

# crossroads

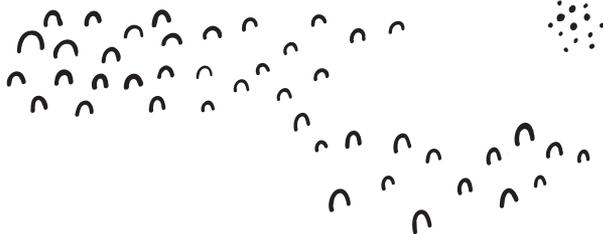
A Lenten Devotional

*Wm. x*  
*crossroads*

A 2017 Lenten Devotional  
by the people of Eastbrook Church

# 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. Decide whether you want to invite your friends, family, Life Group, or other small group to join you.
3. Begin each day by reading the Scripture 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. If you are a parent, use the “Family Talk” piece each day to have a discussion with your kids. Several Family Talks ask parents to tell a personal story. Children especially love to hear stories of when their parents were young. They get very interested in hearing how their parents messed up and were redeemed. As a parent, be sure to give yourself enough time to think of a story before you come together as a family.
6. Use the online version of the devotional readings to reach out to friends online and around the world. Invite them to follow along with you during Lent this year. Find the online version at **[eastbrook.org/crossroadsdevotional](http://eastbrook.org/crossroadsdevotional)**. Use Eastbrook’s Facebook page ([facebook.com/eastbrookchurch](https://facebook.com/eastbrookchurch)) and other social media outlets such as Twitter and Instagram ([@eastbrookchurch](https://twitter.com/eastbrookchurch)) to share ideas.
7. Post your comments, thoughts, and questions in the online version. Read others’ comments. This is a great way to learn from the perspectives of others.



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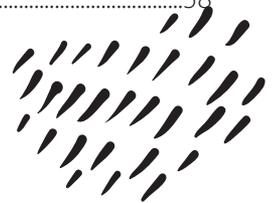
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introduction <sup>x</sup>

# at the crossroads

Read Luke 9:21-27 + Matthew 16:21-23.

*“And Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.’” (Luke 9:22)<sup>1</sup>*

Today we begin a journey with Jesus toward the Cross. This journey is bound up with Jesus’ identity as the Messiah (Luke 9:20) and His mission *“to proclaim the year of the Lords’ favor”* (4:19). The journey begins with the sober reality that Jesus’ identity and mission lead Him to death on the Cross. Yet the joyful reality is that the Cross leads to the resurrection and life for all.

It is important to notice that immediately after Peter’s declaration that Jesus is *“God’s Messiah”* (9:20), Jesus opens the secret that the Messiah *“will suffer many things...be killed and on the third day be raised to life”* (9:22). The suffering and death of Jesus are not the end. They are spiritual warfare bringing liberation and life for humanity.

Jesus instructs His disciples that the way toward real life leads all who follow Him to a crossroads of death to self: *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”* (9:23). This self-denial takes us beyond our sin-smirched, broken selves into a right, restored self as God intended us to be through Jesus Christ. A prisoner only wants freedom if he recognizes he is in prison. One who is sick only longs for healing if sickness is identified. The spiritually lost only desire to be found if the lostness is named.

Our journey within this devotional is a crossroads encounter before God. Once again, we focus upon the sober reality of the Cross in order to prepare us for the joyful reality of the resurrection. Join the journey today!



**Dig Deeper**—What sort of spiritual crossroads are you at in your life right now? Determine today to complete this Lenten devotional. What will you need to sacrifice in your schedule to do so?

**Family Talk**—When have you felt that nobody liked you? Have you ever been treated cruelly? Jesus knows how that feels. What can you do when you feel this way?

# the crux of the matter

Read Luke 9:43-50 + Matthew 17:22-23.

*Crux* is Latin for cross. Jesus tells us to really listen, because what He is saying is the crux of the matter—basic, decisive, pivotal. His disciples don't get it. It is utterly incomprehensible. He has healed the untouchables, Moses and Elijah have appeared and talked with Him, the crowds love Him! But there it is again: the Cross. He, the Son of Man, fully God and fully human, will be given over to men, profoundly betrayed, and killed. This deeply troubled, even grieved His followers, but only briefly as they continued to think about their own lives and importance. Nobody could hear or understand that the crux of His story was coming soon, a story of love made perfect in suffering.

I don't fully understand it either, even with the benefit of the whole picture of His resurrection and abiding with us. I'm a "good American"! I don't like suffering. I want to be accepted and liked, and considered tolerant and kind. Doesn't being a Christian mean love, safety and peace? I hate rejection, betrayal and pain. But slowly, over the years, I am learning to let the truth of who our Messiah is sink in. I am learning to embrace rejection and betrayal as tiny windows into His pain.

In our Living Waters groups, we have a big wooden cross. We are invited to go to it and confess our sins and pour our wounds out. We receive God's forgiveness, comfort, and healing. That's the real heart of the matter for me today—learning to walk the rhythm of the Cross. I am learning to accept suffering and offer it back to God so that He transforms it into life. I am learning to abide with the One who loves us so much.



**Dig Deeper**— Has God ever broken through a superficial understanding of His love through your experience of personal pain or betrayal? Write a prayer of thanksgiving for what you have learned. Reflect on some ways that you can imitate Jesus and *"set your face like a flint towards Jerusalem."* Allow His words to sink into your lifestyle of trust in unexplained suffering.

**Family Talk**— Make a cross together to display during this season of Lent. It could be made of paper, clay, wood, branches, or other materials. It could be painted, drawn, or otherwise decorated. Let the cross be a reminder of Jesus' death for us.

# a clash of expectations

Read Luke 18:31-34 + Matthew 20:17-19.

Seven years into marriage, my husband and I felt God's leading away from our newlywed home back to the Midwest. We joyfully packed, our newborn daughter in tow, and moved to Milwaukee. We felt God restoring us to four seasons and extended family; what would follow but blessing and peace? (How naive to look back now!) Over the next ten years we encountered loneliness, depression, job stress, health problems, and marital issues. We questioned God. Were we being punished? Did we misinterpret His call? Why would He allow stumbling through thorns and rocks in the valley when we expected the tranquility of the mountaintop? Our expectation of God's calling was a rosy-hued vision out of line with the reality of living in a fallen world. Ultimately, we learned to walk through difficulty while dependent on Him, which produced spiritual growth and maturity. Ease does not equal growth.

Imagine yourself as His disciple. You have been astonished, watching Jesus heal people, calm storms, even raise the dead. You abandoned everything to follow Him. You correctly identify Jesus as the promised Messiah, and expect the earthly anointed king who will restore David's throne.

Jesus, for the third time, explains the reality of what awaits Him in Jerusalem. He speaks to correct your vision of what is to come with the truth of what will happen in His death. Prophecy will be fulfilled. He will be mocked, insulted, and killed. He will rise again.

After your mighty leader is killed, what might you experience? How would that shake your belief? Jesus knows the upcoming separation from Him will bring sorrow and fear. He prepares His disciples so that, even though they could not comprehend His words initially, they will remember on the third day and beyond. He leads them from their narrow interpretation of God's ultimate plan into a greater and better reality than they could have envisioned.



**Dig Deeper**— When have you experienced your expectations clashing with God's reality? What was the result of that difficult time? How did you experience God's provision in your struggle?

**Family Talk**— Parents, share a story about a difficult time you faced while obediently following Jesus. How did you see God work?



lord of the  
sabbath

# sabbath rest 24/7

Read Luke 6:1-5.

Then read Exodus 20:8-11 + Isaiah 58:13-14.

If you were brought up like me, you may remember that Sundays were about rules. The fourth commandment to honor the Sabbath day became no work and no play.

In this passage, we see Jesus revealing really big ideas about Himself, in addition to standing up to the Pharisees who have now begun their scheming against Him. When Jesus says *"The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath,"* He is telling those around Him that He is Creator God and the One who indeed rested on the seventh day. In the parallel account in Mark He adds, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

The Jews would have understood this. In Exodus, when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the fourth commandment derived from God's rest after seeing that everything He had made was good. It was established in the beginning, and it was "for man" as was all of creation. It was not just a Jewish law but guidance for all people from the very beginning, part of God's provision for those He made in His image.

Jesus told His followers that He had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. How does that fit here? It means that God in Christ has provided the means by which we can enter a continual state of resting in His grace. And so like the rest of the commandments, the fourth commandment is not a rule by which we obtain His approval but grace by which you and I are able to gladly obey. It shows us how to live in the freedom He has provided on the Cross.



**Dig Deeper**— Look again at Isaiah 58:13-14. Think about how your Sundays are or could be a "delight" and a "joy." How do you show that Jesus is the Lord of your Sabbath?

**Family Talk**— Plan some ways your family can intentionally experience a Sabbath together. First, brainstorm for ideas, letting everyone contribute. Then, decide which activities you will do and set aside Sabbath time for them.

# looking for the good

Read Luke 6:6-11.

Jesus was in the synagogue, getting ready to heal someone—how exciting! This should have been a joyous occasion, but instead the Pharisees and teachers missed it. They didn't look for the good, but instead looked specifically for ways that Jesus was "breaking the law."

How do I respond to Jesus being the Lord of the Sabbath? Am I eager to participate in His plan, or am I quick to find reasons not to see God working? If I'm honest, I have to say that I don't like change; I fight with God every step of the way. When God pushes me into new places, I have to force myself to see what God desires. It is hard to get beyond what is comfortable: family life, work, ministry and other responsibilities that easily fit within my comfort zone. Yet, I don't want to miss what God is doing, like the Pharisees did, even if it is uncomfortable. I desire to be part of the solution, not looking for the negative, but instead seeing how God is at work.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were in the synagogue looking to accuse, not looking for ways to engage in worship. Have you ever done this? How do you enter into worship? Are you looking to worship, to fellowship and engage with what God is doing in the church, city and world? Or do you find yourself distracted by something that is outside of your comfort zone?

I don't know about you, but I don't want to complain and look at how I don't like what God is up to. I want to discover the good things that God is doing and see His hand wherever I am. My desire is to see the good in His work no matter what, just like when He healed the man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath.



**Dig Deeper**—Re-read Luke 6:6-11. What were the Pharisees and teachers in the synagogue really there to do? What was Jesus there to do? What can you learn from the two different perspectives given in this passage?

**Family Talk**—Make a list of things your family likes about your church community. Take time to encourage someone in your community who makes it a place to grow closer to Jesus.

# a shift in perspective

Read Matthew 12:9-14.

Having the proper perspective on a situation can be difficult. Often we're standing too close to see the overall picture or too far away to understand that there's an issue at all. We miss the obvious. We fixate on one aspect of the whole. We misinterpret the circumstances because we are consumed by our hope, fear, agenda, prejudice, arrogance, guilt, worry, or whatever else. And sometimes we don't ask the pertinent questions because we simply don't see the real problem.

Jesus took a question about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath and reframed the dialogue to get to the heart of the matter. He was shifting everyone's perspective.

Would you save a helpless creature? *Yes, of course I would.* Even on a Sabbath? *Yes, I would.* Would you try to save a helpless human then? *Yes, I think so.* They're worth more than a sheep, you know. *Yes, of course. You're right. Yes, I'd help.* Even in the face of opposition? Even when you are judged negatively for it? *Um... probably.* What if you do this thing and not only are unpopular for it, but you're despised for it? What if someone wanted to kill you for it? Would you still take my perspective about what is good, what is lawful?

I don't know the answer to these questions. My way gets lost and blurred all the time. Confusion sets in and it all feels hard, overwhelming and tiring. I realize that I have lost true perspective. *Jesus, I can't know what is good outside of you! Please Jesus, what questions should be asked? Of you? Of me? Of those around me? Please! Move my heart in response to your Spirit so I may have the confidence of your good and perfect perspective.*



**Dig Deeper**—What areas in your life could use a perspective shift? What specific steps could you take to feel the confidence of knowing God's perspective in daily situations?

**Family Talk**—Go to a website to look at objects close-up and try to identify them. A similar thing happens when you are very far away from an object. God is able to see and know what everything is, while we often see only a part of a situation.

# rem of the soul

Read Exodus 20:8-10.

"How are you?" "Busy." Sound familiar?

I'm a stay-at-home mom of twin two-and-a-half-year-old girls and a 16-month-old baby girl. I work part time and attend grad school. About a year ago, I reached full-on burn out. The Lord showed me the importance of Sabbath and thus began my Saturday "Mom's Morning." My husband takes the kids and I go somewhere to just "be." It has changed everything.

We sometimes experience an exhaustion of the soul that goes beyond the superficiality of physical tiredness. This is our spirit's call for the Sabbath. Tim Keller calls Sabbath "soul rest" or the "REM of the soul."<sup>2</sup> We are told we need 8 hours of sleep and, technically, if we took 8 one-hour naps each day, we could meet the quota. However, sleep experts tell us that in order to get totally restorative rest, we need an extended period of time in order to reach deep sleep that restores the body. The same is true of our souls. The Sabbath is an extended time where we are liberated from work and commitments, where we can trust God to provide, and we experience restoration.

We all need to be a bit more trusting, like Chick-fil-A, a fast food chain that is closed on Sundays and holidays. This seems like madness in the business world because of the "lost" business opportunities. Yet, Chick-fil-A is the most profitable fast food chain in America by a landslide.<sup>3</sup> Their trust in God's provision trumps the "need" for business. Their counterintuitive trust that God will provide has proven results.

We all need to trust that taking regular extended time out for rest, deep reflection and praise will end up giving us more than it costs us. Let's take time to drop the "busy" for His glory and our good.



**Dig Deeper**—What holds you back from being able to free yourself of commitments for a designated time? Is there a way for you to designate a rhythmic, consistent Sabbath time to just "be?" What time could you set aside regularly?

**Family Talk**—List reasons why people may not want to take a rest. Why is rest important?

# the right to overrule

Read Luke 13:10-17.

A powerful truth strikes the reader of this passage: Jesus is absolute Lord over all. He has utter and total freedom to do precisely as He pleases, and He is not to be questioned in the process.

Jesus finds someone in a most wretched state, someone who has suffered forever, someone who is in daily misery, and according to Him, "bound by Satan." In His compassion, Jesus releases her, freeing her from the bondage of suffering. Having personally seen a cancer victim live far beyond their doctor's predictions, the power of Christ to overrule nature both warms my heart and sends chills up my spine. Christ has the power and right to overrule.

This passage shows that He is sovereign in His mercy to the suffering individual. By healing a long-standing ailment, Jesus showed His sovereignty over the physical boundaries He has put in place as Creator. Healing her, He overruled the effects of DNA and normal biological processes.

He also overruled the very Sabbath He put in place in order to work an act of mercy, living out Hosea 6:6, "*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*" He overruled His own law, because He is Lord of all. He overruled Satan himself for He is sovereign over Satan who had bound the woman through the years. The greatest of the fallen angels must obey the Sovereign Lord.

By overruling synagogue leaders, He shows He will not be questioned by petty religious leaders and that He alone is sovereign in judging the integrity of men. Jesus demonstrates His sovereign Lordship over all, and He will bring to shame even the most powerful religious authority who demonstrates unfounded arrogance in His presence. Jesus overrules all.



**Dig Deeper**— What areas of your life (relationships, schedule, etc.) do you need to submit to the sovereignty of Christ?

**Family Talk**— God is the boss. Talk about what that means. When is it easy to let God be the boss? When is it hard?

# a friend's godly example

Read John 5:1-15.

During my time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I learned much about the Sabbath—thoughts that remain on my heart to this day.

Being situated practically on the Equator, the work day coincided with the natural light and the work week covered a full six days. The contrast of the Sabbath day was something that struck me right away.

The friend I lived with shared his weekly Sabbath practice with me—early worship followed by time at his late wife's grave while fasting and meditating on God's Word. I must admit that after the worship service, a day spent in utter quiet was a bit of a challenge for someone coming from our culture of distraction. Slowly but surely, I appreciated the intermittent electricity and lack of media while my focus shifted to mind wandering, the lapping of waves on Lake Kivu, and the rustling of swaying palm branches. Because of Goma's history and current challenges, the word "peace" is not the first word that comes to mind but I truly experienced "peace that transcends all understanding" which only comes from God. I felt distractions fade to the background and Jesus take His preeminent role.

I observed my friend set aside a day for the Lord and I know how much it meant to him every week. I noticed people, some who risked dangerous treks through the bush, come unannounced to see my friend on these days too. Because of his prominent stature in his home village, more than likely, these visits included a request of some sort. Never once did I see him turn anyone away. Never once did I see him by word or action discard a person or family as if they were interrupting his special day. He did what our Lord does here in this passage. He "saw" and he "asked" (v.6). I learned from my dear friend because my friend knew who the Lord of the Sabbath is—it is Jesus alone.



**Dig Deeper**—What would your ideal Sabbath practice look like? What steps can you take to implement this?

**Family Talk**—Think together about who your family could invite in and encourage. Plan to invite them.

# the bigger picture

Read John 5:16-18.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders' perception of Scripture and God. His ministry is revolutionary. In this passage we see Jesus not only challenge their legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath, but also their understanding of who Jesus was—not simply a prophet or teacher, but the Son of God. He came to fulfill Scripture and help us understand the nature of who God is.

Jesus is telling the Jewish leaders that the concept of Sabbath points to an eternal reality. The leaders are so obsessed with following the rules of the Sabbath that they miss the bigger picture. In Genesis, God created the world in 6 days and then He rested. Here, Jesus is suggesting that God is still creating—we exist in the sixth day. Our practice of Sabbath rest points to an eternal rest that we will experience when God finishes His work of redemption in the world. In some ways the Sabbath is supposed to be a tangible image of heaven.

It is so easy for Christians to become caught up in the legalism of commandments that we miss the bigger picture—the eternal goal of perfection in God. Instead of pointing out the obvious flaws or shortcomings in others, we should be working to create a more loving, accepting community that reflects the perfection of God and His Kingdom to the rest of the world.



**Dig Deeper**—How do you think a proper observance of Sabbath can be a testimony to those around us? How can we reflect the beauty and love of God's Kingdom through this practice?

**Family Talk**—What can your family do to encourage others in your church community? Perhaps you could choose one other family to share a Sabbath day with.



the new  
temple

# blessed is the king

Read Luke 19:28-40.

"Blessed is the King!" This was the joyful song of the crowd of disciples as Jesus rode on a borrowed colt into Jerusalem that day—a song of praise for all the miracles they had seen. The song comes from Psalm 118:26, and verse 27 of that psalm tells us the procession should continue, with boughs in hand, all the way to the altar in the Temple. Emotion was high! The King was coming, and the crowd anticipated seeing more miracles. What would Jesus do for them now? Little did they know...

I have sometimes been caught up with emotion in a worship service (maybe you have too), wanting Jesus to be my King... but a King who will give me what I think I need, who pleases me. But do I want Him to be King *over* my life (v.27)? Will I serve Him? Will I give Him what He wants? Will I let Him use my "colt," my precious possession? Did He really need my childlessness? Couldn't I give Him something else? No! He asked for the most precious thing I had to give, the thing that had ruled my heart and my emotions.

Jesus' destination was the altar. He was going to give His all for me. So what could I say? "Lord, take this little 'colt' of mine and somehow get glory for yourself." Please come and reign in my life and let me bring joyful praise to you! *"Blessed be your name on the road marked by suffering, when there's pain in the offering. Blessed be your name!"*<sup>4</sup>



**Dig Deeper**— Is there something in your life you value above all else (relationship, dream, etc.)? Worship God as your King today as you personalize and pray through Psalm 145, offering to Him that thing that has ruled your heart and emotions so that He may use it to bring glory to His own name.

**Family Talk**— Make a crown from paper and together decorate it with drawings and words that praise and worship Jesus as King.

## in

Read Psalm 118:26-27 + Zechariah 9:9.

Contemplate and think about one little word: in.

Jesus came to be *in* the world, to redeem the world *in* the name of the LORD. Not 'to,' 'above,' or 'beyond' us, but *in*; side by side with us, Emmanuel.

Being humble in nature and action, Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a work beast, a colt, an unbridled donkey to fulfill the prophecy of old from Zechariah. He came blessed by God to be examined and found worthy as a perfect redeeming sacrifice. Not an atonement only good for a year like the bloody beasts of Passover but divine holy blood, shed once for all.

Jesus offered Himself on the Cross to buy us back, forever, with our sin remembered no more by the Father. We are *in* Him.

He became the eternal temple of praise and redemption for all of us for all eternity. What a marvel! What a mystery!

We recently returned from a trip to Spain, Italy and France. What we learned is the grand, glorious testimony Jesus has given the faithful. From the art in the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, to Vatican City in Rome, to Sacré Coeur and the Louvre in France. Jesus is faithful to His faithful and offers grace and truth to us all. All we have to do is ask: "Lord help me see it, I am blind." The temple of God is *in* His Son Christ Jesus.



**Dig Deeper**—What does it mean for you that Jesus is in the world and life with us? Find a piece of art (painting, sculpture, song, poem, etc.) that will help you experience and appreciate God in a new way.

**Family Talk**—Using a search engine, find a piece of artwork that depicts a scene showing the passion of Jesus. Have each family member tell what they see and how it makes them feel. How will you respond to God as you think about this?

# when the crowds depart

Read John 12:12-16.

I am not sure where I learned to worship Jesus with emotion and waving of hands like the large crowds around Jesus. I remember in high school, standing on the platform in church during our Missions Fest with a huge flag from Burkina Faso in my hands, watching the 8 AM worshippers praising God with all of their strength. Then there were the Sunday Night youth leaders who sang to God with loud music, shouts, and all their hearts. Somewhere along the way, I learned to use emotion in lifting praises to God. But emotions come and go and can ultimately die out. The crowds depart. The weekend retreat or emotional high in worship stops.

In high school, an older lady from my church spent time with me and one other girl once a week. She taught us that beyond the emotions of a great worship service or retreat, in order to grow in our relationship with our Savior, we needed to know His word and spend time talking with and listening to Him each day. She taught us the importance of reading the entire Word of God, Old and New Testament. How else would one know that Zechariah sings of this humble Savior on a donkey hundreds of years before He comes? How else could one learn that God is faithful to fulfill His promises, even when most human hopes fade?

She told us to take a journal and record a passage of Scripture that struck us from the chapter of the Bible we were reading and to write down our prayers. This would help us to remember the works of God in the past and currently in our own lives. Then we would be able to join in with the disciples and remember the way in which God is true to His promises, fulfilling each one in the past and continuing to do so in the present. This sort of daily walk with our Savior is unseen, doesn't always feel good, but keeps us walking with God when the crowds wither.



**Dig Deeper**—When the emotions fade and the crowds depart, are you quietly spending time with your Savior in the Word of God? Do you take time each day to listen to God through His Word and talk to Him? Record some of this in a journal in order to remember your experiences with God.

**Family Talk**—Have each person take some time to draw or write a response to the reading (John 12:12-16). Share your response and talk about how it felt to respond on paper.

# the end game

Read Luke 19:41-44 + Psalm 137:7-9.

How is it possible to be at peace when there is sorrow and suffering in the world? Do you ever wonder why God doesn't intervene? I have. God, where were you...

- When I was a child, waking up to discover that my mom had vanished? (A time when her first suicide attempt was *hidden from my eyes*.)
- When I was taken to live in a new house, with a new family? (A time when evil *surrounded me*.)
- When I was reunited with my mom, who had remarried a violent alcoholic? (A time when chaos *closed in on every side*.)
- When I was devastated by the division in my family? (A time when *peace was smashed to the ground*.)

Psalm 3:4 encourages us in times of trouble, to cry out to the Lord, who answers us from His holy hill: "*I am here, at the Cross...*" While evil things may still happen to us, around us, and through us, God's presence at the Cross was an absolute game changer. Consider this: God is like a Grandmaster in chess, fully aware of the opening, middle and end game.

When Jesus died *at the Cross*, it was a calculated, strategic move, executed on our behalf. Who would have ever thought that God had the upper hand when he allowed the King of Kings to be positioned into checkmate? Yet, death was His strategy all along. Unlike chess, it didn't end at checkmate, for God's end game was the resurrection!

God used hidden tactics to catch the enemy off-guard. Perhaps we, too, are dumbfounded by what He allows in our lives. In troubled times, we may feel like an abandoned pawn, but it was Jesus, not us, who was forsaken. The *peace that transcends all understanding* is ours yesterday, today, and tomorrow, because God maintains the upper hand.



**Dig Deeper**— Alexander Maclaren said that peace is not the absence of what's wrong, but the presence of what's right. How can you experience peace in times of trouble? Rather than keeping a list of wrongs, take note of the ways that God has the power to use suffering for good. How has He used your sorrow and suffering for good?

**Family Talk**— As a family, make a list of the good things God has done for you this year.

# desire

Read Luke 19:45-48 + Isaiah 56:4-7.

In Luke 19:48 it says the people “*hung on his words*.” The people desired to know and learn from Jesus, not out of duty or obligation as the Pharisees and Sadducees did, but out of a yearning to know God in their hearts. Deep down they knew their hearts longed for the peace and satisfaction that only Jesus could give them. His words were precious and held value, so the people desired to hear them and to know them.

What happens when we make our relationship with Christ centered around rules and regulations? I fall into this trap too many times. I make judgments about someone’s faith based upon whether they go to church every Sunday, how many times they read the Bible and how often they pray. But this should not be the case! If prayer is done out of obligation, is it really sincere? If going to church is out of obligation, is it really affective? If reading the Bible is out of obligation, are we really learning? If our hearts truly desire God, our prayers, reading the Bible and church attendance flow out of a desire for Him. Fulfilling actions alone does not produce a fruitful relationship.

In the church often there is this thought that the more we follow the rules, the better our lives will be. This is true to some extent, but we can become so obsessed with following the rules that we do not allow people to desire, to be passionate, to yearn for life, or to be beautiful. Our duty to God should flow from our love for Him and an understanding that His laws bring life—not from fear. While Jesus did speak of final judgment, fear was not the way He brought people to Him. He healed, like the paralytic man by the pool; He listened, like the Samaritan woman by the well; and He saved, by His death on the Cross. Jesus came to save by giving life and desire to those around Him; He was truly the new temple.



**Dig Deeper**—When have rules gotten in the way of building your relationship with God? How do you think rules and relationship can work together in your life as you pursue God?

**Family Talk**—Write a family poem about who Jesus is to you. It doesn’t have to rhyme. It could be a Haiku or a rap. If you want, you could take the melody of a simple song and write new words.

# sanctified: let's act like it

Read John 2:13-17 + Psalm 69:6-9.

Loved ones, I am convicted by these passages. My heart and life can become like the temple from which Jesus had to expel the money changers. I enjoy God's creation rather than bowing before the Creator. I hungrily consume news and media in the very moments when I should be committing my day to Him. So often we entertain ourselves in every imaginable way, but neglect our relationship with the precious Father. How often do I endure scorn for the sake of Jesus? Rarely. Does zeal for God's house and His work consume me? I certainly care, but I am by no means consumed.

Praise Jesus that His sacrifice has saved me from sin's curse, but woe to us who have been redeemed and take it for granted. The Holy Spirit within magnifies the Lord in my heart for His grace and mercy, and fills me with gratitude when my mind forgets His goodness. Rigorous honesty reminds us of the need for diligent defense of the life and liberty provided by our Savior. Miraculously, Christ's death and resurrection frees us from the guilt and shame that come as a result of deviation from God's way for us.

Just as the temple was sanctified for worship and sacrifice to the Living God, so our hearts have been purified and set apart for His purposes. Pray today that the Holy Spirit will make His will your will. Let His strength be your strength. May God's master plan be our deepest desire and the object of our affection and motivation. Let us seek His kingdom and righteousness first, and in so doing, keep our hearts undefiled by the world's enterprises, but instead let us be consumed with zeal for the heart of God.



**Dig Deeper**— During Lent, we solemnly remember Christ's humiliation and sacrifice. How is the Lord asking you to humble yourself, and what is He asking you to sacrifice for Him?

**Family Talk**— As a family, list five ways that you can show Jesus He is the most important thing in your lives. Together, commit to doing them.

# tearing down

Read Matthew 21:12-17 + Jeremiah 7:9-11.

When I read these passages it reminds me of a friend I had back at school: I'll call him John. Sometimes I lovingly call him "Marxist John" because when I jokingly asked him if he knew of any Marxist groups I could look into, he offered me pamphlets. The thing about John is that he's also one of the most clearly passionate followers of Christ I've ever met.

Looking at the passage from Jeremiah, the problem is not that the people weren't worshiping properly, it's that the rest of their lives didn't match up with God's ways. Greed was their sacred cow. They lied, swindled and didn't take care of the poor. When Jesus drives out people from the Temple it's not because commerce was strictly wrong in that space; trade and the selling of sacrifices would have been commonplace and normal. It is that the trade that was taking place was exploitative. Money was being changed unjustly; the poor were being exploited.

People don't like my friend John, or at least a lot of people don't. He's seen as either too divisive, inflammatory, or abrasive. Yet really what he's doing is revealing our sacred cows. If Jesus is the new temple—the presence of God on earth—then we need to rid ourselves of our idols and the ways in which we don't honor God. John does that by protest, the modern-day flipping over tables. He protests abuses of police, he protests poor treatment of prisoners, he protests the ways economics disenfranchise the poor. In all of this, I see the radical, confrontational picture of Jesus who will not let injustice stand. Sometimes Jesus flips the tables and confronts us to follow Him by tearing things down.



**Dig Deeper**— Jesus and the Bible clearly call us to take care of the poor. In what ways does society or culture seem to be indifferent or harmful to poor people? How can the church fight against this? What things are "sacred" in your life that keep you from caring for the least of these?

**Family Talk**— What can your family give up this week, month, or year so that you can give more to people in need? Together, decide who you will give to.



the new son

# whose authority?

Read Luke 20:1-8.

In 8th grade, I was in a particularly boisterous science class where, when the teacher would get agitated enough, she would rip off her spectacles and challenge the main perpetrator by saying sternly, “What gives you the right to disrupt my class?”

When Jesus disrupted the priests and teachers of the law, they wanted to know who gave Him the authority. I understand the question. In my profession I am a man given authority and under authority and I feel it daily. I am given authority to help families I work with in stewarding their financial resources. I want to do my best, serving them by giving access to advice that can accomplish their goals and objectives. I am under the authority of the licensing agencies, the financial planning board, and my employer to do the same task within the constructs they have built. It is my responsibility to report to these authorities on an ongoing basis, and my work must show that I try to do this to the best of my ability.

Jesus has given me this authority. He has placed me in a role that allows me to use my gifts and talents. I am committed to hearing and following Jesus, and with His grace, to make a difference for Him in my work, family and relationships. Jesus had the authority and mission from His Father to teach and proclaim the good news of His coming. The earthly authorities from the Temple, however, were more interested in Jesus’ credentials than His message and teaching. If they had accepted and come under His authority, what would the difference have been to the world and their lives? Let’s not miss our opportunity to hear His message, come under His gracious authority and watch our world change.



**Dig Deeper**— Are you under Jesus’ authority today? How does being under Jesus’ authority impact your daily motivations and decisions?

**Family Talk**— How are believers different from those who do not believe? How is your family living for Jesus? Think of something you could do to show that Jesus is in charge of your family.

# the sign of authority

Read John 2:18-22.

When I was a youth, each weekend in the summers I would hear Jesus say, "destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up." And the Jews would respond, "forty and six years was needed to build this temple and in 3 days you will raise it up? Ha, you are crazy!" As a youth cast member in the Zion Passion Play, I always thought these words of Jesus puzzling.

We know that Jesus was not always straightforward in His speech, such as when He spoke in parables. In this text Jesus offered a cryptic answer to the Jews, not directly answering their question. The Jews demanded Jesus show with a sign of power "by what authority" He had just cleansed the Temple of the money changers. The Temple was in an uproar so the Jews were demanding Him to provide a sign of His authority. On what basis did Jesus think He had the right to overturn the money changers?

I appreciate John's commentary that the Jews as well as the disciples did not know what Jesus meant when He said "destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up." Not until Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead did the disciples understand that He had predicted His resurrection. Jesus' sign of authority was His resurrection; just like He said.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is proof-positive that He is the Son of God. His authority is sufficient and covers all. It includes not only the Jewish Temple but also the temple of every human heart. His miraculous resurrection is proof enough.



**Dig Deeper**—Are there tables that need to be overturned in the temple of your heart? Invite Jesus to clean out your temple, removing distractions from your worship of Him.

**Family Talk**—Have each family member draw a picture of anger. When is it okay to be angry? What makes God angry? When we make God angry, what can we do about it?

# hope in the brokenness

Read Luke 20:9-19

*"What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

Despair is lurking around the corner for each of us if we can't, by faith, grab a hold of the hope that never diminishes. The reality of Jesus' birth and death crush the stronghold of despair. The manger, the Cross and the empty tomb compel me to keep my gaze fixed on the One who holds not only our times and all power, but all of eternity. They beckon my mind to be so filled with truth, that the lies of despair in the face of Eternal Hope are continuously stripped of any power they might have had. We can't worship His birth without walking the road toward the Cross. As I journey bearing my own Cross for the will of My Father, the road often laced with uncertainty and hardships is yet teeming with amazing hope. As I rest in Him, the joy of this refreshing hope overflows with such abundance that it constantly replenishes this parched and weary-bound soul.

What causes my weariness? My reliance on self, which translates into despair. The tenants had the same lack of trust with their sovereign and sometimes so do I.

As believers, let the *"stone of stumbling and the rock of offense"* (1 Peter 2:8) not cause us to stumble nor be easily offended, but truly be the Rock, the Capstone, on which we stand in victory for the Glory of our King. You see, we can all easily find ourselves in the mocker's seat of pride, thinking we're in control and know best, when all the while God, through His Son Jesus, wants to bear an abundant crop as we relinquish all ideals, accomplishments, loftiness and whatever tempts us to say 'No' to the vinedresser. Only then, in the fullness of our constant surrender, will the Lamb who was slain receive the reward of His suffering through the reverence of our lives; and we will find life-sustaining hope to persevere.



**Dig Deeper**— Do you ever wrestle with God for control over circumstances? How have you learned to trust in Him? What reassures you of His unfailing love and trustworthiness?

**Family Talk**— Parents, tell a story of a time you tried to make something work out for yourself that didn't work out. How did you feel trying to make it work? What did you learn from the experience?

# rejected stones

Read Psalm 118:19-24.

My nieces and nephew recently discovered Legos. What amazes me is that even my two-year-old niece Lorelai helps out. She can sit in front of the manual, carefully select the right Lego piece, check her work against the manual, and proudly hand it to her siblings to put in place.

This type of careful selection is what the mini-parable found in v. 22 is about. In order to build a great structure like Solomon's temple, the builders carefully selected the right stones, saving the most perfect stone for the cornerstone. Stones that didn't fit the blueprint were rejected.

Fast-forward about 1000 years and we find another rejected stone in Jesus. Jesus didn't look like the right piece for the job. He didn't match the blueprint for the Messiah at first glance. I think my niece would have rejected Him, just as many did in His time—and still do today.

But there's something beautiful here. Jesus, flesh and bone, was rejected. I, too, have been rejected by friends, boyfriends, employers, you name it. Rejection hurts every time, no matter how big or small. But rejection isn't who I am. I'm not discarded, overlooked, or abandoned, never to be selected and used creatively. God, the masterful engineer, is also creative and surprising. He shocked the world when He used a rejected stone as the cornerstone of His Kingdom, He shocks me with how He answers my prayers (v. 21), and I choose to trust that He will use rejection for my good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

After studying this passage, I now think that rejection is actually a part of the plan, not something to be lamented and despaired. I want to be like the psalmist and give thanks before, during, and after I'm rejected. The point here isn't rejection, playing the victim, or naming a villain, the goal is to proclaim thanksgiving to our creative, surprising, masterful God. I want to rejoice and be glad no matter what (vv. 23-24). I have something in common with Jesus, and so do you—we're all rejected stones.



**Dig Deeper**—How might you give your rejection to God today? Trust Him with it. Thank God for His faithfulness in all circumstances.

**Family Talk**—Parents, tell of a time you felt rejected. What did you do to go on? Might you have done things differently with hindsight?

# a case of mistaken identity

Read 1 Peter 2:4-8.

One Christmas when my daughter Hannah was about 2, my family went to celebrate with my extended family in Indiana. That year, my brother, Steve, and his family were also able to return home. At one point I looked up as Hannah went running to jump into my brother's arms. I remember thinking, "That is so sweet, she's excited to see her uncle!"

Then the screaming began.

Steve looks a little like me, sounds a little like me and, apparently, Hannah thought he was me...up until the moment she realized he wasn't. And when the reality didn't match her expectations...yowza!

In our text from 1 Peter, and in the other texts this week from Luke, there is a clear message that who Jesus was didn't match the expectations many people had for who they thought He should be. They were looking for a conquering warrior-king to lead them against Rome. He came as a humble servant interested in the kingdom of God. And when He didn't match their expectations, their fear and anger led them to reject Him. In fact, Peter refers to Jesus as a stone that causes people to stumble.

Before we judge the people of Jesus' day too harshly, I remember thinking (at various times in my life) that God was a cosmic policeman waiting to get me every time I messed up, or a benevolent Santa Claus ready to give me anything I asked for, or my heavenly "buddy" that wouldn't judge my actions or challenge my behavior—He just wanted me to be happy.

We all have expectations and an understanding of who God is. But does our picture match the reality of who Jesus and Scripture reveal God to be?



**Dig Deeper**—What expectations did you have of God that have changed as you have grown in your understanding of Him? What helped you come to a fuller understanding of what God is really like?

**Family Talk**—Have each person in your family draw a picture of what they think God looks like. Ask each other why they drew what they drew.

# stone of stumbling

Read Isaiah 8:13-17.

As I read and re-read these passages from Isaiah I am reminded that God almighty is holy and to be revered. Isaiah tells us He is like a “stone”. Both surprising and puzzling, we are told He is a stone that makes people stumble.

Our friend Terri Plant recently led a project with some young girls from a town in the West Bank called Birzeit. The girls painted some rocks with messages of hope, joy and peace. On the back side they placed information about their organization in case the person finding the rock wanted to learn more about the painted message. As the final step of spraying the rocks with a clear coating to preserve their new-found beauty was completed, there was great excitement in heading out to place them strategically around their community in hopes of blessing those who would find them. At their next gathering the girls all wanted to see if their stones had been found. To their dismay they found them right where they had left them and their beautiful artwork had been washed away by the rains. The only thing that remained was the message on the back side.

The coming Messiah is described in Isaiah 53:2b, *“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”*

Even though the special rocks the girls had placed to be a blessing now looked like any other stone, there still was something special about those ordinary looking stones. If they were turned over, a path to the Son of God was seen.

In today's reading we are told that the Messiah may become a stone of stumbling to those who don't pick up that stone and look for more. To those who do not regard Him as holy, He is a stone that makes them fall. But praise God, Isaiah tells us in the closing passage for today, “I will put my trust in him!”



**Dig Deeper**— What misunderstanding of Jesus or the Gospel do you think causes people to reject Him? How can you help them see “the other side”?

**Family Talk**— Paint or draw on stones depicting the truth of who Jesus is.

# the amazing landlord

Read Matthew 21:33-46.

When I moved to Milwaukee, I rented an apartment in a Victorian house on the Eastside. The day I moved in did not go well. The landlord was away on a journey and the apartment was very, very dirty. I had to spend hours and hours cleaning!

As I meditated on today's passage, I was intrigued, surprised, and amazed by the actions of the landlord. First, the landlord prepared the vineyard, then he went away on a journey and sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. The tenants' actions were brutal when the servants arrived. The landowner's response was amazing. I would have gotten the authorities involved right away and had the ruthless tenants evicted and punished, but the landowner sent more servants, and those servants were treated just as brutally. Finally, the landowner does something unthinkable and sends His own son. The tenants completely rejected him, they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The landlord was willing to sacrifice valuable servants and his own son to collect his share of the crop!

Does any of this make sense? Only when we realize that the landlord in the parable represents God the Father, whose love and care for His Kingdom are incomprehensible. He is passionate about His Kingdom. The first tenants were replaced because they rejected the landlord's son. Jesus is God's only Son who was rejected and crucified. Many do not accept Him today and are excluded from God's Kingdom, but all who do accept Him are part of the Kingdom and receive His Spirit making it possible for them to produce good fruit.

As you continue on the Lenten journey this year, take time to reflect on the love and passion of our amazing landlord.



**Dig Deeper**— God demonstrates great patience with the world in this parable. How do you experience His patient love in your life?

**Family Talk**— Read the parable together and then act out the story. Afterwards, talk about who in the story behaved most like God.



the new mooses

# the heart of the matter

Read Luke 20:20-26.

I hung up the phone with Jeff and an answer to a lingering question my wife, Heather, and I had on our hearts started to take shape. Many months before that phone call in 2005, where Jeff shared a connection he made on a business flight, we had obediently walked down the path of adoption only to have it short circuit at the end. The Lord started to put the puzzle pieces together and we felt confirmation to move forward down a road we had never considered: international adoption. One of the immediate challenges we faced was how to resource such undertaking since at the time we were not in a position to manage that financially. As we put together our paperwork, I discussed this challenge with Marvin, the passenger who Jeff chanced upon on his flight. He cut to the heart of the matter. "Which is easier for God, to move all the wealth in this world to His purposes or provide for this small thing, in which He is clearly leading you?"

The chief priests and teachers of the law were working hard to cause Jesus to stumble and trap Him so they could hand Him over to the authorities. So they sent their minions to ask Him a catch-22 political question that might ensnare Him: "Is it right to pay taxes to the Caesar (should we fund the very persecution we live under)?" Jesus saw right to the heart of the matter and provided the answer without the nuances, caveats, and framing, in which we so often get lost. Why wouldn't they pay taxes to Caesar with his own money? Since his image was on the coin, it reflected that the coins really belonged to him. And in the same way, God has created us in His image (we have His image on us), so we ought to give ourselves to Him. They were astonished and became silent.

Marvin's question back to me cut right to the heart of my matter. Where did my faith in God go if I had already followed Him thus far? We prayed, and having the heart of the matter clearly settled, the issues were silenced. We moved forward, God provided, and our family grew by a blessed two.



**Dig Deeper**—What questions, or issues in your life have become complicated and difficult to navigate? Are you willing to bring these to Jesus who will clarify the heart of the matter?

**Family Talk**—Tell of a time you knew you were supposed to do something and you didn't. How did that feel? Were there any consequences? What might you do next time you are in a similar situation?

# outside the box

Read Luke 20:27-40.

It is easy to find fault in the Sadducees when they approach Jesus. They ask a question, not to find an answer, but to support their own presupposed ideas. They don't believe that there is a resurrection in the Kingdom of God. They hope to stump the greatest teacher of their time or to trick Jesus into affirming their position. Both of their perceived possible outcomes are an attempt to draw others to their way of thinking.

What they did not expect was a third option, that Jesus would think in a way outside their limited understanding. His answer proves them wrong, tearing their argument to pieces and even draws praise from the scribes and teachers of the law. But did they take the surprising and brilliant answer to heart? Is their thinking transformed? Do they see Jesus for who He is? Unfortunately, they do not.

The Sadducees were silenced. They were not open or teachable. They were only interested in evidence that would protect their position and support their preconceived belief system. How foolish!

Sadly, I am like this too. I often approach God in the same way. For the past 4 years I have struggled to find peace in a career path, alternating between my two perceived possible outcomes: architecture or special education. I have sought God on my own terms with no thoughts of other options. What I may not expect is for God to think outside the box that I've put Him in.

Let us not be like the Sadducees, unwilling to consider God's calling. During this Lenten season, let us seek Him with an open heart and allow Him to guide our lives, even when it might be "outside the box" and beyond our comfort zone.



**Dig Deeper**—What does it look like to genuinely ask God for direction? Is there an area in your life where you have limited how you expect God to answer?

**Family Talk**—Parents, share a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone. How did you feel, and how did God use you?

# choosing to see

Read Luke 20:41-44.

The Sadducees pressed in harder with their questioning of Jesus as they continued to reject anything that was not of the written law. They wanted proof of His identity that they could verify and understand with their intellect. Then Jesus, in His perfect ways, turned the tables on them by pointing them to their own written doctrine, the beloved words that guided their lives, which they knew inside and out. He used what they knew and asked them a question they could not answer without choosing to believe what they could not comprehend. Jesus once again laid out the red carpet for them to take that first step of faith—to choose to trust instead of demanding explanation. He invites them to open their hearts to the incomprehensible ways of God. The answer to this question required faith to see Jesus as both fully man and fully divine. The Sadducees could not grasp that the two could both be present in Jesus. They were looking with their eyes and hoping for a man to save them, but their hearts were blind to the divine Savior in their midst.

Why couldn't the Sadducees see? Jesus provided everything they needed but they still wouldn't choose to believe. They thought that they had all the answers; to choose to believe would cost them their pride. They were leaders for their people; to choose to see would cost them their power. I find it amazing how Jesus could back them into a corner and yet still respect their freedom to wrestle with the word and choose. He stretches, guides and loves us in the same way. He faithfully pursues our hearts by responding to our prayers, questions, doubts and fears by giving us glimpses of the divine. However, we must choose to believe in order to see the all-powerful, holy, incomprehensible and unexplainable possibilities of His hand.

*"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*  
(Hebrews 11:1)



**Dig Deeper**— Reflect on your life 10 years ago. How has your faith in God grown since then? What has caused the most changes?

**Family Talk**— Parents, share some ways with your children that you have grown spiritually and how that happens for you. Let your children share about times they grew closer to God. Pray that each of you can continue to grow.

# forever reign

Read Psalm 110:1-4.

“We highly want you to consider applying for the discipleship leadership position for your floor.” *Me? A leader? There’s no way!* This is what I was thinking in my head when I was approached by my residence hall director in college. In my mind, a leader was someone who was popular, energetic, a public speaker, etc; all characteristics I felt I did not possess.

I fell into a similar mindset of those who heard the prophesy of the Lord in these first four verses of Psalm 110. They knew the Messiah would be the Most High Priest, with all authority given to him—authority that will never be broken. He will sit on the right hand of the throne and will lead his people to victory. Okay, this is it! This is the ultimate leader the Israelites have been waiting for! The Messiah will come as a mighty warrior, ready for battle; to destroy anyone who will get in his way. They had a picture in their mind of how the Messiah would lead, just as I had a picture in my mind of what a leader should look like.

But that is not how the Messiah came. That is not how Jesus delivered His children. He led His people into freedom by dying on the Cross. In His time on earth, Jesus had a lot of pushback from many religious rulers and civilians like you and me. God foresees that, but speaks with confidence in these verses that Jesus will lead His people into victory and glorify His Father’s name. Of course, there were some challenges that I faced with the leadership position (I agreed to do it), but God taught me that if I am willing to serve Christ in my leadership role, He will (and did) give me the tools to be a strong leader. Christ’s reign as Priest will reign forever, just as our security and identity remains in Him forever.



**Dig Deeper**—What characteristics would you use to describe a leader? Psalm 110:3 states that Jesus’ people will be ready and willing to serve when He goes to war. In what ways are you preparing your heart to serve Him?

**Family Talk**—Together, make a list of as many attributes of a good leader as you can think of. Do you know good leaders who meet some of these attributes? Compare this list to how Jesus lived as a leader.

# a summary of the law of moses

Read Mark 12:28-34.

“When did you first get your calling to be a missionary?”

I’ve been asked this question many times over the years, and I still don’t really understand it. It’s like asking someone, “When did Jesus first call you to love other people?” or “When did you hear God’s call to love God?” The answer to both of these questions, surely, is that our call came the day we first believed in Christ. From there, we continually work out what it looks like to love God fully and love our neighbor as ourself.

When Jesus told the earnest young scribe that the greatest commandment could be summed up in the commandments to love God and people, the scribe agreed that love was greater than all of the sacrifices one could offer. Jesus commended his understanding of the law; that what we do flows out of who we are, which ultimately comes out of who we love. If we truly are a people who are in love with Jesus, then our lives will reflect this wonderful foundation. If day by day, week by week, year by year, we pour out our hearts to the Lord and ask Him to give us the gift of His love, then we will be changed; our hearts will be enlarged, and we will find that we can rejoice more and more in choosing the difficult path of loving people.

Sometimes God is easy to love because after all, He is so beautiful! Still, we stumble when it comes to loving our (very imperfect) neighbor. The only reason given in the Old Testament for loving our neighbor is God Himself, “*I am the Lord*” (Leviticus 19:18). Let us choose to love because of the loving God we follow; let us choose to see our neighbor with His eyes of compassion; let us choose to love our neighbor because Jesus is Lord.



**Dig Deeper**—What are some things that hold you back from loving your neighbor as yourself? Write down some specific things and ask God to help you work through these barriers.

**Family Talk**—Ask each person in the family to describe or give a definition of love. Afterwards, decide on one thing to do to show love to someone outside your family.

# don't fake it!

Read Luke 20:45-47.

During our years living in West Africa, I purchased, on at least two occasions, carved wood art only to find out later that the “authentic” sculpted piece was a fake—not real ebony wood but a common wood found throughout Mali. In each case, the art piece had been enhanced through the use of black shoe polish to *look* like the real deal; a beautiful and rare ebony carving.

Several years ago, French police uncovered a large network of fake African art. The crooks used urine and cashew nut paste to give newly-sculpted African wooden art an antique appearance—and sold the pieces for thousands of euros. The criminals profited through the naiveté of uneducated art buyers.

Today’s reading addresses a “fake” in Jesus’ time—a dead piety on the part of the religious professionals; faith without humility, compassion, and love. Nothing seems to exasperate Jesus more than the legalism of the religious hacks of his day. Multiple times throughout the Gospels, the Lord Jesus confronts empty religion: a faith composed of pious and impressive outward religious activities without a corresponding inward transformation that comes from a faith based on repentance and obedience. Jesus warns the crowd, *“Don’t let your faith be like theirs! Steer clear of faithless faith!”* A parallel passage in Matthew 23 shows Jesus castigating the legalism of the religious leaders in asserting that they had *“seated themselves in the chair of Moses”* (v. 2). But Moses’ actions in leading the Israelites came from a heart of humility and grace, not a dead piety like that of the scribes and Pharisees.

I still have the fake ebony sculptures. They serve to remind me that God wants my faith actions to flow out of a heart responsive to His unconditional love of me and work in me, not a fake piety that seeks to impress God or others. God desires an authentic faith walk in me.



**Dig Deeper**—Pause and ask God to show you if there is anything in your life that is fake—any actions that seek to impress others or try to show God that you are worthy of His love.

**Family Talk**—Parents, list two statements: one true and one false. Ask your children to guess which is which. Repeat this game several times. Then, talk about fake things and why we want to be truthful people.

# just as a pharisee

Read Matthew 23:1-12.

How many times when asked, do we wear our “Oh, I am a Christian” badge? It’s so easy to claim, but not as easy to live without God’s help, especially in our society. When we identify ourselves as followers of Christ, do we really think about the depth of this statement, how it is a daily commitment to a higher sovereignty?

From elementary all the way to high school I was the only person in the whole school who identified herself as a Christian, even before I actually gave my life to Christ. That was what my parents were and I thought that religion was more of a “family thing.” After I got saved, changing my behavior in order for it to match what I professed was one of the most difficult things I had to do, and I was not always successful. I still struggle with it today. One of my friends at the time once told me, “Joy, God won’t really mind if you ‘sin’ one more time—and you already do it anyway.” It felt like a slap in the face and made me realize how people could see through my hypocrisy.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees represented the authority, they sat on Moses’ seat but were not living out what they were preaching. Jesus condemned their misleading behavior because it was guiding new converts in the opposite direction. When each of our steps are done for other people to see, it is not truly an offering to God (v. 5). Jesus reminds us what we ought to be, how we are all equally bonded to each other as brothers and sisters, children of the one Father we have in heaven (v.9) and bound to serve because service is a quality of the greatest disciple.

Humbling ourselves by letting God take over our broken lives is part of the daily commitment we partake in as His followers. We need to remember that, just as with the Pharisees, aiming for other’s approval is not what will take us closer to God. Our Savior came for more than that.



**Dig Deeper**—Is there any area in your life in which you are being a Pharisee? How can you balance the possibility of making worldly errors with the human expectations of perfection from a Christian individual?

**Family Talk**—Do you ever pretend to be really good at something? Why do people pretend to be good at something when they aren’t? What do you think God thinks of the pretending?



lord of the  
cast-off

# he notices

Read Luke 21:1-4.

Can this middle-class white male who is financially stable and happily married and who has lived his entire eighty-plus years in both political freedom and the fellowship of various biblical congregations, genuinely identify with a penniless widow trapped in a cruelly occupied country, whose “home church,” moreover, is run by a bunch of scoundrels?

No. I cannot.

But that widow—“cast off” by her own culture—has plenty to say to this “well off” man in his: how deep is your commitment to the one you call your “god”? Are you willing to obey His Word no matter what? Does the Body of Christ have any claim on your loyalty?

*(She continues):* I sometimes hear you sing with others the old hymn, “I Surrender All.” “All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give.” Then over and over you repeat the refrain: “I surrender all; I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.”

*(She goes on):* You seem to enjoy the music but do you realize what you’re saying? “All to Jesus I surrender; humbly at His feet I bow.”

*(She just doesn’t quit):* Listen up! He noticed me when I gave my last red cent. Don’t you think He notices when you write a check for your “tithes-and-offerings” as it’s called in churchspeak? Don’t you think He notices that despite your pledge to surrender “all,” you’ve already convinced yourself you have far too many expenses to return even His ten percent? I was society’s cast-off when Jesus noticed me. But He saw what I did and He told the whole world: “That woman did surrender all.”

*[She’s not quite finished!!!]:* Hey there, “well off” man, any chance that He notices you too? What do you think He sees?



**Dig Deeper**—What’s your definition of “all”? Is it the same as Scripture’s apparent meaning in this passage? If circumstances forced you to say that you look more like (a) “the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury” or more like (b) the “poor widow put[ting] in two very small copper coins,” which would it be? Why?

**Family Talk**—Parents, share a time someone did something unexpectedly kind for you. Ask family members to think of ideas for random acts of kindness. Challenge everyone to do a secret act of kindness this week.

# sight to the blind

Read Mark 12:41-44.

I am myopic (nearsighted), which means if something is way beyond the tip of my nose, I need corrective lenses to see it clearly. One of Jesus' tasks is to give sight to the blind: physical and spiritual. He especially cures His followers of spiritual blindness. As followers of Jesus like His disciples, you and I need to learn to look at our world through the mind of Jesus. Then, through His "corrective lens" we can see reality like God would have us see it. This is what He is doing in these passages with His disciples and what He needs to do with us. Isaiah 55:8 explicitly states why: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.*

Jesus is giving sight to His blind disciples. He just broke down their trust in their religious leaders by exposing the leaders' motives, which are self centered and self glorifying (vv. 38-40). Now, He contrasts the "impressive" rich, giving out of their abundance, with a poor widow giving richly out of her lack of resources. The next passage deflates the disciples' trust in man-made religious edifices, the impressive temple building in which they stood.

God's thoughts, judgments and estimations are different than ours. He is not impressed when our motive in doing good is to impress people. He is impressed when we give to Him in the costly manner that the widow models. Remember the greatest commandment from a few verses back (vs. 30)? Love God with *all* of your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Jesus points out what is totally invisible to His blind disciples: the radically comprehensive giving of one of society's lowliest—a poor widow—and how totally visible her sacrificial love is to God.



**Dig Deeper**—What misperception of personal poverty prevents you from blessing others? Ask God to help you see who or what impresses you, and where you fail to give because you think it would be too costly.

**Family Talk**—Ask what you could share to bless or help someone else. Everyone has something they can give. Find someone who might need what you have.

# needing more

Read Luke 7:36-50.

My class gathered together and sang “Christ is All I Need” before heading to our Christian college graduation ceremony. At the ripe age of 21, I was supposedly prepared to handle anything with my Bible minor and bachelor’s degree. I assumed my theology and training would be enough to navigate life, but some lessons cannot be taught in a classroom.

Nobody taught me how to walk with my friends through burying their parents or what to say when their spouse walks out on them. I wasn’t instructed on how to live life when it did not reflect the traditional trajectory. I wasn’t prepared to navigate the hurt of deep deception. Nobody explained how to process losing someone to the poor decisions of a drunk driver or the hands of a mentally ill shooter. I wasn’t shown how to understand and love someone whose addiction caused harm to innocent children.

The truth is no one can fully be prepared for the future. When the darkest moments cover us, despite our faith, it is okay to admit Christ isn’t all we need—we need His people too. We need to share our weeping and lack of composure; we must admit we aren’t always as together as we appear. Our weakest, ugliest moments are to be exposed so we will discover God’s grace displayed through His people. When we embrace our lives as messy and not easily understood, we begin to learn how to love others in their messes with the same love we received during our messiest moments (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Perhaps God’s grace will allow us to understand the power of an unraveled woman’s tears at the feet of Jesus. May the grace that meets us in those messy moments move us forward to tangibly display grace to the messiest of people.



**Dig Deeper**—How have the circumstances of your life equipped you to show grace and love to others?

**Family Talk**—Parents, tell a story about someone who was or is hard for you to love (no names). Describe this person and your struggles with them. Ask your children what they think you should do (or might have done). Ask them to think about someone who is hard to love and encourage them to show love.

# bridging barriers

Read John 4:4-26.

Huddle up! Batten down the hatches. A stranger is coming.

“How is it that you being a Jew ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?”

They hadn’t met, yet there were already two strikes against her. These weren’t caused by her sinful choices. No, she was born that way: a Samaritan and a woman. Jesus needed to go through Samaria. Jesus asked her for a drink of water. Why? Because what He offered was for her too. And He wanted her to receive it.

I am a TCK—a third culture kid. We TCKs are caught between two (or more) cultures, not belonging completely to either and sometimes being rejected by both. That which is unfamiliar often causes discomfort, as well as that which is not understood. Some eat camel; others eat horse. Some shake hands when they greet while others prostrate or kneel down. And on and on.

Do we reject some because they don’t look like us or behave like us? Are we dismissive and condescending because others don’t understand our jokes and colloquialisms? Must a person dress like us, have the same color skin and the same accent to be worthy of our respect and a recipient of our kindness? When I read this passage, the answer is “No!” In Christ there is no male or female, no Jew or Greek (Galatians 3:28). The Cross reconciles all things and all people to Christ. This is the good news of Easter.

Our world is full of people who do not belong for one reason or another. It is full of cliques. Society likes to marginalize. Those who are on the inside find power and satisfaction knowing others are excluded. But that’s not the way of the Cross. Jesus came to tear down barriers and to proclaim that the way of salvation and peace with God is free and available to all; even to Samaritans and women.



**Dig Deeper**— We all have prejudices. Examine your heart. What are yours? Determine that with God’s grace, you will allow His love and goodness to crowd them out. How will you follow Jesus’ example?

**Family Talk**— Look for a family who is from a different culture than yours. Plan a meal or activity with them. Share stories of family traditions.

# ready to meet you

Read Mark 5:1-20.

Have you ever traveled someplace unfamiliar with the expectation someone would be there to meet you? What if that person did not show up?

Some years ago, I traveled to Ecuador for a work-related trip. A colleague, who was traveling from her native country of Colombia, planned to pick me up at the Quito airport. Hours passed, the crowd thinned, and there was no sign of her. Finally, I received a message that her flight was delayed and would not arrive until the next day. I was unprepared for this change of plans, and eventually reached my destination safely, but how I wished someone had been there to meet me that day!

In this passage, as soon as Jesus got out of the boat, the demon-possessed man who lived isolated among the tombs, and whose extreme condition would probably make headlines even today, came immediately to meet Jesus—and Jesus was right there, ready to meet him, too.

Jesus was not taken aback by his condition. He didn't appear shocked, express revulsion, or turn away. Jesus meets him as he is, takes care of his situation, and restores him.

Although this man's state may seem extreme, perhaps illness, depression, financial problems, relationship crises, or some other situations in our lives have made some of us feel we're on the outskirts of fully participating in life. Or perhaps some of us have deliberately isolated ourselves, wandering among tombs of darkness or despair.

There is no human condition that surprises Jesus. He isn't going to run away from us, shocked by our confession, mistakes, or circumstances. Jesus is right there, ready to meet us as we are, where we are, waiting to offer us freedom, desiring to liberate, and longing to love and welcome us.



**Dig Deeper**—Have you isolated yourself in any areas of your life? Are there any areas of your life which you need to allow Jesus to meet you?

**Family Talk**—Parents, share about a time when you have felt alone. Ask the rest of the family what they could have done for you if they had not been there.

# feeling foreign

Read Luke 17:11-19.

August of the year 2013. As my family and I packed the car, I barely noticed the heat because of my excitement. After this day, things would never be the same. Yes, I was still me, but I would now have more freedom—more responsibility and a new life ahead of me! As I got in the car to leave the city I knew, the people I knew, and the experiences I knew, I suddenly felt very out of place. There was a whole world out there that I had no idea about. I was scared. All of the choices I would have to make, all the money I would spend and save, and what kind of relationships I would form scared me. For those of you reading this that are still in the dark about what I am talking about, I am talking about one of the most foreign things I have experienced: going to college. Maybe some of you are thinking that college was not that hard, or you don't remember feeling this way but for me it was so foreign. Growing up in a strong family in a strong church background, everything was here for me and everything was always home.

We find this same feeling of being foreign in today's reading from Luke 17:11-19. Jesus healed ten lepers but only one of them came back to Jesus to give thanks. The one who gave thanks happened to be a foreigner; a Samaritan coming to a Jewish King. This healed man must have been afraid to even come to Jesus because it was unfamiliar to Him.

Even in our faith, wherever you may be, there is no foreign land that Jesus cannot and has not reached. In simpler terms, that means He can reach you.



**Dig Deeper**—Are there any areas within you that feel foreign that you have not talked to God about? The healed leper was thankful. Write five things in your journal that you are thankful to God for right now.

**Family Talk**—Talk about things you are thankful for. Then make thankful drawings of the things you are thankful for. Hang them in a place where you can remember to thank God every day.

# she who is forgiven much

Read John 8:1-11.

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. (John 8:11)*

Adulteress? What a scandal. Certainly we should stone her. And yet...When we think about our own sin, which is what Jesus encouraged these accusers to do, would we put down our stones, our accusations, our judgments of others? Is my sin anything like hers? After being a wife and mother for over fifteen years, I had the opportunity to take a job outside of the home and I jumped at it. This was just the change of pace I needed, I thought. It meant a lot more work for me, balancing work at home and at the office. But I adjusted and came to enjoy my office hours and even joined my fellow workers in after-work fun. I rationalized this extra time spent away from family, thinking I deserved a reward for all my hard work.

When I came to my senses (Luke 15:17), I realized that adultery comes in many forms. I realized that I allowed my affections to drift from husband and children to self-serving activities, which is a form of emotional adultery. Choosing to get my needs met outside of Christ by a world that is intent on its own interests is spiritual adultery. I was living outside of the Father's will for me, just like the woman in this passage. And just like with her, in His magnificent grace, Jesus identified my sin writing it in the sand—where the living water would wash it away. His message of love and forgiveness restores us to a right relationship with Him and with each other.

He is the Lord of the outcast and reaches out to save us from certain death. He is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13). There is no worldly substitute for Him. Only He can satisfy. Our sin is so great it cost Him His life and yet He cries out to the Father on our behalf, *"Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).



**Dig Deeper**— Our sin does not occur in isolation. It affects other lives as well. Have you asked forgiveness from those who are affected by your sin? How will you forgive those whose sin affected you?

**Family Talk**— Think of a time when someone hurt your feelings or made you really mad. What did you do about it? Think of a time you hurt or made someone else angry. What did you do about it? What would God want us to do about these things?



the end game

# help me to see

Read Luke 12:54-59 + Matthew 16:2-4.

My prayer to God as of late is, "God, help me to see." This has been a season of humility and weakness, realizing that I'm not as holy as I thought I was. I'm not as righteous as I claim to be. I'm not as strong as I want to be. The words "you hypocrite," from Luke 12 ring too true. And it's my fault. I'm the one who keeps praying, "God, help me to see."

At this point in Luke, Jesus has been talking to religious leaders, His disciples, and now a crowd of thousands of people that have gathered around Him. What will this Jesus they've heard about do today? Will He feed five thousand people with someone's small lunch? Will He cast out demons? Will He the heal sick? Will He raise the dead? But Jesus doesn't entertain the masses by performing miraculous signs to prove once again, that He is the Messiah. He's already done that. No, today He calls them out. Today He's helping them see who they are in light of who He is.

This is a kindness from God. If you are anything like me, you beat yourself up when you see your imperfect humanity. But be encouraged. It's in this place where we can say, "God is God, and I am not." We are weak but God is strong. We are the broken, but God makes us whole.

As I wrestle through a mess of emotions, brokenness, and sin, it's hard to get my head above it all to gain perspective, so that I can see. But I know I need to see Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).



**Dig Deeper**— Today take time to pray, "God, help me to see." What is God speaking to you? How is he helping you see? Pray this prayer from early church scholar, Jerome (AD 342-420): "Lord, Thou hast given us Thy Word for a light to shine upon our path; grant us so to meditate on that Word, and to follow its teaching, that we may find in it the light that shines more and more until the perfect day; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

**Family Talk**— Hide a prize somewhere in a dark room. Hide it well. Have everyone "look" for it in the dark for a limited time. When no one can find it, tell them you'll give clues about it looks like. Then explain that this won't really help. The only way to find it is to be able to see. Turn on the lights or give everyone flashlights to find it. Share the prize and talk about how Jesus is the light that helps us to see truth.

# grace in the end

Read Luke 21:5-11.

*"As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." (Luke 21:6)*

Early in my ministry, when I was working with college students, one of the students started a conversation about some groups that were coming on campus with posters and bullhorns talking about turning from sin because "the end is near." Some of the students were concerned that the method was taking away from the message about Jesus, and it was a good discussion. Still, the question about the end should elicit something from us.

Jesus walks with His disciples through Jerusalem and they point out the glorious Temple. It must have been quite a sight to see, even as it is today. However, Jesus declares that the Temple in its splendor will eventually be destroyed, as it was in AD 70 by the Romans. In the midst of the disciples' shock, Jesus instructs them to be aware that an end will come and to watch for it.

There will be an end and there is grace in it. There was an end to the Temple, but it came with the death and resurrection of Jesus, not just the destruction of the glorious Temple. Jesus' death brought an end to the need for the sacrificial system which the Temple embodied: *"he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself"* (Hebrews 9:26). He is the sacrifice, the High Priest, and the New Temple in Himself.

The end is near, and there is grace in the end.



**Dig Deeper**— In what ways would you describe Jesus' death as a grace-filled end? How does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus prepare you for the end of your life and for eternity?

**Family Talk**— Parents, share a story of someone you know who died and went to heaven. Share about the sadness and the hope you felt.

# raise your heads

Read Mark 21:12-28.

Life can get at you. It doesn't stop. Day-in, day-out, one problem after another. The kids get sick, then get sick again. The car breaks down. The medical bills pile higher and higher. The roof leaks, and when you fix all that, you break your foot. We've all been there. I am there right now.

As we look at the world and at our own circumstances, things seem to be turning from bad to worse. Jesus builds up this tension in today's passage. He foretells of wars, death, and betrayal (vv. 12-16). Jesus predicts the downfall of Jerusalem (v. 20), the great pain for pregnant and nursing mothers that is to come (v. 23), and fear and foreboding becoming the norm (v. 26). Even creation itself will be distressed at the coming events (v. 25).

Jesus predicts that times will get really tough. Strangely enough, Jesus is saying these things as He heads to His death. When I read this passage, I can't help but to also hear a lament issuing from Jesus as He sees His own destruction drawing near. He was human after all, and the foreknowledge of that much pain and suffering had to be unbearable.

But Jesus doesn't just end His prophecies on a negative note. No, Jesus knows the end times, and His own end can only mean one thing: hope. The last verse of this passage doesn't say, go cry and hide because it is going to get scary. It says, *"raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near."*

Jesus knows that hard times, evil times, will come, but they will not come without hope—the hope of redemption, the hope of salvation, the hope of deliverance. As we look at our own lives, evil times will come, but they do not come without hope. So, *"when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."* (v. 28)



**Dig Deeper**—What is your normal response to mounting problems in your life? What do you think Jesus meant by His instruction in verse 28? How can you do this?

**Family Talk**—What is a big problem you have had? Let everyone answer. How did you solve the problem? How does God want us to solve our problems?

# the unchanging

Read Luke 21:29-38.

There is an enormous maple in our front yard. Even while lying in bed upstairs, I can see its branches brush up against the window. Lacy and light green in spring. Broad and dark green in summer, shading the entire yard. Glowing golden in fall until the days when the leaves drift down, making us wade, ankle-deep in its leaves. Then, for too many months it seems, the long bare branches of winter scrape the glass. One day, buds appear again. *How many cycles of seasons have I watched this tree?* Truthfully, I try not to count.

Jesus asks His disciples to look at the fig tree while He explained the metaphor: just as its sprouting leaves tell you that summer is near, so these signs—these cosmic catastrophes and trials—will mean that the consummation of the Kingdom is near. This is meant for our hope—*summer is coming!*

But what are the signs? And when will they happen? We get distracted, figuring out God's itinerary, and often miss the beautiful contrast. Trees, like all of creation, can only change; God's word *cannot* change. You might even say, God's word is evergreen. It is our one constant in a world where events beyond our control are always stirring.

So what does earnest watchfulness look like? Jesus shows us at the end of the chapter. Each day, teaching; each night, withdrawing, most likely, praying. Jesus read the signs of his own journey nearing its consummation, and yet, He continued to spend Himself on what is unchanging, what will never fade or wither away—the teaching of His word.

May we be found waiting just the same, clinging to the unchanging, evergreen word of God and spending ourselves making it known.



**Dig Deeper**—Watchfulness seems passive, but in this chapter, Jesus Himself models active watchfulness. What are some ways you can actively wait for the Lord's return? What are you doing to prepare yourself and others for the return of Christ?

**Family Talk**—Share a time when you had to wait for something exciting. How is waiting for Jesus to come back like that?

# he endured... the table?

Read Luke 22:1-23.

In our passage today, Jesus did not just tolerate eating with His disciples, as well as His betrayer...it says He *"eagerly desired"* to do this (v. 15). He valued being with them, despite the foreknowledge that they would all desert Him; that Peter would disown Him three times, and that Judas would betray Him with a kiss!

I have thought a lot about the Church recently, and the pain we experience in the body of Christ. When we encounter hurt by people in the Church, our instinct can be to leave the Church for a "safer" place. Unfortunately, that can leave us perpetually searching or isolated, missing the blessing that comes from committing and working through the pain we have in relationship with others. We cannot bring healing to these broken relationships on our own, but we can trust God to help us navigate through it. After all, Jesus prayed for unity in the Body (John 17:20-23)! We can assume that we will feel misunderstood, betrayed, and abandoned by people in the Church. If you haven't experienced it yet, just wait. Or perhaps, you are the one who hurt others intentionally or unintentionally. We are a family and we *still* need each other. Just like Jesus, we can bless and be blessed by our church family, *despite* all of our issues.

Humanly, it is impossible. We cannot truly love one another on our own. It is only possible through Jesus living and loving through us, one day at a time. This will bring glory to God and set us apart from the world. After all, if we only love those whom it is easy to love, we are no different than the world (Matthew 5:43-47). May the Holy Spirit bring healing in wounded places, redemption to broken relationships, and unity to His Body, in Jesus' Name!



**Dig Deeper**— How does being under Jesus' authority impact your daily motivations and decisions?

**Family Talk**— Who is in charge at your school? In your city? In your home? How can you show respect to those who are in charge?

# family likeness

Read Luke 22:24-46.

We should thank the evangelist Luke for asking so many questions of the early apostles in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the thinking of Jesus and His disciples just prior to the Cross. It's amazing how easy it was for the disciples to miss the point. While they sit around, very pleased with themselves, arguing about who of them are the greatest, Jesus is getting ready to die. He is about to embody, through His death, the incomprehensible love and humility of God that makes sinners new creations. They are proudly competing for recognition while He plans to make them recognizable as God's family.

It is so easy for us to be like the disciples—caught up discussing our own accomplishments or expectations instead of realizing how Jesus' teaching should revolutionize the way we act. He simply plans to make us profound, humble human beings.

Jesus shows that we will only achieve greatness through humility, service, communion with God and repentance. Some are called to leadership and persecution. But, those who are truly significant realize that their significance is only through trust in Jesus and His presence. We should be willing to serve and commune with each other, and depend completely on the Father.



**Dig Deeper**—What do we possess that would, in our encounter with the world, mark us as dangerous people of the crucified Christ?

**Family Talk**—Talk about what makes somebody important. How does Jesus decide who is important? What do you think it means when Jesus says "the first shall be last and the last shall be first"?

# forsaken

Read Luke 22:47-65.

*"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48)*

*"Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.'" (Luke 22:61)*

*"The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him." (Luke 22:63)*

I remember a time in my life when I experienced rejection from some people who were very close to me. Not only did they turn away from me, but they actually turned against me. It was painful, sad, and frustrating. We had both done some things that made the situation difficult. We both played a part in making it a very difficult situation.

Undoubtedly, each of us has experienced some sort of abandonment, rejection, or pain in relationships. Most of the time, if not all of the time, we have contributed to that situation in one way or another or in varying degrees.

But here is Jesus. He is betrayed by Judas, one of the Twelve, and arrested like a common criminal by Temple guards. At a fake, forced trial, He is accused falsely. While there, one of His three closest companions, Peter, denies Him three times. He is beaten and mocked by soldiers. The pain of our personal rejections may loom large, but His is larger still.

Here is Jesus. He has done no wrong. He has not contributed in any way to the problem. He has no sin. Yet, He enters into the retaliatory cycle of human wrong and brokenness. Almost like a naïve child He steps into an oncoming disaster and experiences the pain. Why?

*"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).*



**Dig Deeper**— What rejection or opposition have you faced from others? How might you bring it to God today? What would you say is the significance of Jesus' rejection for us as humans today?

**Family Talk**— Do you have a friend who turned against you and won't be your friend anymore? Jesus had a friend who "betrayed" him. He knows how hurtful this is. What can you do when or if this happens to you?

# crucifixion: three short poems

Read Luke 22:66-23:56.

*"With loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand." (Luke 23:23-24)*

*"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he said this, he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)*

No law can withstand human demands.  
No governor forestalls foregone conclusions.  
We stand amidst the crowd, shouting  
for the death of our God to satisfy  
our thirst. With no words for the crowd  
and no words for Pilate, Jesus submits  
meekly to the grinding gears. No tears  
now from the King who is not of this world.  
No harsh rebuke of a holy and awesome God.  
No one leaps to His aid. No angels descend  
from the skies. No one stops what has now  
been set into motion. The cold, cruel world  
reaches out for destruction, but still,  
even still, there is divine intention.  
Hidden - within and without - from our eye,  
God is working, transforming our reality.



Without fanfare, the King of Glory is pinned  
with gory force upon the beams of wood.  
The people watch with voiceless stares.  
The sneering rulers speak their fears.  
The soldiers mock with maiming force.  
Overhead the notice speaks sharp  
truth: this is the King of the Jews.  
With no apparent human heroism,  
His snapping skeleton - a bloody body -  
hangs heavy as God's heart becomes a wound  
opened wide with welcome for all who wash  
their weary selves within its messy flow.  
Still now He hangs at God's cross purposes  
as holiness and grace collide with fire.  
The vulture views the spectacle and waits,  
as all earth's air is drained out of God's lungs.

In the clamoring cacophony  
echoing around the execution,  
unseen divine intimacy unveils  
to human eyes and ears.  
His heaving body, suffocating  
with evil, wheezes out a prayer:  
pleading, surrendering, commending.  
The drama of humanity's weakness  
and God's strength transfixed at  
the crossroads, takes a hard  
turn into unexpected avenues  
as Messiah gasps, shudders and dies.  
Darkness descends and everyone  
gapes in stunned silence:  
'What have we done?  
What has He done?'



**Dig Deeper**— Read some of the following verses to reflect upon the meaning of the death of Jesus. What is most striking to you about the crucifixion of Jesus during this year?

- John 1:29-34
- Acts 2:22-24
- 1 Peter 1:17-21
- 1 John 2:1-2
- 1 John 4:9-10

**Family Talk**— Drape a black cloth or paper over the cross your family made earlier (p. 6). Children of different ages have very different perceptions of death. Ask each of your children what death is and why they think Jesus had to die. As they share, reassure them that Jesus' death resulted in the resurrection—Jesus being alive again. The good news is that we too can live with Jesus when we die.

# the first day

Read Luke 24:1-12.

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

When a wedding happens, it is a beautiful moment reflecting a depth of love, commitment, and celebration. There are so many powerful moments: the vows which convey the loving commitment for life, the rings that tangibly reflect and remind of that loving commitment, the pronouncement of marriage by the officiant, and so much more. Without a doubt, though, the high point of celebration for all gathered is after the kiss when the bride and groom turn around and are introduced for the first time to the gathered family and friends: “it is now my pleasure to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs....”

The resurrection of Jesus is one of the most powerful moments in God’s glorious story of human history. In many ways, it is like the grand introduction to all the watching world: “let it be known that the powers of evil and sin have been defeated and Jesus is the King.” In the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah God’s love, commitment, power, and glory are celebrated in public fashion.

On that first resurrection morning, as the women approached the tomb, neither they nor we knew what God had in store. But what a celebration when the reality was declared: “The Lord is risen—He is risen indeed!”



**Dig Deeper**— Read and reflect on some of these other passages about the resurrection of Jesus:

- Luke 24:13-35
- John 20:19-29
- Romans 6:1-10
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-58
- Colossians 1:15-23

How will you celebrate the resurrection of Jesus this year? How will you publicly proclaim that He is King in your life?

**Family Talk**— Talk about the Easter traditions your family has and how they are a way to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Perhaps your family can think of a new way to celebrate the resurrection every year.

# reflection

# reflection

# reflection

# reflection

# special thanks

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## Works Cited:

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2. Tim Keller, "Work and Rest" on his Gospel in Life podcast (dated Oct. 22, 2015)
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Jesus came to “*seek and save the lost*” (Luke 19:10). As the Savior He brings light and hope, but even so there is a dark turn in the story of Jesus. All the good news of kingdom proclamation and demonstration suddenly becomes harsh and grating in the ears of the world. Darkness rises before the Light of the World as we journey with Jesus to the crossroads of salvation.

That journey with Jesus begins with the sober reality that Jesus’ identity and mission lead Him toward death on the Cross. Yet the joyful reality is that the Cross leads to the resurrection and life for all. Our journey within this devotional parallels Jesus’ journey, helping us grow with Jesus in our daily life with God. For us, too, the journey means letting go of ourselves and infilling of God’s love. As Jesus said, “*And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*” (Luke 14:27).

Join others in this journey with Jesus as we focus upon the sober reality of the Cross in order to prepare us for the joyful reality of the resurrection!

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