



# Flourish

A Lenten Journey of Surrender  
and Soul Growth

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# Turning the Soil:

## Confession & Repentance

**Devotional Week One**

**February 18, 2026 – February 22, 2026**



## Ash Wednesday, February 18: The First Turn

Written by Pastor Ramon Smith

Scripture: Joel 2:12–13 (CEB) “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your hearts... Tear your hearts and not your clothing.”

Embrace Grace: Before we turn, we are already loved. God's call to repentance is not rooted in anger, but in mercy. Today we practice **prayer and reflection**, trusting that repentance is an invitation back into grace.

Prayer: Merciful God, we return—not pretending, not performing, but honestly. Take our hearts and reshape them by Your grace. Amen.

Devotional Message: Lent begins with a turn. Joel does not call the people to panic—he calls them to return. The crisis they faced was real, but Joel makes it clear: *the problem was not the locusts*. The deeper issue was that God's people had drifted. They were headed in the wrong direction.

Repentance is not about outward displays of sorrow. God says, “*Tear your hearts, not your clothing.*” In other words, let the change be real. Let it reach the core of who you are.

This is the heart of repentance: an exchange. Augustine said it best—“*Give me your heart, take mine in return.*” When we give God our divided hearts, God offers us a new one shaped by love, humility, and faith.

In *Flourish*, repentance is the first act of surrender. Before anything new can grow, the soil must be turned.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about repentance?
- Where in my life have I been headed in the wrong direction?

### Engage Questions

- What is God calling me to turn away from this Lent?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and examine my heart?
- Or to **Go Out** and live differently because of this first turn?

## Thursday, February 19: From Ashes to Healing

Scripture: James 5:16 (CEB) “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

Embrace Grace: God never intended repentance to be lonely. Today we practice **confession and communal prayer**, trusting that healing happens in community.

Prayer: Healing God, make us a people of honesty and grace. Restore what has been broken among us. Amen.

Devotional Message: Ashes remind us of our mortality, but confession reminds us of our need for one another. Sin isolates. Confession reconnects.

James reminds us that healing often happens when repentance moves beyond private regret into shared prayer. The church becomes a place where truth is met with mercy.

Flourishing communities are not perfect—they are honest.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about healing and community?
- How is vulnerability forming my faith?

### Engage Questions

- Who might God be inviting me to trust?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and receive prayer?
- Or to **Go Out** and extend grace?

**Friday, February 20: Turning toward God**  
**Written by: Reverend Dr. Daniel Reeves**

Scripture: 1 John 1:9 (NRSV) "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Embrace Grace: The faithfulness of God and his grace are renewed every morning.

Prayer: Lord, You are the creator of all of humanity. We live and have our beings in You. Eternal Father, kindly help us to see our limitations, and through the Spirit, convict our hearts to live a life worthy of our calling as believers. May Your Spirit stir in our hearts to be humble and lay before Your feet, all our burdens and sins. We ask these things in the name of the One who cares and is always faithful to forgive and restore us, in Jesus' name, amen.

Devotional Message: When I was growing up, the words repentance and confession were sometimes presented as "guilting you or shaming you." Having grown up, and my own personal experience, I have come to realize that "repentance and confession" help to shape my spiritual journey with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In my own experience, repentance isn't only about me turning away from my sin but turning toward my Creator and Sustainer of my faith. Repentance and confession invite us on a journey of daily and constant reliance on God's grace, and our obedience to be transformed by God's Spirit. It is not a call to shame, but to name our sins, and help us to see how we have driven away from God's love. In other words, through confession and repentance, we are saying to God, here I am, and there's nothing you don't know about me; I'm being open and honest. One of the lessons I learn from repentance isn't about feeling sorry for my sin or shortcomings, but I am readjusting my life to the will of God, knowing that God's grace is mightier than my personal failures. I am constantly reminded to examine and re-examine my life as I walk with the Lord. In other words, the season of Lent invites us to take a pause, examine our lives as we pray by listening to God's Spirit, who gently convicts us, and never condemns us, since it is through confession and repentance that the Lord restores us.

## Equip Questions

- What am I struggling with that I need to lay on the altar of grace?
- How do I invite God to reveal the area of my life that I am struggling with?

## Engage Questions

- Am I being called to **Be Still** and reflect deeply?
- Or to **Go Out** and take a concrete step toward change?



## Saturday, February 21: Returning with Our Whole Hearts

Scripture: Isaiah 55:6–7 (CEB) “Let them return to the Lord, who will have compassion.”

Embrace Grace: Even now—God says return. Grace is already waiting. Today we practice **fasting and prayer** as ways of making room for God.

Prayer: Compassionate God, help us release what competes for our hearts. Draw us back into Your life-giving presence. Amen.

Devotional Message: Returning to the Lord is not sentimental, it is intentional. Joel names fasting, prayer, and reflection as tools that help us reorient our lives. Fasting is not about deprivation; it is about dependence.

When we fast, whether from food, media, or busyness, we learn what has been feeding us and what has been starving us. Repentance is about changing direction, not just feeling remorse.

Returning to the Lord means Scripture before social media. Inclusion over exclusion. Forgiveness over resentment. Mission over maintenance.

God promises compassion to those who return. Flourishing grows where surrender begins.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about wholehearted return?
- What distractions am I being invited to release?

### Engage Questions

- What practice will help me return to God this week?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and simplify?
- Or to **Go Out** with renewed faithfulness?



## Sunday, February 22: A Clean Heart, O God Written by Laurie Tarver

Scripture: Psalm 51:1–12 (NRSV) “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved — even when we fall short. God's mercy is greater than our mistakes. In Christ, we are forgiven, restored, and made new. Lent invites us to slow down long enough to be honest with God. In silence, we allow the Spirit to gently reveal what needs healing. Confession is not shame; it is the doorway to freedom. Reflection prepares the soil of our hearts for renewal.

Prayer: Merciful and loving God, Search our hearts and know us. Where we have wandered, call us home. Where we have sinned, forgive us. Create in

us clean hearts and restore the joy of Your salvation. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Devotional Message: Psalm 51 is a prayer born from failure — yet it is filled with hope. David does not hide, excuse, or defend himself. He simply comes before God with honesty: “Have mercy on me.” That is where repentance begins.

During Lent, we are invited into this same courageous honesty. Confession is not about dwelling on guilt; it is about trusting God’s steadfast love. We dare to name our impatience, our pride, our indifference, our missed opportunities to love well — not because we are condemned, but because we are deeply loved.

At SUMC, we believe grace meets us exactly where we are. When we bring our whole selves before God, we discover that mercy has already gone ahead of us. The prayer “Create in me a clean heart” is not a cry of despair, but of expectation. God is still creating. God is still restoring. God is still renewing willing spirits.

Repentance turns us — not backward into shame, but forward into freedom. And restored joy becomes a witness to the world that forgiveness is real.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God revealing to me through this Scripture?
- Where do I need to be honest with God this season?
- What is God forming in my heart during Lent — humility, surrender, renewed joy?
- Is God calling me to be still and receive forgiveness, or to step forward — to reconcile, apologize, forgive, or witness to His restoring grace?

Planted:

Prayer

**Devotional Week Two**

**February 23, 2026 – March 1, 2026**



**Monday, February 23: Morning by Morning: Formed by a Listening God**  
**Written by Laurie Tarver**

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4–9a (NRSV) "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is nearby. Who will contend with me? Let's stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?"

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved people — not because we are flawless, but because God is faithful. Even in weakness, even in weariness, the Lord is near. Morning by morning, God awakens us in grace. At SUMC, we seek to be people who listen before we speak and pray before we act. Lent invites us to slow down, sit in holy silence, and allow God to open our ears. In reflection, we remember that we are sustained not by our own strength, but by the nearness of Christ.

Prayer: Gracious and faithful God, Awaken our hearts each morning to hear Your voice. When we grow weary, give us words that heal and hope that sustains. When we face resistance or uncertainty, remind us You stand near. Form in us a listening spirit and a steady trust in You. In Christ's name, Amen.

Devotional Message: There is something deeply comforting in the rhythm of this passage: "Morning by morning." Before the servant ever speaks a sustaining word to others, God awakens the ear. Listening comes first.

As a church family, we know that life carries both joy and hardship. Some among us are weary. Some are navigating criticism, uncertainty, or change. Isaiah does not ignore these realities. The servant faces opposition and pain — yet does not turn away. Why? Because "the Lord God helps me."

This confidence is not bravado. It is trust.

Lent is not a season of proving ourselves; it is a season of being formed. In the quiet spaces — in prayer, in worship, in reflection — God gently shapes our hearts. We are reminded that we are beloved, not because we have it all together, but because God's grace holds us together.

When we practice holy listening, we become people who can sustain the weary — in our homes, in our community, and within our congregation. Our steadiness does not come from self-defense, but from knowing that God stands nearby.

Morning by morning, God is forming us into a faithful, listening people.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God gently teaching me through this Scripture today?
- What is God forming in my heart during this Lenten season — patience, courage, humility, trust?
- Where might I need to practice listening deeper before speaking or acting?
- Is God calling me to be still and receive, or to step forward — to serve, reconcile, invite, encourage, or witness?



### Tuesday, February 24: The Power of Leaving

**Written by Reverend Dr. Daniel Reeves**

Scripture: Genesis 12: 1-4a (CEB) “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Leave your land, your family, and your father’s household for the land that I will show you. Abram left just as the Lord told him”

Embrace Grace: We leave to become vessels of God's grace despite our limitations.

Prayer: Father of love, may Your mercy and grace continue to lead us and guide us to trust when we are confronted with surrender and leave behind all the weight that easily besets us. May we live our lives knowing you never leave us, with you, we can cast all our cares and leave behind everything that has placed a weight on our spiritual shoulders. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Devotional message: Leaving is not easy. I remembered my first trip out of Africa was mentally challenging. As a refugee in Ghana, I had all my relations in Liberia. I had built relationships with people, and I wasn't sure what was ahead of me, apart from the fact that I was going to attend a Seminary. There were a lot of unknowns. Will I ever see my family in Liberia or friends in Ghana again? Reflecting on Abram's obedience to leave his "land... family, and...father's household for the land that I will show you," I'm amazed by his faith and trust in God. I believe, like Abram, during this season of Lent, we are invited to a time of "holy leaving." I think we are called to leave our comfort zones, what we think gives us security, and those things that people easily know us by. For some of us, we are called to leave behind grudges, fear, and maybe a power grab. May our personal time of reflection lead us to obedience that will turn us toward God's love and a heart of faith and a transformed life.

### Engage Questions

- What is it that might be holding me from living out God's love and mercy?
- How do I trust God when His Spirit stirs my heart to take a step in faith during this Lenten season?

### Equip Questions

- Am I being invited to Be Still—to stop striving and listen?
- Or to Go Out—to sit with someone else in their silence?

## Wednesday, February 25: When We Don't Know What to Pray

Scripture: Romans 8:26 (CEB) “The Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case.”

Embrace Grace: God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. When words fail, the Spirit remains faithful. Today we practice **silence and reflection**, trusting that God hears even what we cannot say.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, pray in us and through us. Hold our sighs, our silence, and our tears. Teach us to trust that nothing in our hearts is hidden from You. Amen.

Devotional Message: There are moments when prayer feels easy—and moments when it feels impossible. Pain, grief, confusion, or exhaustion can leave us without words. Scripture does not shame us for this. Instead, Paul reminds us that the Spirit steps in when we are at a loss.

Prayer is not measured by eloquence. It is measured by honesty. God does not need polished phrases. God listens for the heart.

Sometimes prayer sounds like gratitude. Sometimes it sounds like anger. And sometimes it sounds like silence. The good news is that the Spirit translates it all.

Silence is not the absence of prayer—it is often the deepest form of it. When we sit quietly before God, we open space for the Spirit to shape us, comfort us, and intercede on our behalf.

This Lent, let us release the pressure to “say it right.” Let us trust that even our groans are holy. God is closer than we think, listening more deeply than we know.

### Equip Questions

- What truth about God's grace does this Scripture reveal to me?
- What is forming in me as I practice silence and trust?

## Engage Questions

- What is God calling me to release in prayer?
- Am I being invited to **Be Still**—to stop striving and listen?
- Or to **Go Out**—to sit with someone else in their silence?



### Thursday, February 26: Praying from the Heart, Not for the Crowd

Scripture: Matthew 6:5–6 (KJV): “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved children, seen, known, and loved even when our prayers feel awkward or unfinished. God meets us in sincerity, not perfection. Today we practice **prayer**, not to impress others, but to deepen our relationship with God.

Prayer: Faithful God, draw us away from distractions and into Your presence. Help us pray honestly, humbly, and with open hearts. Amen.

Devotional Message: Jesus is clear: prayer is not a performance. It is not meant to draw attention to us or to showcase our spiritual vocabulary. Prayer is meant to draw us closer to God.

In Matthew 6, Jesus challenges the temptation to pray for recognition rather than connection. He invites us into a quiet, sacred space—the “closet”—where prayer becomes honest and unguarded. There, we are not pretending. There, we are simply God’s children.

Prayer begins by remembering who God is: our Father and our King. God is both loving and powerful, intimate and holy. When we pray, we are not

informing God of something God does not know. We are placing ourselves in God's presence.

The heart of prayer is relationship. God already knows our needs, but prayer shapes us. It aligns our hearts with God's will and reminds us where our help truly comes from.

Flourishing prayer is rooted in authenticity. When our intention is right, prayer becomes a place of transformation rather than performance.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about prayer through this Scripture?
- How is my understanding of prayer being reshaped?

### Engage Questions

- Where might I need to create intentional space for prayer?
- Am I being called to **Be Still**—to pray quietly and honestly?
- Or to **Go Out**—to live differently because of my time with God?



## Friday, February 27: A Simple Prayer for Daily Living

Scripture: Matthew 6:9–13 (KJV) “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven...”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—welcomed into conversation with a God who listens. God does not require fancy words or long speeches. Today we practice **prayer** as simple, faithful conversation with God.

Prayer: Our Father, teach us to trust You with today and tomorrow. Shape our hearts through prayer that reflects Your love and grace. Amen.

Devotional Message: When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he did not give them a formula to memorize so much as a pattern to live by. The Lord's Prayer is simple, but it is not shallow. It teaches us what matters most.

Prayer begins with relationship: *Our Father*. We are not praying to a distant deity, but to a loving Parent and sovereign King. From there, prayer moves to surrender—*Thy will be done*. Prayer is not about bending God's will to ours, but aligning our will with God's.

Jesus teaches us to pray for daily needs, not long-range guarantees. *Give us this day our daily bread*. Prayer keeps us grounded in trust, one day at a time.

Prayer also invites honesty. We confess our sins. We release others through forgiveness. We place the unknown future into God's hands, trusting God to lead and protect us.

Flourishing prayer is not complicated—it is faithful. It is daily dependence on a God who is already at work.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through the Lord's Prayer?
- What is forming in my soul as I pray this way?

### Engage Questions

- What daily need do I need to trust God with right now?
- Am I being called to **Be Still**—to rest in God's care today?
- Or to **Go Out**—to forgive, serve, or love as God has loved me?

## **Saturday, February 28: The Way Up Is Down**

**Written by: Reverend Dr. Daniel Reeves**

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV) “ ...have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature [ God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage”

Embrace grace: Living out a servant-hearted life in a status-seeking world.

Prayer: Eternal Father of grace, we come to you during this season of spiritual renewal of our lives by humbling ourselves before you. We ask the Lord that You help us to submit to Your will, and help us not to become self-centered, but live to serve all people. I'm asking in Jesus' name, amen.

Devotional message: Recently, I came across a quotation that truly resonated with me. Not in a negative way, but it helps me see my own walk with God more clearly. Richard Rorth once wrote, “One of the best-kept secrets, and yet hidden in plain sight, is that the way up is the way down. Or, if you prefer, the way down is the way up.” The truth is that we live in a world driven by status. Celebrating celebrities and coveting personal recognition for satisfaction can sometimes blind us to what living a life of service truly looks like. During this Lenten season, I invite us to consider the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry was centered on service—serving others. From washing His disciples' feet to lifting the marginalized in society, His ministry defines service. The season of Lent calls us to serve all people, but also to pause and reflect on which areas of our lives we need to embrace humility. During Lent, we are called to slow down and reassess our hearts. One of the lessons from our text is how we can confront our self-centeredness. The goal of the text is not about guilt, but rather about resting in God's grace and reassurance. In other words, God's grace and mercy are available when we allow God's Spirit to mold us as servants.

Engage Questions:

- What part of my life am I selfish in, or do I have an attitude of silent pride?

- What is one truth from the reflection that can help me to become more like Christ this week?

### Equip Questions:

- Am I being called to **Be Still**—to rest in God's care today?
- Or to **Go Out**—to forgive, serve, or love as God has loved me?



### Sunday, March 1: Lift Your Eyes Up Written by Jenny Cardenas

Scripture: Psalm 121:1-2 "I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Devotional Message: One of my favorite activities during the week is participating in Kids Hope. Every Wednesday, I head over to the local elementary school to spend time with a special kiddo. We play games, we eat lunch, talk....but something else happens every single time. It's when I go to the classroom and knock on the door to let him know I'm there. My kid's head immediately swings around looking for me. His classmates know I'm there for him. His teacher is expecting me. And this kid gets excited and always, always, looks for me at that exact time.

I think it's like that when we spend time with God. We have to lift up our eyes from whatever is going on in our lives, whether it's school, chores, work, facebook, etc. Whatever it is that you spend time doing, there comes a time when you have to stop and prayerfully look up. Just as my Kids Hope mentee looks up for me on Wednesdays, we are called to look up to God. And unlike me with my limited one-hour commitments with Kids Hope, God gives so much more. He gives life, joy, peace, understanding, healing. He's the maker of heaven and earth. No one else is like Him or compares to Him. And we get

to spend time with the Creator of Heaven and Earth every time we pray. All it takes is looking up at Him, letting everything else fall to the background.

Lift your eyes up.

Prayer: God, please help me look away from the things of this world that do not matter. Take my mind off of worry, anger, pride - anything that takes my eyes off of you, Lord. Let me lift my eyes up to You, the Holy One, the Redeemer, the Savior. From You alone, Lord, is my help and salvation.

Equip question:

- What does God want me to look away from so I can focus on Him?
- What do I need to lay down in order to focus on God?

# Rooted in the Word:

## Reading Scripture

**Devotional Week Three**

**March 2, 2026 – March 8, 2026**



## Monday, March 2: Rooted in the Word

Scripture: Psalm 119:105 (CEB) “Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved—still learning, still growing, still asking questions. God does not shame us for what we don’t yet understand. Today we practice the discipline of **Reading Scripture**, trusting God to guide us one step at a time.

Prayer: Gracious God, light our path as we open Your Word. Give us hearts that are humble, curious, and open to Your truth. Amen.

Devotional Message: In a world flooded with opinions, misinformation, and noise, Scripture grounds us. God’s Word does not remove every mystery, but it does provide direction. The psalmist reminds us that Scripture is a lamp—not a spotlight. It shows us enough light for the next faithful step.

Many of us were taught that faith means certainty. But Scripture invites us into relationship, not rigid answers. Reading the Bible is not about mastering information; it is about being formed over time. God meets us in honest questions and reasonable doubt.

When we read Scripture prayerfully, we remember who God is and who we are. We remember God’s promises—even when fear tempts us to forget them. The disciples forgot Jesus’ words in the midst of suffering, yet Jesus still showed up. Scripture helps us recall what fear tries to erase.

Flourishing begins when we return, again and again, to God’s Word—not to win arguments, but to be shaped by grace.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through this Scripture?
- How is God shaping my trust through regular engagement with the Word?

## Engage Questions

- What step of faith is God inviting me to take?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and listen?
- Or to **Go Out** and share God's promises with someone el



### Tuesday, March 3: When Doubt Meets the Word

Scripture: John 20:27–28 (CEB) “Put your finger here... Stop doubting and believe.”

Embrace Grace: God welcomes our questions. Doubt does not disqualify us from faith—it can deepen it. Today we practice **Reading Scripture** as an act of honest seeking.

Prayer: Jesus, meet us where our faith feels fragile. Speak to us through Your Word and draw us closer to You. Amen.

Devotional Message: Thomas is often remembered for his doubt, but Scripture tells a fuller story. His doubt led him back into community. His questions led him to Jesus. And his encounter led to one of the strongest confessions of faith: “My Lord and my God.”

Scripture gives us permission to wrestle. Faith is not blind acceptance; it is trust shaped by encounter. When we read the Bible, we discover that many of God’s people struggled before they believed—and sometimes while they believed.

Reading Scripture faithfully means reading it patiently, with context, prayer, and community. The Bible was not written to answer every modern question directly, but it contains everything necessary for salvation and faithful living.

Flourishing faith allows room for questions while staying rooted in God's grace. Scripture does not fear our doubt—God uses it.

### Equip Questions

- What questions am I bringing to Scripture right now?
- How is God using doubt to draw me deeper?

### Engage Questions

- Who can I study Scripture with this season?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and seek understanding?
- Or to **Go Out** and invite others into honest conversation?



## Wednesday, March 4: Scripture Is a Means of Grace

Scripture: Luke 24:32 (CEB) “Weren’t our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road?”

Embrace Grace: God meets us through ordinary practices in extraordinary ways. Today we embrace **Reading Scripture** as a means of grace—expecting Christ to meet us there.

Prayer: Living Word, open our minds and warm our hearts as we read. Make Yourself known to us. Amen.

Devotional Message: Martin Luther once said that the Bible is the cradle that holds Christ. When we open Scripture, we are not simply reading ancient words—we are encountering the living Word.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't recognize Jesus at first. It was as He opened the Scriptures that their hearts began to burn. Scripture prepares us to see Christ more clearly.

Reading Scripture is not about speed or volume. It is about attentiveness. When we read slowly, prayerfully, and with openness, God forms us from the inside out.

This is why Scripture is central to a flourishing life. It teaches us how to love God, love neighbor, seek justice, and walk humbly. Over time, it shapes our instincts, our decisions, and our hope.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is catching fire in my heart?
- How is Scripture forming my desires this season?

### Engage Questions

- Where is God inviting me to linger in the Word?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and receive grace?
- Or to **Go Out** and reflect Christ's love in action?



## Thursday, March 5: We Read Scripture Together

Scripture: Matthew 18:20 (CEB) "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm there with them."

Embrace Grace: We were never meant to journey alone. God forms us in community. Today we practice **Reading Scripture together**, trusting Christ's presence among us.

Prayer: God of community, teach us to listen—to You and to one another—as we open Your Word together. Amen.

Devotional Message: Scripture reminds us that faith grows best in shared spaces. We need prayer partners, and we need study partners. Reading Scripture together humbles us. It reminds us that we don't have all the answers. Tradition, experience, reason, and Scripture work together as God shapes the church across generations.

When we read with others, we hear perspectives shaped by different experiences. This does not weaken faith, it deepens it. God often speaks through the body of Christ.

Flourishing discipleship is communal. The Word takes root when we read, reflect, and respond together.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is emerging as I read Scripture with others?
- How is God shaping my humility and openness?

### Engage Questions

- Who might God be inviting me to read Scripture with?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and listen deeply?
- Or to **Go Out** and join or invite someone into study?



## Friday, March 6: From Reading to Living

Scripture: James 1:22 (CEB) “Be doers of the word and not only hearers.”

Embrace Grace: God's Word shapes not only what we believe, but how we live. Today we practice **Reading Scripture** as preparation for faithful response.

Prayer: God of truth, move Your Word from our minds to our hearts and hands. Show us how to live what we read. Amen.

Devotional Message: Scripture always leads somewhere. When we read the Word faithfully, God calls us to respond—with presence, service, generosity, and witness.

Reading Scripture forms our conscience. It teaches us to resist fear, reject injustice, and trust God's economy over the world's anxiety. The Holy Spirit illumines our minds and opens our eyes to what is possible.

Flourishing faith is lived faith. Scripture nourishes us so that we might nourish others. As we take in God's Word, we are sent out to embody it.

The Word becomes flesh again—through us.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God calling me to live out?
- What is forming in my soul through Scripture?

### Engage Questions

- How is God calling me to respond today?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and discern next steps?
- Or to **Go Out** and act in love, justice, and mercy?

## Saturday, March 7: Living with Pain

Written by Dr. Jay Beavers

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:26 (CEB) “Look at your situation when you were called, brothers and sisters! By ordinary human standards not many were wise, not many were powerful, not many were from the upper class.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved—even in weakness, limitation, and pain. We do not need perfect bodies or perfect circumstances to belong to God. Today we practice **Prayer and Reflection**, trusting that God meets us not after the pain is gone, but in the middle of it. God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection.

Prayer: Holy and Gracious God, thank you for always being with us when pain threatens to crush us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Devotional Message: I live with pain – literally -- all of the time. I probably will die with pain. I was born with a bad back, the source of my pain. Ouch! Several years ago, I realized that I had choice: I could crawl into a shell and feel sorry for myself, or, I could reach out to God asking God to help me live with my pain every day. Reaching out to God made more sense than feeling sorry for my situation.

1 Corinthians 1:26 helps me at this point: “Look at your situation when you were called, brothers and sisters! By ordinary human standards not many were wise, not many were powerful, not many were from the upper class.” I think we could add, “not many had perfect bodies.” Bingo! I’m included! Whatever your situation, you also are included. All of us are part of God’s family!

For me, I knew that I could ask God to help live with my physical pain. God, in turn, answered my prayers by leading me to skilled physical therapist and an excellent pain management doctor. Both have helped to me minimize the pain and live a meaningful life. Both have helped me sing again, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!”

Whatever your situation in life is, good or bad, God is there for you when you call on God for help.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through 1 Corinthians 1:26 about weakness and calling?
- How is God forming endurance or gratitude in me through my struggles?

### Engage Questions

- What pain or limitation do I need to entrust more fully to God?
- Is God calling me to **Be Still**—to receive help and grace?
- Or to **Go Out**—to encourage someone else who is living with pain?



## Sunday, March 8: A Disciple Reads the Bible – Meeting Jesus Through Scripture

Written by Pastor Ramon Smith

Scripture: Luke 24:27 (CEB) “Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved—still growing, still learning, still being formed. We do not meet Jesus first through doctrine, but through relationship. And it is through Scripture that we encounter the living Christ. Today we practice **Reading Scripture**, allowing our roots to grow deep into the love of the Triune God.

God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. Today we grow deeper.

Prayer: Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—plant us firmly in Your Word. As we read Scripture, reveal Jesus to us more clearly and shape our hearts by Your love. Amen.

Devotional Message: A Disciple is a person who reads the bible.

Why read the Bible? We learn about our need for divine Grace and God’s mission to save humanity. When understood within its context, the Bible provides instructions to improve our lives and relationships.

It is through Scripture that we meet Jesus. My understanding of the “Lordship of Jesus Christ” has not changed, but my approach to how I preach and teach about the “Lordship of Jesus Christ” in the practice of ministry has changed. I have discovered that the word “Lord” carries some negative connotations, especially for unchurched or pre-Christian people. People tend to understand the word “lord” to mean someone who is authoritarian and oppressive rather than loving and liberating.

In Wesley’s *The Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Acts 1:21, Wesley defines the words “Lord Jesus” as over us as our master. Even Wesley’s definition can carry a negative connotation because the word “master” is strongly linked to the history of slavery in the United States. Therefore, I have learned to redefine the word “lord” in a way that is consistent with Scripture and the teachings of Wesley. Once again, our starting point is the love of God.

Jesus, the natural Son of God, is a member of the Trinity—a community of persons in love. Since Jesus is fully divine, he rules with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This rule is rooted in love. Therefore, the Lordship of Jesus is rooted in love. Since Jesus is also fully human, he entered into a covenant of redemption with the Father to make atonement for fallen humanity. It is extremely helpful to remember that Jesus is fully human. In him, we see a loving God who understands what it means to be human.

The Bible informs us that Jesus did not have a place to lay his head, thirsted, hungered, wept, experienced betrayal, got angry, ministered to marginalized people, was unjustly crucified, and experienced death. Does this sound like someone who wants to oppress and impose authoritarian rule? No. Jesus experienced all of this to liberate us from the bondage of sin and death so that we might enter into proper relationship with God, humanity, and creation.

Jesus conquered Satan and sin through his death, and he conquered death in his resurrection. These were the actions of a self-sacrificing, loving Lord and Savior. Therefore, Jesus’ Lordship is not based on worldly standards; it is rooted in the love of the Triune God.

Jesus’ death and resurrection were for all humanity. The covenant of grace is available to everyone regardless of social status, nationality, age, gender, ethnicity, or race. We enter this covenant by responding in faith to the grace of God and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is Lord of all—even if people reject that grace. Therefore, “Jesus Christ is Lord of all.”

When we respond in faith, we submit ourselves to the will of our loving Lord—not out of fear or coercion, but because grace has filled our hearts. Jesus sits on the throne of our hearts. We become citizens of his kingdom. Sin is still present, but it no longer reigns. We now serve our loving Lord Jesus Christ.

### Questions to Consider When Reading the Bible

- What did this passage mean to its original hearers?
- What part does it play in the Bible's total witness?
- What part does it seem to play in my life, community, and world through this passage?
- What changes should I consider making due to my study?

### Practices

- Choose a reading plan on your own via the Bible app
- Join a pastor-led bible study
- When available, join a Sunday School class focusing primarily on scripture.

### Recommended Resources for Understanding the Bible

- Wesley Study Bible (CEB)
- Wesley One-Volume Commentary-Kenneth J. Collins & Robert W. Wall
- The Bible Project Videos
- Gospel Parallels, NRSV – Burton H. Throckmorton

### Equip Questions

- What truth about Jesus' Lordship is becoming clearer to me through Scripture?
- How does seeing Jesus as loving and liberating reshape my faith?
- What is forming in my soul as I root myself in God's Word?

### Engage Questions

- Where do I need to let Jesus sit more fully on the throne of my heart?
- Is God calling me to **Be Still**—to linger longer in Scripture and encounter Jesus?
- Or to **Go Out**—to live under the loving Lordship of Christ in a way that reflects grace to others?

# Pruned for Growth:

## Fasting

**Devotional Week Four**

**March 9, 2026 – March 15, 2026**



## Monday, March 9: When Your Soul Needs Recharging

Scripture: Matthew 4:4 (CEB) "People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—valued not for our output, but for who we are. God meets us when our batteries are low, not when we are fully charged. Today we practice fasting as a way of reconnecting to the Source.

Prayer: God of life, recharge what has been drained in us. Teach us to hunger for You more than anything else. Amen.

Devotional Message: Most of us know what it feels like to run on empty. We push through exhaustion, tell ourselves we'll rest later, and ignore the warning signs flashing in our souls. Fasting invites us to pause and ask an honest question: *What am I really depending on for strength?*

In the wilderness, Jesus fasted—not to weaken himself, but to deepen his dependence on God. The fast did not drain him; it strengthened him. By refusing to turn stones into bread, Jesus declared that life is sustained by more than consumption. True nourishment comes from God.

Fasting creates space. It disconnects us from what numbs us and reconnects us to what gives life. Whether we fast from food, media, noise, or busyness, the goal is the same: to be recharged by God's presence.

Flourishing faith begins when we stop pretending we have unlimited power and instead plug ourselves back into the Source.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about dependence through this Scripture?
- What is being recharged in my soul during this fast?

## Engage Questions

- What might God be inviting me to fast from this week?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and receive strength?
- Or to **Go Out** with renewed clarity and faithfulness?



### Tuesday, March 10: Led by the Spirit into the Wilderness

Scripture: Matthew 4:1 (CEB) “The Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved children, led—not abandoned—by the Spirit. God does not send us into the wilderness to harm us, but to form us. Today we practice fasting as an act of trust and obedience.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, lead us—even when the path feels uncomfortable. Teach us to follow You faithfully. Amen.

Devotional Message: The same Spirit who declared Jesus “beloved” at his baptism led him straight into the wilderness. This reminds us that fasting and struggle are not signs of God’s absence, they are often places of God’s deepest work.

The wilderness strips away distractions and illusions of control. In fasting, we voluntarily step into that space. We learn what truly sustains us and what has been falsely filling us.

Adam fell in a garden of abundance. Jesus stood firm in a place of scarcity. The wilderness becomes a classroom where spiritual muscles are strengthened and clarity is sharpened.

Fasting helps us discern which voices we've been listening to, and which voice truly matters. When we follow the Spirit, even into uncomfortable places, we discover that God's intentions are always for our good.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God revealing about trust and obedience?
- What spiritual strength is being formed in me?

### Engage Questions

- Where might the Spirit be leading me to simplify?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and listen carefully?
- Or to **Go Out** with greater courage and discernment?



## Wednesday, March 11: Resistance Training for the Soul

Scripture: James 4:7 (CEB) “Resist the devil, and he will run away from you.”

Embrace Grace: God does not expect perfection, but growth. Grace trains us, not shames us. Today we practice **fasting** as resistance training for the soul.

Prayer: God of strength, help us say no to what harms us and yes to what gives life. Amen

Devotional Message: Fasting builds resistance—not against food, but against temptation. Like physical training, spiritual strength grows through intentional practice.

Jesus resisted the tempter not by raw willpower, but by being grounded in God's Word and love. Fasting helped clarify his priorities and strengthened his resolve.

Some of us cannot fast from food for health reasons—but we can still fast. We can fast from social media, constant news, unholy habits, or unhealthy patterns. The purpose is not deprivation; it is transformation.

As we fast, the Spirit reveals what needs to be removed and what needs to be restored. Over time, what once controlled us loses its power.

Flourishing faith is strengthened faith—trained through grace and sustained by love.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God showing me about resistance and freedom?
- What unhealthy patterns are losing their grip?

### Engage Questions

- What might God be inviting me to resist right now?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and grow inward strength?



**Thursday, March 12: Fasting from Busyness**

**Written by Pastor Ramon Smith**

Scripture: Matthew 11:28 (CEB) “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard... and I will give you rest.”

Embrace Grace: We are loved for who we are, not for how busy we are. God invites us to rest. Today we practice fasting from busyness as an act of surrender.

Prayer: Gentle Jesus, teach us to rest in You. Release us from the burden of constant doing. Amen.

Devotional Message: Busyness is often rewarded—but it can quietly rob us of joy, awareness, and rest. Sometimes we are so busy doing “good things” that we miss Jesus in our midst.

John the Baptist fasted in solitude. Jesus fasted in the wilderness. Both remind us that formation requires space. Fasting from busyness helps us rediscover our *being* before our *doing*.

Jesus offers a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light—not because life is simple, but because love clarifies what matters most.

When we fast from busyness, we reclaim time for prayer, Scripture, reflection, and presence. Our souls recognize the difference.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about rest?
- What is being reordered in my life?

### Engage Questions

- What activities might I need to release this season?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and rest deeply?
- Or to **Go Out** with renewed presence and love?



## Friday, March 13 From Fasting to Faithful Living

Scripture: Isaiah 58:6 (CEB) "Isn't this the fast I choose... to set free the oppressed?"

Embrace Grace: God's grace moves us from inward renewal to outward compassion. Today we practice **fasting** that leads to justice, mercy, and love.

Prayer: God of justice, let our fasting shape our living. Teach us to love as You love. Amen.

Devotional Message: Biblical fasting always leads somewhere. It opens our eyes to injustice and softens our hearts toward others. God's chosen fast loosens bonds, feeds the hungry, and restores dignity.

Fasting realigns our priorities and reminds us that love of God and love of neighbor belong together. When our fasting deepens compassion, it has done its work.

Flourishing faith is never self-centered. What God renews within us is meant to bless the world through us.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God revealing about justice and compassion?
- How is fasting reshaping my heart?

### Engage Questions

- Where is God calling me to act with mercy?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and listen?
- Or to **Go Out** and serve, give, or reconcile?

**Saturday, March 14: Fasting is a Spiritual Amplifier**  
**Written by Gabrielle Smith**

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-21 “And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Embrace Grace: By submitting to God through fasting, his voice is amplified and we are given the gift of clarity.

Prayer: Lord, help us to embrace all of the spiritual disciplines not so that we can collect accolades or draw attention, but so that we can grow closer to you, hear your voice, and look more like you each and every day. Amen.

Devotional Message: 2025 was a year that I embraced fasting. I struggled with this discipline in the past because I love food. I love cookbooks, watching cooking shows, and cooking. I enjoy going to restaurants run and owned by people who are passionate about what is presented on a plate.

However, the discipline of fasting actually calls us not to put anything on a plate. I fasted almost weekly in 2025. Many times, I did not announce this, or make any special preparations. At times, my husband did not even know that I was fasting. However, there were times where God spoke to me and nudged me to fast, such as when I had a difficult decision to make or was in difficult and challenging circumstances. I wasn’t as consistent with other spiritual disciplines, but I held on to fasting as something I could do (or not do) regardless of my earthly circumstances.

I fasted while working, at soccer games, at the dance studio, at home, while shopping, and while traveling. After a certain amount of time, thinking, even

about more difficult subjects, was easier for me. Toward the later part of the year, I realized I was asking myself this question: what action can I take right now that will put me closer to God, or make God proud? This made many things easier and clearer.

Like prayer, fasting is something we can take with us wherever we go. If we combine both fasting and prayer, the result leaves us closer to God than we can imagine.

# Branches of Blessings:

## Almsgiving

**Devotional Week Five**

**March 16, 2026 – March 22, 2026**



**Monday, March 16: Blessed to Be a Blessing**  
**Written by Pastor Ramon Smith**

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:7 (CEB) “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—recipients of grace before we ever give anything away. We do not give to earn God's love; we give because we have already received it. Today we practice **generosity (almsgiving)** as a joyful response to grace.

Prayer: Generous God, open our hearts and loosen our grip. Teach us the joy of giving freely and faithfully. Amen.

Devotional Message: Oseola McCarty washed clothes by hand for most of her life. Dollar by dollar, she saved—not to accumulate more, but to give it away. When she gave nearly everything she had to create a scholarship fund, joy multiplied. Her gift sparked generosity far beyond what she could have imagined.

Paul reminds us that generosity is not about pressure or guilt. It is about freedom. God does not need our money, but God desires our trust. When we give cheerfully, we declare that our security does not come from what we hold, but from who holds us.

Generosity reshapes our hearts. It moves us from fear to faith, from scarcity to abundance. We are blessed to be a blessing—not just someday, but now.

Flourishing faith understands this truth: what we release in love is never truly lost. God uses it to bring life to others—and joy to us.

Equip Questions

- What truth about God's generosity is being revealed to me?
- How is joy being formed in my soul as I give?

## Engage Questions

- What is God calling me to give—time, resources, encouragement?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and trust God's provision?
- Or to **Go Out** and bless someone in need?



### Tuesday, March 17: Giving Is an Act of Trust

Scripture: Luke 12:15 (CEB) “Watch out! Guard yourself against all kinds of greed.”

Embrace Grace: God meets us in our fear and reminds us that we are never alone. Today we practice **generosity** as an act of trust—trusting God's provision more than our possessions.

Prayer: Faithful God, help us trust You with what we hold. Free us from fear and lead us into faithful generosity. Amen.

Devotional Message: If we're honest, generosity can feel risky. We wonder: *If I give, will I have enough?* Scripture answers that question again and again—not with spreadsheets, but with stories.

David learned this lesson on the threshing floor. Offered a free sacrifice, he refused. “I will not offer to the Lord my God that which costs me nothing.” David understood that true generosity reveals where our trust lies.

We often count our resources instead of counting on God. But God's math is different from ours. Five loaves feed five thousand. A widow's oil never runs dry. A washerwoman's savings multiply beyond imagination.

Giving teaches us to trust the Giver more than the gift.

## Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about trust and provision?
- Where do I still struggle with fear around giving?

## Engage Questions

- What step of generosity feels risky but faithful?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and trust God?
- Or to **Go Out** and give sacrificially?



## Wednesday, March 18: Giving That Costs Something

Scripture: 2 Samuel 24:24 (CEB) “I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

Embrace Grace: We are loved beyond measure by a God who gave everything. Today we practice **generosity** that reflects sacrificial love.

Prayer: Self-giving God, shape our hearts to give as You give. Teach us what it means to offer our lives in love. Amen.

Devotional Message: Life is costly. Parenting, healing, calling, justice—it all costs something. Our faith is no different. Salvation is free, but discipleship costs us something.

David understood this. A gift without cost was not a gift at all. Sacrificial giving is not about suffering—it is about love. Jesus gave his life so that others could live. In response, we offer our lives as living sacrifices.

Generosity includes our finances, but it doesn't stop there. It includes our skills, time, service, and presence. When we give sacrificially, we begin to see the world "from below," noticing suffering we once ignored.

Flourishing faith costs us comfort—but it gives us life.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about sacrifice?
- What is God reshaping in my priorities?

### Engage Questions

- What might God be asking me to give that costs something?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and examine my attachments?
- Or to **Go Out** and serve with compassion?



## Thursday, March 19: Giving Builds the Body

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:27 (CEB) "You are the body of Christ."

Embrace Grace: We belong to one another. God forms us into a community of care and mission. Today we practice **generosity** as participation in God's work through the church.

Prayer: God of the body, help us give so that all may flourish. Unite our gifts for Your mission. Amen.

Devotional Message: Giving to the church is not about paying bills, it is about enabling ministry. Buildings, technology, administration, and maintenance may not excite us, but they make ministry possible.

Every act of generosity supports worship, service, care, and mission. From AA meetings to youth groups, from worship to outreach, generosity creates sacred space where lives are changed.

When we give, we participate in something larger than ourselves. We become part of the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Generosity strengthens the body so the body can serve.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about community and mission?
- How is generosity forming my sense of belonging?

### Engage Questions

- How can I support the mission of the church more fully?
- Am I called to **Be Still** and reflect on my role?
- Or to **Go Out** and serve through the body of Christ?



### Friday, March 20: Giving So God Gets the Glory

Scripture: Matthew 6:3–4 (CEB) “When you give... your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Embrace Grace: All that we have is a gift from God. Today we practice **generosity** not for recognition, but so that God alone gets the glory.

Prayer: Glorious God, receive our gifts and our lives. May all we give point to You. Amen.

Devotional Message: Generosity is never about impressing others. It is about glorifying God. Paul reminds us that generosity produces thanksgiving—not to us, but to God.

When lives are transformed, when needs are met, when hope is restored, God gets the credit. Every dollar given, every act of service, every sacrifice offered is set aside for a holy purpose.

We give because God first gave. And when we give quietly, faithfully, and joyfully, God's grace multiplies.

Flourishing faith lives open-handed—for the glory of God and the good of the world.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about humility and glory?
- How is generosity shaping my witness?

### Engage Questions

- How can my giving point others toward God?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and examine my motives?
- Or to **Go Out** and give with joy and faith?



## Saturday, March 21: Almsgiving – the Why Matters

Written by Jenny Cardenas

Scripture: Matthew 6: 1-4 (CEB) "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them."

Embrace Grace: we are called to love and serve others because God calls us to do so, not because of how it looks to others

Prayer: Lord, please cleanse me of pride and arrogance. All my gifts, talents, and abilities are from you, and I seek to use them to honor you and show my love for you. Let everything I do be done in love for you.

Devotional Message: Jesus was pretty clear here in the scriptures: the reason behind giving is as important as the action itself. Meaning, if you give for attention or kudos or because it looks good, God is not impressed. In fact, Jesus calls those type of people hypocrites. He instead honors those who give with a sincere faith, who do good deeds out of a genuine love for God. They don't want recognition from people – it would feel like shallow praise. Instead, they yearn for their Father to say 'Well done, good and faithful servant'. What kind of giver are you?

### Engage Questions

- How is God calling me to serve Him? Am I serving with a pure heart or with selfishness?



## **Sunday, March 22: Grace That Gives: Living as Christ's Ambassadors**

**Written by Laurie Tarver**

Scripture: Matthew 25:31–46 (selected) “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10 (selected) “We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God... As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain... See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved — imperfect yet redeemed. We are recipients of grace and ambassadors of Christ. Because we are reconciled to God, we are sent to love and serve in His name. Lent invites us to examine not only what we give, but how we give. Through prayerful reflection, we remember that generosity flows from gratitude. We give not to earn God's love, but because we have already received it.

Prayer: Merciful God, Thank You for reconciling us through Christ. Open our eyes to see You in the hungry, the lonely, and the forgotten. Soften our hearts toward generosity. May our giving reflect Your grace at work within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Devotional Message: In Matthew 25, Jesus makes generosity deeply personal. Caring for the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned is not charity at a distance — it is ministry to Christ Himself. The King identifies with “the least of these.” What we do in love, we do for Him.

Paul echoes this calling in 2 Corinthians. We are “ambassadors for Christ.” We have been reconciled — restored, forgiven, made new — not to keep grace to ourselves, but to embody it in the world. “Now is the day of salvation.” Now is the moment to live differently.

Lent reminds us that generosity is more than financial giving. It is the offering of time, compassion, attention, forgiveness, and presence. It is allowing the grace we have received to become grace we extend.

We will not do this perfectly. We may hesitate. We may overlook opportunities. Yet we remain God's beloved, continually being shaped by mercy. As we reflect and pray, the Spirit forms in us a heart that notices need and responds with love.

At SUMC, we believe grace changes us — and sends us. Reconciled people become reconciling people.

## Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through these Scriptures about generosity?
- Where have I received grace that I am now called to extend?
- What is forming in my soul this Lenten season — compassion, courage, awareness, surrender?
- Is God calling me to be still and receive His reconciling grace, or to step forward — to serve, give, reconcile, invite, or witness in His name?

Leaves that Breathe:

Silence & Reflection

**Devotional Week Six**

**March 23, 2026 – March 29, 2026**



## Monday, March 23: Making Room for God

Scripture: Psalm 46:10 (CEB) “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved—not because we are productive, but because we belong to God. God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. Today we practice **silence and reflection**, choosing stillness over striving.

Prayer: Still-speaking God, quiet the noise within us and around us. Help us rest in Your presence and remember who You are. Amen.

Devotional Message: We live in a world that rewards noise. Full calendars, constant notifications, and endless commentary have convinced us that silence is unproductive. Yet Scripture tells a different story. God invites us to be still—not to escape life, but to remember who is truly in control.

Silence is not empty; it is spacious. In silence, we stop filling our souls with what cannot satisfy. We stop chasing bread that molds and fades. We make room for the Bread of Life.

Reflection helps us notice where God has been at work all along. When we slow down, we begin to see God’s grace woven into ordinary moments—conversations, interruptions, even exhaustion.

Flourishing does not begin with doing more. It begins with making room. Silence and reflection reorient our hearts toward trust, reminding us that God is present, faithful, and enough.

### Equip Questions

- What truth about God is being revealed to me in stillness?
- What is forming in my soul as I slow down?

## Engage Questions

- Where do I need to make more space for God?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and rest in God's presence?
- Or to **Go Out** with renewed clarity and peace?



### Tuesday, March 24: Why Not You?

**Written by: Clay Flaim**

Scripture: Hebrews 12: 1-3 “So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne. Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged and you won't give up.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—even in seasons of trial, uncertainty, and hardship. God does not abandon us in difficulty. Today we practice **trustful reflection and prayer**, remembering that endurance is formed through faith. God meets us not after the trial, but in the middle of it.

Prayer: Faithful God, when trials come, steady our hearts. Help us remember that we are never alone and that Your love holds us through every season. Amen.

Devotional Message: When I was a graduate student at Texas A&M, I attended Bible studies that were led by Tim and Janice Kerlee. Occasionally, one of the students would come into Bible study complaining about some

circumstance in their life and be asking the question “Why me?” Janice would respond with a question I will never forget. She would simply say “Why not you?” Her point was why does it always have to be someone else who deals with the financial trial, difficult class or professor, broken relationship, or any of the plethora of problems college students deal with every day.

I think this passage from Hebrews is making the same point as Janice’s story. To truly understand this passage of scripture, you need to look at what is being said in Hebrews 11. This chapter is often called the “Hall of Faith”. It tells the stories of Old Testament figures who went through various trials in their walks of faith. What you notice as you read through the chapter, is that many of the people listed went through some tough stuff. Noah and the Ark, Moses and the Exodus, Abraham leaving Ur to a place he did not know and his near sacrifice of his son Isaac, and Sarah and her having a baby at 90 are among the people included in the chapter.

What do all these stories have in common? God got these people through everyone of them. He got Noah through the flood, Moses through the Exodus, Abraham to his inheritance, and Sarah through her infertility. He will do the same for us. It says in Romans 8: 38-39 “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No matter what trial you may be going through, God will get you through.

What trial in your life right now do you need to trust to God’s care?

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through Hebrews 12 about endurance?
- How is God shaping perseverance in my soul during this season?

## Engage Questions

- What trial am I being invited to entrust fully to God?
- Is God calling me to **Be Still**—to rest in His sustaining love?
- Or to **Go Out**—to encourage someone else who is facing their own race?



### Wednesday, March 25: In Stillness I Wait for The Lord

**Written by: Karma Reynolds**

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1–14 (CEB) “The hand of the Lord was on me... Mortal, can these bones live?”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved—even in wilderness seasons when strength feels gone and answers feel delayed. God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. Today we practice **Silence and Reflection**, trusting that stillness is not emptiness but sacred space where God reshapes us.

Prayer: Lord O’ God, when my eyes are blinded to your glory, when my hands lay weary, take me up into your arms and lead me astray no more. For I follow you endlessly, because you have great things awaiting me. Amen.

Devotional Message: In practice we find a deep listening that awakens us to God’s truth, a truth of love and direction. Surrender and fall into his grace when guidance is none.

Sometimes life can feel heavy, even crushing, as we wander through a wilderness season. In those times, our strength fails, and all we can do is sit in the stillness of God’s presence.

Sometimes his love feels near and tangible; other times, silence fills the room. Yet even in silence, he is shaping us, teaching us to wait, to trust, and to listen.

In my wilderness season, I prayed, cried, and begged for deliverance. Then the Lord spoke: “Would you trust me enough to freefall?”

Freefalling meant complete surrender—packing up everything I owned and moving to a new state, with no money and no sure plan, stepping into the unknown with only faith. In that leap, God proved faithful. He provided every cent I needed and more. He blessed me beyond measure, transforming me into someone I am proud of. My old life is no longer; I am made new.

God speaks in stillness. He invites us to trust him in the moments when we have no safety net but his promises. Faith is allowing him to speak even when we fear his answer. “God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” — Romans 8:28

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through Ezekiel 37 about life in dry places?
- What is God forming in me during this season of waiting?

### Engage Questions

- What wilderness area of my life is God inviting me to surrender?
- Is God calling me to **Be Still**—to listen and trust in silence?
- Or to **Go Out**—to step forward in faith even without certainty?



## Thursday, March 26: Quiet Reflections

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:9-13 (CEB) “There he went into a cave and spent the night. The Lord’s word came to him and said, “Why are you here, Elijah?” Elijah replied, “I’ve been very passionate for the Lord God of

heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!" The Lord said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the Lord. The Lord is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the Lord. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

Embrace Grace: God comes to us in the midst of our busy-ness. God comes to us when we're wandering in the wilderness, up on a mountain, or hiding in a cave. God comes to us in quiet ways and gently whispers to us.

Prayer: Almighty God, Remind us that you are always present with us good times, tough times, quiet moments, or in the midst of our busy-ness... No matter where we are, you are always present and eager to embrace and equip us for our next faithful step! Amen.

Devotional Message: Elijah accomplished a mighty work for the Lord (see 1 Kings 18:17-19:16) – purging the nation of false prophets and idol worship, but Queen Jezabel swore revenge and sought to kill Elijah. Fearing for his life, Elijah ran and hid.

Have we ever experienced a time when we thought everyone was against us? Where do we go? To whom do we turn?

Elijah cried out to the Lord. The prophet's fear kept him from sensing it, but God was already fully present with Elijah, even in the midst of his panic.

Elijah's fear had him quaking in his sandals, causing his heart to pound, and making him feel the heat of Jezabel's hot pursuit already. Elijah didn't need earthquakes, storms, or fire. Elijah needed a steady, reassuring presence to assuage his fears and calm his anxiety.

Elijah sensed God's divine presence in the gentle whisper, quiet stillness, and holy space where the veil between heaven and earth is thin.

God is fully capable of parting seas, stirring up storms, and rolling away stones, but God is equally present in the quiet sounds of silence.

In those dark, difficult moments when we feel mistreated, beaten down, or defeated, we are not alone!

### Equip Questions

- In the midst of our busy, how do we make time for God?
- Do we listen when God whispers to us?
- How can we reflect on the same question, "Why are you here?"

### Engage Questions

- Why are we here in this time and place?
- How can we reach out and bless those in our community so that they, too, can experience the tenderness and gentle blessings of God?



## **Friday, March 27: Reflection That Leads to Healing**

Scripture: Psalm 139:23–24 (CEB) "Examine me, God! Look at my heart."

Embrace Grace: We are fully known and fully loved. God invites us into reflection not to shame us, but to heal us. Today we practice **reflection** as an act of grace.

Prayer: Searching God, help us see ourselves truthfully and tenderly. Heal what needs healing within us. Amen.

Devotional Message: Reflection is holy work. It takes courage to slow down and look inward. Yet God promises to meet us there—not with condemnation, but with mercy.

Daily reflection helps us notice patterns—both healthy and harmful. It allows the Spirit to gently reveal what needs to be confessed, forgiven, or released.

Asking simple questions—Where did I see God today? Did I cause harm? What broke my heart?—opens the door to healing. Reflection clears away what clutters the soul so that love can flow more freely.

Flourishing faith is honest faith. And honesty, held in grace, leads to transformation.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God revealing as I reflect honestly?
- What healing is beginning within me?

### Engage Questions

- What might God be inviting me to release?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** and receive healing?
- Or to **Go Out** and seek reconciliation?



## Saturday, March 28 From Stillness to Faithful Living

Scripture: Mark 6:31 (CEB) “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.”

Embrace Grace: Jesus invites us to rest—not so we can escape the world, but so we can reenter it with love. Today we practice **silence and reflection** as preparation for faithful living.

Prayer: Rest-giving Christ, renew our strength. Send us back into the world grounded in Your love. Amen.

Devotional Message: Jesus knew the demands of ministry. He also knew the necessity of rest. Silence and reflection were not interruptions to his mission—they sustained it.

When we rest with God, we are reminded of our purpose. Silence clarifies what matters. Reflection aligns our lives with love of God and love of neighbor.

From stillness, we are sent. Nourished by Christ, we become bread for others—through presence, compassion, service, and generosity.

Flourishing faith flows from the Presence that satisfies.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about rest and calling?
- How is silence shaping my faith?

### Engage Questions

- How is God sending me back into the world?
- Am I being called to **Be Still** a bit longer?
- Or to **Go Out** and offer myself as nourishment for others?



**Sunday, March 29: Patience Takes Practice**  
**Written by Adrian Cardenas**

Scripture – 1 Samuel 16:1-13 “The Lord said to Samuel, “How long are you going to grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and get going. I’m sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found my next king among his sons.” “How can I do that?” Samuel asked. “When Saul hears of it he’ll kill me!” “Take a heifer with you,” the Lord replied, “and say, ‘I have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord.’”<sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make clear to you what you should do. You will anoint for me the person I point out to you.” Samuel did what the Lord instructed.

When he came to Bethlehem, the city elders came to meet him. They were shaking with fear. “Do you come in peace?” they asked. “Yes,” Samuel answered. “I’ve come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Now make yourselves holy, then come with me to the sacrifice.” Samuel made Jesse and his sons holy and invited them to the sacrifice as well. When they arrived, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, That must be the Lord’s anointed right in front. But the Lord said to Samuel, “Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven’t selected him. God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.”

Next Jesse called for Abinadab, who presented himself to Samuel, but he said, “The Lord hasn’t chosen this one either.” So Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “No, the Lord hasn’t chosen this one.” Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord hasn’t picked any of these.” Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Is that all of your boys?” “There is still the youngest one,” Jesse answered, “but he’s out keeping the sheep.” “Send for him,” Samuel told Jesse, “because we can’t proceed until he gets here.” So Jesse sent and brought him in. He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking. The Lord said, “That’s the one. Go anoint him.” So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him right there in front of his brothers. The Lord’s spirit came over David from that point forward. Then Samuel left and went to Ramah.

Embrace Grace: In this moment, we remember that we are God's children - fully known and fully loved, even in our imperfection. In this moment, we can know this truth: we belong to Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You see beyond outward appearance and look at the heart. Shape our hearts to be faithful like David's: humble, obedient, and ready when You call. Help us to trust you, even in seasons of waiting, and fill us with Your Spirit to walk the path You have laid before us. Amen.

Devotional Message: In 1 Samuel 16:1-13, we find the story of when God sends his servant, Samuel, to anoint a new king of Israel. Jesse presents his strongest, most impressive sons, but the Lord says, "Don't judge by his appearance or height... The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them...but the Lord looks at the heart". One by one, the obvious choices to Samuel pass by. Finally, the youngest son, David, still out in the fields tending sheep, is called in. The young overlooked shepherd is chosen by God.

But notice something important: David is anointed in this chapter, yet he does not become king for many years. Between promise and fulfillment is a long road of confusion, service, danger, and waiting. The oil was poured quickly by Samuel, but the preparation of David becoming king took time.

Flourishing:

Holy Week

**Devotional Week Seven**

**March 30, 2026 – April 4, 2026**



## Monday, March 30: Confession Leads to Forgiveness

**Written by Pastor Rhonda Chambers**

Scripture: 1 John 1:5-9 (NIV) "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Embrace Grace: God's love lights our way so we can live in truth and enjoy fellowship with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Prayer: Loving God, Help us to come to you with contrite hearts, seeking restoration and reconciliation, knowing that in you, we find forgiveness and love! Amen.

Devotional Message: I'm blessed to have such awesome, loving parents! They loved and encouraged my brother and me, raising us in the church and teaching us core values of integrity, compassion, and hard work.

I'd like to say that I always followed their example and lived up to their expectations, but that would be a lie. I fell short far more often than I'd like to admit. Momma always told us that she loved us enough to get up off of her behind to get ours... and she did!

There were a few times when we made Momma so mad that she would send us to our rooms and tell us we had to wait till Daddy came home.

Oooooohhh, that was the worst! I sat in my room, tears streaming down my face, contemplating, regretting, waiting till Daddy got home, knowing I'd have to tell him what I'd done. Daddy worked long hours, but time seemed to drag on even slower...

I dreaded having to look in Daddy's eyes and confess.

I knew I was in big trouble, but that wasn't the part I dreaded most. What hurt far worse than any spanking was seeing the look of deep disappointment on Daddy's face. Failing to live out all they'd taught us, falling short of their expectations, choosing to disobey... my misdeeds hurt my parents in ways that I couldn't fully understand then. When Terry and I became parents, I gained a greater appreciation for my parents and got a tiny glimpse of the anguish my misdeeds must inflict on my heavenly Father.

Daddy always said no one ever makes the same mistake twice. Not that we don't repeat our sins, just that the second time, it's not a mistake, it's a choice. Choose wisely.

### Equip Questions

- When we've fallen short, how can we make it better?
- What choices do we need to change?

### Engage Questions

- How can we create accountability partnerships and help each other?
- How can we offer forgiveness, reconciliation, and love for others?



## **Tuesday, March 31: Scripture as a Means of Grace**

**Written by Pastor Ramon Smith**

Scripture: Luke 24:32 (CEB) “Were not our hearts on fire when he spoke to us on the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—saved by grace, sustained by grace, and led by grace. God meets us not only in worship or prayer, but in the reading of Scripture. Today we practice Reading Scripture, remembering that Scripture is a means of grace where we encounter the living Christ.

God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. Today we open our hearts to the Word.

Prayer: Living Word, reveal Yourself to us through the written Word. Ignite our hearts and guide us in the way of salvation. Amen.

Devotional Message: The central theme of our faith is the saving grace of God. Scripture is where we meet Jesus Christ in the experience God's saving grace. Therefore, Scripture is a means of grace. Jesus is the living or revealed Word of God. The Bible is the written Word of God. We can trust what the bible says because the Holy Spirit inspired people to write scripture. In addition God, was the primary agent in the writing the scripture. The written Word of God bears witness to God's self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, in scripture we see "...God's work in creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit's ongoing activity in human history."

According to John Wesley, the aim of scripture is to lead us to and "in the way of heaven." In scripture, we find what Wesley calls the "Scripture Way of Salvation", which is inclusive of the way from original sin, to justification, and to sanctification. Wesley's understanding of scripture is consistent with Article V of the Articles of Religion, "The Holy Scripture containeth everything necessary to salvation." Likewise, Confession IV of the Confession of Faith says the following about scripture, "...reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation." Therefore, we believe that the way to salvation is rooted in scripture, and any belief or practice that is not rooted in scripture is not necessary for salvation. While, anything that is not contrary to scripture is permissible. Therefore, if the way to heaven (salvation) is our aim, then scripture must be the measure or standard by which we measure all other sources and norms.

Personal experience "shows what God is doing in the life of the believer." Through personal experience, we are able to see how personal stories fit within the larger context of the salvation story. Therefore, we experience a journey from sin and death to righteousness and eternal life. As a result, we are able to bear authentic witness to what is found in scripture because we are experiencing the "Scripture Way of Salvation" in our own lives. In essence, we become living testimonies for the world. The good news of Jesus Christ becomes our news. It claims us, and we proclaim it. The Word of God

becomes alive in our lives. The written Word of God becomes more than just words of a page, we experience the revealed or living Word of God in our hearts. Simply put, we meet Jesus. We experience assurance that we are God's children through the activity of the Holy Spirit bears that witness to our spirit. This "Jesus meeting" experience, is confirmation of what we read in scripture. Experience cannot prove doctrine that is not found in Scripture, but it can confirm what we have read in Scripture.

My mother used to say, "Son, God gave you a brain, you should use it." My mother was simply reminding me that God gave me the ability to think or reason, and that I should use that gift. Some people believe that we have to check our brains at the door as Christians. Unfortunately, far too often people are told, "do not think, just believe." As Wesleyans, we believe that a reasoned understanding of the Christian faith will enable us to live out the gospel message in the world. However, we recognize that there are limits to our human knowledge. It is through reason that is guided by the Holy Spirit that we are able to interpret scripture. In addition, reason confirms what we read in scripture.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me about salvation through Scripture?
- How do scripture, tradition, experience, and reason shape my understanding of Jesus?
- What is forming in my soul as I root my life in the Word?

### Engage Questions

- How can I more intentionally meet Jesus in Scripture this week?
- Is God calling me to Be Still—to reflect more deeply on what I read?
- Or to Go Out—to live as a living testimony of the grace I have encountered?



## Wednesday, April 1: Call for Help

**Written by Pastor Rhonda Chambers**

Scripture: (Psalm 18:6 CEB) “In my distress I cried out to the Lord; I called to my God for help. God heard my voice from his temple; I called to him for help, and my call reached his ears.”

Embrace Grace: Throughout the Bible, we see that God greatly desires a relationship with us. God is our compassionate, heavenly parent. God draws near to us. God loves us. God hears our every prayer!

Devotional Message: Seminary doesn't teach classes on “Impressive Prayers.” Such classes do not exist because fancy words and polished prayers don't impress. God is not dazzled nor swayed by our vocabulary or theological acumen. God wants our hearts – completely and authentically.

When our son was just a preschooler, he went outside to see his Daddy. Terry was repairing the neighbor's ride-on mower. He'd fixed the engine and replaced the blade on the mower deck. The deck was still upside down, and Terry was fixing to put it all back together.

Just as Terry was getting his tools, Chip walked out and saw the shiny new blades on the upside-down deck. He bent down, exclaimed, “helicopter” and gave the blade a spin nearly cutting off the end of his thumb.

I heard a horrifying scream and ran outside. Tears streamed down his face, and blood was everywhere.

I quickly scooped Chip up as he wailed, “PRAY Mommy, pray hard! It hurts!”

I pleaded with God as I washed Chip's hands. All I could think to pray was Sweet Jesus, please help!

The mower blade sliced through Chip's thumb, almost to the bone, cutting through his nailbed. Stitches wouldn't be possible.

I slathered on Neosporin, wrapped his thumb in a Lion King Band-Aid, kissed Chip's tear-stained face, and held him tight as I prayed more. I don't know what I said, but I'm sure it was woefully inadequate.

Thirty years later, all I know is that God heard my heart! Chip's thumb is fine. No scars, no numbness, and no missing pieces. God didn't promise that Chip

would never get hurt again, just that each time Chip gets hurt, God will still hear our prayers.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Remind us that we don't need eloquent platitudes or seminary degrees to pray; we just need to open our hearts and pour them out to you. You desire our hearts, our vulnerability, our sincerity. Thank you for hearing more than our words; you hear our hearts! Let our hearts always be tender to you. Amen

### Equip Questions

- When we're hurting, what is our knee-jerk response? Who do we call?
- Do we regard prayer as our primary response, or is it a last resort? Why?

### Engage Questions

- How can we strengthen our relationship with God?
- How can we encourage others to strengthen their relationship with God?
- How can we help others to view prayer as simple conversations with the One who dearly loves us?



## Thursday, April 2: Take a Break Written by Pastor Rhonda Chambers

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV) “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved—even when we feel entangled, distracted, or overwhelmed. God does not condemn us for what hinders us; God invites us to lay it down. Today we practice Fasting, trusting that releasing what entangles us helps us fix our eyes more clearly on Jesus.

God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection. Today we make space for what truly matters.

Prayer: Loving God, Keep us mindful of You and help us notice when we are distracted by worldly things. Help us take a break from distractions and refocus our hearts and minds on You. Amen.

Devotional Message: When the kids were little, I would notice times when tensions got high and tempers flared. After some prayer and observation, I noticed that increased stress seemed to follow increased TV time. My solution was simple, I crawled behind the cabinet and unplugged the TV. When the kids tried to turn on the TV, I feigned shock and expressed dismay, "I'm sorry the TV is broken again, but lets do something else fun instead!"

With only one TV in the house, it was easy to fast from screentime. We played games, did puzzles, created art, went on family walks, or just played outside! Stress eased and the whole family's mood improved all while we grew closer together!

That is the kind of fasting I pray we've all participated in during this Holy season of Lent. A fast from things that keep us from enjoying all the blessings, joy, and love that God desires for us. When we give up social media, anger, busy-ness, resentment, video games, or anything else that blocks us from living out our faith and following Christ, that is a holy and helpful fast that makes us better, that restores relationships, ignites our fervor for Christ, reconnects us with those we love, and allows us to bask in God's perfect shalom – peace and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit!

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through Hebrews 12 about what hinders my race of faith?

- What is forming in my soul as I let go of what entangles me?

### Engage Questions

- What “TV” in my life needs to be unplugged this season?
- Is God calling me to Be Still—to rest from distraction and fix my eyes on Jesus?
- Or to Go Out—to reconnect with others and live more fully into God’s shalom?



### **Friday, April 3: Give Generously and Sincerely**

**Written by Adrian Cardenas**

Scripture: John 12:1-11 (CEB) “Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus’ feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume. Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, “This perfume was worth a year’s wages! Why wasn’t it sold and the money given to the poor?” He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it. Then Jesus said, “Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. You will always have the poor among you, but you won’t always have me.”

Many Jews learned that he was there. They came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. The chief priests decided that they would kill Lazarus too. It was because of Lazarus that many of the Jews had deserted them and come to believe in Jesus.”

Embrace Grace: We are God's beloved children—unconditionally loved. Nothing we do or fail to do can ever separate us from His unending love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, like Mary, we want to pour out our love for You without hesitation. Free us from our pride, and let our devotion to You be sincere and generous. May our lives be an offering that honors You above all else. Amen.

Devotional Message: In John 12:1–11, we read the story about a deeply personal moment in the home of Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 10). While others sat at the table, Mary knelt at the feet of Jesus and poured out an expensive perfume worth a year's wages. It was extravagant, sincere and generous.

Mary's act was not done for recognition; it was pure devotion. She did not measure the cost; she acted in faith. In contrast, Judas Iscariot criticized her action, using spiritual language to hide his true heart. Sincerity and generosity can sometimes lead to misunderstanding. A heart fully devoted to Jesus will not always make sense to those who don't know Him.

True generosity flows from true love. It is not about the size or value of the gift but the sincerity of the heart. When we truly understand who Jesus is and what He has done, holding back may end up being harder than pouring out!

What would it look like for us to have Mary's sincerity? To give our time, attention and resources freely as an act of worship? Giving generously doesn't necessarily mean offering expensive material things. A life devoted to Christ can be your offering.

#### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through this Scripture?

#### Engage Questions

- What is God calling me to *do* or *share*?



**Saturday, April 4: Be Creative with God**  
**Written by Isabelle Smith**

Scripture: Exodus 35:30-35 (CEB) “Then Moses said to the Israelites: “Look, the LORD has chosen Bezalel, Uri’s son and Hur’s grandson from the tribe of Judah. The LORD has filled him with the divine spirit that will give him skill, ability, and knowledge for every kind of work. He will be able to create designs, do metalwork in gold, silver, and copper, cut stones for setting, carve wood, do every kind of creative work, and have the ability to teach others. Both he and Oholiab, Ahisamach’s son from the tribe of Dan, have been given the skill to do every kind of work done by a gem cutter or a designer or a needleworker in blue, purple, and deep red yarns and in fine linen or a weaver or anyone else doing work or creating designs.”

Embrace Grace: We are God’s beloved, even in our imperfections. Like art, we are unfinished and still being shaped. God does not require perfection before calling us good. Today we practice Reflection and Prayer, remembering that creativity itself can be a way of drawing closer to God. God meets us in our weakness, not our perfection.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to try to live and love like Jesus but just like art we are imperfect help us strive to be more like you. Even when we might feel like we need to be perfect to be like you help us to understand that we can still live and love like you amen.

Like art we are imperfect all of us are but that does not mean that something is wrong with us, but we should try to live like and love like Jesus but like art we will make mistakes all the time.

Lord, please help us to try to live and love like Jesus but just like art we are imperfect help us strive to be more like you. Even when we might feel like we need to be perfect to be like you help us to understand that we can still live and love like you amen.

2021 was when I realized that art does not have to be perfect, so I did art a lot more. When I do art now, I do not care too much about how it looks I just try to get all of my feelings out on a canvas I like to think my art is a good

time to talk with Jesus and ask him about my art. Ask him what I should make or draw. I sometimes memorize scripture and then draw or paint it in my style. Another way to tie God into art is to draw or paint a beautiful scene and thank him to let you have the idea to make it. This year at a painting birthday party we were following the directions of the painter, and everyone was able to make a good painting. You can also put scripture in your art and do something to go with it. So follow the instructions of god and try to help someone learn art each day.

### Equip Questions

- What truth is God teaching me through Exodus about creativity and calling?
- How is God shaping my gifts, even in imperfection?

### Engage Questions

- How can I invite God into my creative life this week?
- Is God calling me to Be Still—to create and reflect with Him?
- Or to Go Out—to use my creativity to bless someone else?

Easter Sunday, April 5

*Celebrate! He is Risen!*

Come experience a joyful worship service to celebrate  
Jesus' Resurrection!