the new house?

Which box are my socks in?

There's nothing in the fridge—what are we gonna eat?

If you and your family have ever moved, you've probably asked these questions. When you move, everything that you're used to is turned upside-down. You have to learn where all of your things belong in the new house. You have to unpack boxes just to find something to wear. You have to learn all about your neighbors and make new friends.

It can be really fun to explore a new house, but it can rock your world, too! That's how it is with any big change in life—moving to a new place, getting really sick, or especially something sad like parents who are divorcing. All of these things can make us worry about what is next.

We just want to know that everything is going to be okay. Jesus knows this. He told His followers to take a lesson from the birds and the flowers. Birds don't stock kitchen shelves, but God feeds them. And flowers don't worry about what to wear—God makes them beautiful just by being themselves! You are way more important to God than birds and flowers. If God takes care of them, won't He also take care of you?

Jesus knows what we need, even before we ask! If we put Him first in all things, He promises to give us what we need, and to replace our worry with His peace.

"All the people who don't know God keep trying to get these things. And your Father in heaven knows that you need them. The thing you should want most is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. Then all these other things you need will be given to you"

(Matthew 6:32-33, ICB)

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- Can you think of someone whose world is “upside down” right now? How can you be a friend to that person, and point them to Jesus?
- What does it look like to “put Jesus first”?
- Is there something in your world that is upside down? Talk and pray about it with your family.



WEEK 6: SUNDAY, APRIL 14-SATURDAY, APRIL 20

HUNGRY TO LEAVE A LEGACY

If you go to Green Bay, you might visit the “Packer Hall of Fame,” a special museum all about the Packers. It has cool exhibits like the Lombardy trophies from the Super Bowl, and even a spot where you can try your own Lambeau Leap!

But, what is a “Hall of Fame” all about? The Hall of Fame is “committed to preserving and advancing the storied history of the Green Bay Packers.”¹ In other words, it helps us remember and honor the best players.

The Bible has a chapter that some people call a “Hall of Faith”--Hebrews 11. It lists Bible people and the brave things they have done. Some of them did super-hero things for God; other times, the very same people really messed up! But, all of them did have faith in God, and what *He could do through them*. They didn’t try to be important on their own; their faith in action is why we remember them.

We all like to be awarded, and we hope to be remembered for doing great things. That’s because God has created us with a desire to “live on”. Some of our accomplishments are only for here-and-now, but what we do for God will last. It will “live on” because it was really God’s work all along.

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being sure of what we do not see. That is what the people of long ago were praised for.” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV)

FAMILY TALK QUESTIONS:

- Who are some of the people you most admire? What is it about them that makes you remember them?
- Do you have family members or friends who have died? What do you remember about them? (Take time to thank God for them and what they meant to you.)
- How is God using your family to make a difference in the lives of others? How will they remember you?



SUNDAY, APRIL 21

EASTER SUNDAY

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.” (Luke 24:1)

The women walk toward the tomb in silence. They loved Jesus—He had turned their lives around! And now, He was gone. What would they do next? Everything seemed darker, colder, sadder.

The only sound . . . their gravely footsteps, slowing now as they approach the tomb. Looking ahead, they strain their eyes. Something isn't right. The stone has moved!

Who did this?

Where are the guards?

Will Jesus' body still be there?

Suddenly, they blink! There's a hot-white light blazing at them. Two lightning-men stand beside them!

The women jump down low.

But, the men seem to smile. “Why do you look for a living person here? This is a place for the dead,” one of them says. “Don't you remember what Jesus told you—that He would be put to death on the cross, and then rise again on the third day?”

Slowly the women get back on their feet. *Friday, Saturday, Sunday* they count. *The third day!*

Suddenly, everything sad became undone. The sky was brighter, the air was warmer, and their footsteps were lighter!

If Jesus is really alive, then He is who He claimed to be. If Jesus is alive, then He has power over life and death. If Jesus is alive, we can still be with Him!

If Jesus is alive . . . everything has changed *forever!*

“But Christ has truly been raised from death—the first one and proof that those who are asleep in death will also be raised.” (1 Corinthians 15:20, ICB)



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WORKS CITED:

1. All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 2011.



We all have deep longings and hungers that propel us forward in life. Just like physical hunger leads us to food to satisfy our bodies, there are deeper hungers within us which need to be satisfied for us to experience life at its fullest.

St. Augustine of Hippo famously wrote of God: "Our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in You." It is when our souls are resting in God that we can truly find the hungers of our lives filled in Him and in appropriate relation to the world around us.

During this six week journey through the season of Lent, we will invite God to reshape our hungers and satisfy us with Himself. We will explore the hungers of our souls, how God fills those deep hungers through Christ, and the ways in which we can lean into our hungers to experience life with God more fully and with greater satisfaction.

