



CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE RESOURCES

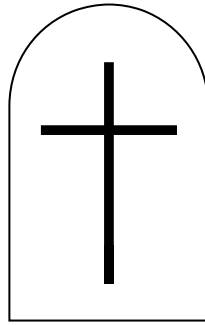


Encounter The Cross

A DEVOTIONAL JOURNEY WITH THE PASTORS AND STAFF OF
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Greetings Church Family,

WE ARE BEGINNING A 40 DAYS JOURNEY TOGETHER THROUGH THIS SEASON CALLED 'LENT' AS WE MOVE TOWARDS EASTER SUNDAY.



LENT IS THE FORTY DAYS BEGINNING ON ASH WEDNESDAY AND LEADING UP TO EASTER SUNDAY. SUNDAYS THEMSELVES ARE NOT COUNTED IN THESE FORTY DAYS, AS THEY ARE GENERALLY SET ASIDE AS DAYS OF SABBATH RENEWAL AND CELEBRATION ("MINI-EASTERS" OF SORTS).

LENT IS A SEASON OF PREPARATION AND REPENTANCE DURING WHICH WE ANTICIPATE AND REMEMBER THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS. IT IS THIS VERY PREPARATION AND REPENTANCE THAT GIVES US A DEEP AND POWERFUL LONGING FOR RESURRECTION LIFE, THE JOY OF EASTER.

LET'S BEGIN WITH THIS PRAYER: *LORD, HOLY ONE, HAVE MERCY ON US. WE CONFESS OUR SINS TO YOU. WE HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF YOUR GLORY AND WITHOUT YOUR MERCY AND GRACE, WE WOULD BE DUST. WE REPENT NOW. LORD, AS WE ENTER THIS LENTEN SEASON, BE NEAR US. HELP US, BY YOUR HOLY SPIRIT, TO FEEL THE PROPER CONVICTION AND REPENTANCE FOR OUR SIN. HELP US, BY YOUR SPIRIT, TO HAVE THE STRENGTH TO OVERCOME THE ENEMY.*

THANK YOU, LORD, THAT EASTER IS COMING! DEATH HAS NO STING, NO VICTORY, BECAUSE OF JESUS! GLORY AND HONOR AND PRAISE TO HIS NAME! THANK YOU FOR RESCUING US. HELP US KEEP THE WEIGHT AND THE JOY OF THIS SEASON IN OUR HEARTS AS WE MOVE THROUGH THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. HELP US BEAR THE GOOD FRUIT OF YOUR SPIRIT.

*FROM DUST, WE MIGHT HAVE BEEN FORMED, BUT OUR BODIES, OUR SPIRITS, OURSELVES, AWAIT BEAUTIFUL REDEMPTION AND THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS. HELP US LONG AND LOOK FORWARD TO THAT DAY, AND LET IT COME QUICKLY, LORD JESUS. **AMEN.***

You are invited!

4/13 - Palm Sunday: 9:00am, 10:30am, & 5:00pm

4/18 - Good Friday: 6:00pm

4/19 - "Easter Egg Hunt: 10:00am"

4/20 - Easter Sunday: 9:00am & 10:30am

Church of the Nazarene: 1871 Boyers Rd. Rockingham VA. 22801



SUNDAY IS COMING!



CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE RESOURCES

*My grace is sufficient for you,
for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

It is a common practice during Lent to fast. A person may give up any number of things, including a certain food or a specific meal. If your motivation to fast is to lose weight, you've got it all wrong. Fasting is not about you doing something, but God accomplishing something in you. It's counterintuitive because in fasting, we learn that our greatest strength lies in our weakness.

Fasting teaches us many things and perhaps the greatest is that when we are weak, we are strong. When Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert and was tempted by the devil, certainly he was physically weak and hungry, but he showed incredible strength to overcome temptation. If you are struggling with sin and wonder how you can overcome, I encourage you to follow the example of Jesus. His fasting prepared him for everything the Devil threw at him.

As you fast and pray, may your physical weakness become spiritual strength. Ask God to take your weakness and help you to lean on the strength of God and acknowledge that on your own, you are helpless to live a holy life. As you fast, may your weakness turn into utter dependence on God.



*For there is one God and one mediator between
God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,
who gave himself as a ransom for all people.*

1 Timothy 2:5-6a

This passage reveals to us the three fundamental truths.

- (1) There is one God.
- (2) There is only one way we can approach Him – through the incarnate Christ.
- (3) That Jesus gave Himself to die on the cross as a ransom for all humanity.

A ransom is a payment, a means of release from bondage, captivity, slavery, or sin. Jesus is the ransom that releases us from our enslavement to sin. Jesus the innocent gave Himself for us the sinners. Through His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb, we are set free from the dominion of sin and from servitude to sin. And through His death we are reconciled to God and brought into a right relationship with Him.

As you pray, open your heart to these truths and ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and free you from its dominion. Tell Him that you want to be in right relationship with God.



Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7

I love the imagery of this verse. In the original language, to “cast” means to “throw upon.” I love the idea of throwing, flinging, shaking off my cares, especially if the Lord is where they will land.

In this verse, we find Peter speaking to the Romans about humility and resisting the enemy. Right in the middle of these instructions is a reminder to throw our cares and anxieties “upon” the Lord. Peter was wise enough to know, during this daily life, in relationships, and on our journey of faith, we will have cares that are too heavy for us.

What are you carrying today that feels too heavy? Do you believe the Lord wants to take it from you? Do you believe he cares? Will you let go?

Believing He cares for us is foundational for our faith. Believing He desires to receive and carry our anxieties deepens our faith. Believing He powerfully acts in our cares is a step of faith. The One who took on our sin and shame, wants our cares as well.

As you pray today, will you take a step of faith with me? Imagine holding your cares, worries, and anxieties in your hands, now rear back, and cast them on Him. Release them with fervor and faith. He receives them in His capable, powerful, merciful hands. Now, leave them there, my friend and let God do only what He can.



Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

This verse is scribbled on a dry erase board on my fridge. I am sharing it with our youngest often, hoping she hides this truth in her heart early.

It sure has been a go to scripture for me. Each time reminding me of my need to yield to the One who is trustworthy.

Today, it caught my eye amongst the fingerprints and getting the groceries put away, “lean not into your own understanding”. I could hear the gentle whisper of His spirit, saying, “you don’t have to have it all figured out. I’ve got this. I’ve got you.” The reminder stopped me in my tracks. Will I surrender the need to have a clear view, a plan, and a solution to what lies ahead? Will I trust Him, again?

I may need to be gently reminded, but my answer is yes! I will surrender my desire because I know He is faithful. I know that He sees clearly and has a beautiful plan. Even when it makes no sense, His plans are best for me.

As you pray, will you surrender your need to know today? As you trust Him, you will find He is faithful to show you the way exactly when you need to know.



Therefore, since we have these promises dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2 Corinthians 7:1

These promises are the promises of God's presence in those who are willing to separate themselves unto Christ. There is work in us that only the Lord can do, but there is also work that he desires that we partner with him in separating ourselves to him.

Oswald Chambers writes, "I have to cleanse myself from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit until both are in accord with the nature of God". Chambers continues "I have the responsibility of keeping my spirit in agreement with His Spirit, and by degrees Jesus lifts me up to where He lived- in perfect consecration to his Father's will, paying no attention to any other thing." – My Utmost for His Highest

As you pray today, ask the Lord to search your heart, to purify, and do the gracious work that he can do. But let's also ask him what areas he would have us partner with him in setting ourselves apart for Him. Living a holy life, claiming the promise of his presence!



But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalms 19:12-14

When we consider the words of Jesus that his followers are to be perfect as their father in heaven, we must allow the Father to search our hearts.

David recognizes his own inability to discern the condition of his heart before the Father. We must too be cautious of our own assessments of our progress on the journey of holiness. Though we desire to live in perfect obedience, we may not discern all areas of our hearts.

As you pray today, ask the Lord to search your heart, to discern any error in your way. Pray that he would keep you from intentional sin, that we may be blameless in Christ. "May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, My Rock and my Redeemer."



And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

Matthew 26:39

There is nothing comparable to what Christ did for us on the cross at Calvary. And though none of my stories of surrender compared to His, I have cried out, whispered, or begged him to take a cup or two from me.

I have never shared this story before. One Sunday morning sitting in our typical section of chairs at church, I noticed a beautiful young college student sitting alone. Toward the end of the service, I wanted to say hello, but instead I felt the Lord say, "Give her your bible." My stomach sank.

Lord, you mean the bible I've been taking notes in for years, I can't give this away. I sat arguing with the Lord in a sweat. The end of the service came, and I had a choice to make. Give MY bible away, to a stranger, and explain the Lord told me too. Take this cup, right now!

He knew the awkwardness would quickly fade, He knew that our exchange would create a connection and bond that we both needed, and that truly my easy yes would bring blessings beyond measure.

As you are prompted by your Savior, pray, and know though His will may look like a scary sacrifice it will ultimately be a gift you don't want to miss.



Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:31-32

When we think of grace, our mind often drifts towards the grace we've received. There's no fault in that, but we must challenge ourselves to remember that the gift of grace does not end when we receive it. In Ephesians 4, we're reminded of the unimaginable gift of grace that was first given to us, the children of God, and we're compelled to extend that gift of grace beyond ourselves. You see, the grace we were given was never meant to be held on to tightly, it was given to be received and then extended beyond ourselves.

At first glance Paul's words in Ephesians seem simple, but extending grace isn't always a simple task. Be reminded today that the same God that gave you the first gift of grace goes with you as you extend it to others today.

As you pray, consider whether you are you holding on tightly to the grace you've received or if you are allowing it to extend beyond yourself to those around you. Who might need that extension of grace in your life today? Pray that God would reveal those people to you and compel you to give the grace that was first given to you.



*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just
and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9

As we approach Easter we are reminded of the great sacrifice of Christ, in whom we can experience forgiveness. In confession, we recognize and agree with the Lord that apart from Christ, we are a mess. We have made mistakes, hurt others, hurt ourselves, and especially, we have sinned against the Lord and we need forgiveness. At Easter, we celebrate Jesus meeting us in our great need with an invitation of Grace, Mercy, and Forgiveness.

Do we also remember the sanctifying work Christ desires to do within us? John reminds us of a two- fold work of grace in forgiveness and purification. Through Christ, God has made a way that we can not only be forgiven, but we can experience heart purity. Jesus said, “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come...” Let us be encouraged not to stop short of experiencing heart purity in our lives. May we know the blessedness of life with a pure heart.

As you pray today, let us pray with David “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”



We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Hebrews 6:19

Hope is an anchor. How we use it is up to us.

The author of Hebrews says “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.” and explains this. First, God’s purpose was set before time to save us. Secondly, God gave His promise, and He is unable to break it. For those who have trusted Jesus, our hope is placed in Christ, not a circumstance or a desired outcome. God has given an unbreakable oath that when we attach our anchor to His purpose and His promise, we will be fixed to a firm rock which will never fail us.

Romans 5 reminds us, “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

Do not be ashamed to have hope during suffering, because our God is trustworthy and faithful, the all-powerful, Creator and Sustainer. There is no better place to anchor your hope.

Hope can be picked up and placed in Christ or left useless beside us in our trouble. The storms of life are real, but our God is secure, trustworthy, and will deliver us in His way, for our good and His glory.

As you pray, ask yourself, “In my storm, is my hope placed in Christ or in my own plans and desires?”



*Whoever finds their life will lose it,
and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

Matthew 10:39

Selfless love is giving your life away. If we were honest, the majority of our lives are spent pursuing the desire to gain and not to give. When it comes to our lives, we want to gain more: more time, more money, more fun, more memories, more freedom, more accomplishments. We want more. This is life: the pursuit of more.

But Jesus doesn't call his followers to operate according to the standards of this world. His promise is that spending your life like that, in the pursuit of more, will ultimately lead you to lose it all. The divine invitation is this: it's not about grasping for life, but rather it's about giving your life away. Selfless love compels me to live a life of radical surrender. What does this mean for your time, your treasures, your talents? What does "giving your life away" look like each and every day?

Making him Lord of our lives means we give our lives away to him. And what is the fruit of living this way, where each and every part of our lives belong to him? Selfless love.

As you pray today, take a moment to take an inventory of your life. Is the posture of our heart about gaining more and more, or about giving him all? Is there any place in your life you are holding back from him? Pray this simple prayer: "Lord, I give my life away. Show me today what that truly means."



*Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

John 15:13

Selfless love is holy love. Jesus isn't offering his disciples a new optional way to show love to others, he is commanding them to love as he has loved (John 15:12). What an incredible standard! And the truth is, according to our standard of human love, it is an impossible standard.

But the "greater love" to which Jesus is referring is not a human love, one in which we conjure up in our own strength. Jesus is referring to the perfect love of the Father, only made possible in the surrendered and sanctified heart. Once we surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, then and only then can his selfless love take root in our hearts. The call to selfless love is a call to his holy love in us and through us.

As you pray today, invite the Lord to be Lord of your life. Invite him to purify your heart from selfishness. Ask for the gift of his perfect love poured out into your heart: his holy love.



Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Psalms 32:1-2

The word blessed means “very happy” or “exceedingly happy.” This is because the one forgiven of their sins understands the gravity of it and the joy of being released from it. Wrongdoing presupposes a standard of right and wrong, and the Bible says that God’s Law is that standard.

This passage calls the breaking of this standard as transgression, which indicates a stepping over a known boundary. It also calls it sin, which refers to missing the mark. And it calls it iniquity which carries the idea of twisting something. In each case it is a failure to live up to God’s standard.

There is a boundary, a target, something that is straight and true – but sin causes us to cross the boundary, to miss the target, and to twist what is straight and true. Because the grace of God extended to us through Christ is ever sufficient to forgive and cover our sin, we are blessed and hold forgiveness in such high esteem.

As you pray, thank God for forgiving and covering your sins. Let him know how it feels to know that your sins are no longer held against you.



Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse....There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever..

Revelation 22:1-5

In the beginning, God created a special set apart place for us to dwell with Him. A beautiful garden where life grows in abundance and where we and all of Creation are whole.

So to it shall be in the End.

Holiness, when presented as a boring existence of denial and deprivation, terribly misrepresents the truth. That kind of “holiness” is a brutal hand-to-mouth existence, which reflects nothing of the lavish overflow of life in abundance, promised and available to us by the Spirit’s power through Christ.

Our call to holiness is to be a people of the garden in the in-between. Drink and feast on life. Prepare a banquet table full of the fruit of the Spirit. And reflect the light of our Lord so that darkness might be no more.

Before you pray, spend some time reflecting on what it means to live a holy life, that is to live in the present as we were created to live and as we will one day be restored.



If we claim to have fellowship with him [God] 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.

1 John 1:6-9

Scripture never confuses SIN with sins. Sins (acts of disobedience to the known law of God) must be forgiven. SIN (our inherent bent toward self, those desires of mind and character that are turned towards self-gratification, our sinful nature (often pictured as an oppressive ruler) must be cleansed/purified. The Bible never uses the word "forgiveness" in connection with SIN. John is writing to a group of Christians to deal with their misunderstanding about relationship with God and with one another. In this he addresses their wrong belief about not having a "disposition of sin" within them.

In the passage above, we see there is one thing we can do with this disposition/inclination/nature. You and I must enter into the light through the death of Jesus. We must have the "old man or old woman" ruled by SIN crucified with Christ. We confess our need and by His grace and power he forgives our sins AND can purify us from all unrighteousness (SIN). This is the foundation to holy living.

As you pray, ask Jesus to not only forgive you of your sins (this is repentance) but also confess your desperate need for him to purify you from all unrighteousness. Recognize that it is only by His grace through faith that we can be forgiven from sins and freed from the dominion of sin ruling in our lives.



But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

1 Corinthians 15:35

Without a doubt many of us would say there are things that, if we had the ability to change, we would. Maybe we are short and we would like to be tall. Perhaps we are blind, or have a disabling physical ailment. Our human bodies are not perfect.

As believers we have the assurance that Jesus rose from the dead. If he had never risen then we would have nothing to believe in. BUT, he did and because he lives, we can believe in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus will come again and there will be a resurrection of the dead. Somehow, by the power of the Holy Spirit, our imperfect, physical bodies will be raised from the dead. The perishable will become imperishable. No more infirmities. From the grave we will rise. We will rise to live eternally with the Triune God.

As you pray, start by thanking God for his amazing love. Thank him that one day you will have a resurrected perfect body and you will live with Him forever in heaven.



How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and RAN out of the house.

Genesis 39:9b, 12

To really get the full picture of the story above, read Genesis 39:6-12. This is a scene in which we see Joseph, the son of Jacob/Israel who has been sold into slavery in Egypt, recognizing the weight of sin and the temptation that is seizing him. He makes a determined decision that he will not put himself in the place of this temptation from Potiphar's wife. She seizes him and instead of hesitating, he runs or flees from the sin that seeks to entangle him.

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Flee from the sin that seeks to entangle you! Remember, "Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

As you pray, ask God to give you divine awareness – being totally aware that you are His child and He is always with you. Confess the area to Him where you know you should be fleeing and have instead been flirting with temptation/sin or even trying to stand and fight it by your own determination. Surrender to the Lord and take intentional action by putting God honoring boundaries in place and seeking spiritual accountability.



Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.
Ephesians 5:1

The second half of the book of Ephesians asks believers to live the holy lives they were called to live. (Ephesians 4:1) and then gives some detailed ways that can happen. In chapter five Paul starts with these words "Imitate God, since you are the children he loves." (5:1)

As a kid I loved sports and loved certain players, I idolized Dr. J Julius Erving. I thought there was no one greater than him, his hair, his charisma, his dunking ability, his swag. I would try and imitate him; I would go out on the court daily and just try to emulate everything he did. Every game winning shot I would replay by myself; I was him, I was Dr. J. I envisioned it time and time again and practiced it over and over, I even gave the play by play calls out loud as I acted out the final seconds. I'm watching my son start to do the same thing with various sports and different players. He even does it with me, he's sporting his grey sleeveless shirts at night just like his dad has always done.

So, what about you, are you imitating anyone, who is it, why? I want to imitate Christ and I can only do that with the empowering of the Spirit.

As you pray, perhaps make this your prayer, "Jesus, I hope and pray, that my life points people to you in a way that they don't imitate me but imitate you."



What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:1-2, 6-7

To get the full scope of what Paul is declaring to the church in Rome, read Romans 6:1-23. If you want to follow Jesus, then first you must die. If we are in Christ, if we have placed our faith in Him and received Him as our Savior, then we can count ourselves dead to sin but alive in Christ Jesus. Jesus had to die for your sin and my sin, to defeat sin and death, and so is it really unthinkable that we too must die to self and sin to be genuine disciples of Jesus?

One commentator wrote, “When the will of God crosses the will of man, somebody has to die.” Christ cannot reign where sin still remains. It is dying to sin that we find real, abundant, and overflowing life in Jesus. Remember that in Christ, sin has no authority in your life. Live purposefully in that freedom and thank God for the free gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus.

As you pray, confess any area you sense the Holy Spirit is touching on in your life. Confess that you recognize that in Christ you have died to sin and it is no longer your master, and surrender everything you are to Jesus.



For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Matthew 23:12

My grandmother’s two brothers, Louis and Matt, didn’t speak to each other for the last 60 years of their lives. Sixty years.

The story goes that, when they were teenagers, one stole the other’s girlfriend and that was that. Having both been born in Italy and holding that cultural stubbornness, they let that one event ruin a relationship – for life. I remember my grandmother used to smile and say, as if somewhat bemused, “They were both so full of pride.”

I never met Louis, who moved to California to be as far from Matt as possible. But I did meet Matt when I was a boy and my only memory is that he seemed, for lack of a better word, “hardened.” It reminds me of Matthew 13:15 - For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’

Perhaps the beauty of lent is that it provides us the opportunity to humble ourselves, to be vulnerable, breakable - for God to use. During this time, we consider our capacity for sin and think starkly of the deep darkness that led to the Innocent One being nailed to a cross.

As you pray, be honest with God and humbly ask Him to search you, in all your frailties, and bring you healing and freedom.



Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Genesis 22:2

It takes 22 chapters before we first come to the word "love" in the Bible. And it was a very special occasion that brought that word to the text.

No, it didn't concern a romance between a man and a woman, and it wasn't about two friends with deep appreciation for each other. It wasn't even referencing how His people felt about God the Creator. The first time we read that word love (in Hebrew it's aw-hav', which means a deep personal affection) is when a father is about to kill his son. Let that sink in.

Out of a dramatic and courageous act of obedience, Abraham is going to take his dear son Isaac and burn him to death as an offering because God has instructed him to do just that. It's gruesome and shocking to our 21st century sensibilities. But that's where love comes in.

God spares Isaac, of course, and faithful Abraham enjoys his son until the old patriarch is ushered from this mortal coil. But God the Father didn't get the same reprieve when He sacrificed His son, whom He loves. You've sung about it often I'm guessing. And when I think that God, His Son not sparing Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in; That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing; He bled and died to take away my sin.

That's love.

As you pray, consider God the Father, who sent His only Son to bleed and die on a cross because He loved you. Thank Him and let Him know you love Him back.



And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:8

During Lent, we're reminded of Jesus' ultimate act of obedience—His sacrifice on the cross. In Philippians 2:8, it says, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" Jesus' obedience to the Father, even in the face of suffering, is the ultimate expression of worship.

True worship is not just about singing songs or saying prayers; it's about how we live each day in response to God's call. Obedience is one of the clearest ways we demonstrate our love and trust in Him. I remember when God called me to move from Lewisburg, PA to Harrisonburg, VA. I wrestled with the decision, unsure of His plan. But when I finally surrendered in obedience, peace followed. I realized that worship is more than just singing on Sundays—it's about aligning our lives with God's will, even when it doesn't make sense.

Just as making a lifestyle change requires commitment, true worship requires the same. It's a daily choice to live in obedience, no matter the challenges we face. When we choose to follow God's lead, we reflect the heart of worship, just as Jesus did on the cross.

As you pray, reflect on the obedience of Jesus this Lent season. Ask God to show you where you can surrender areas of your life to Him. Commit to obeying Him, trusting that true worship is found in that obedience, and that peace will follow.



*Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs*

Psalm 100:2

What does it look like to truly engage in worship? If we could grasp what Jesus has done for us, our worship would look different. Psalm 100:2 encourages us, “Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” Yet, we often find ourselves more animated when watching sports, celebrating a victory, or cheering on our favorite team. But when it comes to participating in worship, sometimes we hold back.

For example, our family are die-hard Michigan football fans. On game days, my husband is decked out in Michigan gear—from his PJ pants and sweatshirt to his Crocs, socks, and even his boxers. He’s all in, and his excitement shows every time Michigan scores. Shouldn’t our worship be just as wholehearted?

We celebrate big in sports, but sometimes we hold back in worship, thinking it might seem “weird” or out of place. But the God who created us, who sacrificed everything for us, is worthy of our most passionate praise. When we truly grasp what Jesus has done for us, like the victory of His death and resurrection, we’ll want to shout and give Him the glory He deserves.

As Matthew 28:6 reminds us, “He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.” The ultimate victory Christ won for us should stir our hearts to worship with joy and abandon. Let’s bring that same energy to worship—hands raised, hearts fully engaged.

As you pray, ask God to help you grasp the significance of His sacrifice and resurrection. Invite Him to stir your heart to worship with the same energy you would for a game or victory.



This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

1 John 3:16

It is so simple.

This is how we know what love is.
Jesus lay down his life for us.
For you.
For me.

So much of life is complicated. Schedules and budgets monopolize our minds. Decision after decision drain our energy. The what ifs and the what nexts wear us thin.

But this is so simple.
Love.
Love in a way that sets others first.
Love bigger.
Love quicker.
Love broader.
Love like Jesus loved.

As you pray today, ask the Lord to show you where you are making love more difficult than is necessary and seek His guidance in how you might un-complicate things so this fruit might grow more easily in your life.



Today you will be with me in paradise.

Luke 23:43

As a parent, I often heard the phrase, “It’s not fair!” from my girls. Whether it was about one getting something the other didn’t, unequal punishment, or just not getting their way, this cry of injustice echoed through our home. It’s easy to feel that way when things don’t seem equal or fair by our standards.

When reading the story of the two criminals on the cross in Luke 23:40-43, we might find ourselves saying, “That’s not fair!” One criminal, guilty of his crimes, receives the promise of eternal life, while the other doesn’t. He acknowledges his sin, repents, and asks Jesus to remember him. Jesus responds, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” It’s not fair, but it is grace.

What the criminal deserved was punishment, but what he received was mercy. This moment shows us that what’s fair isn’t always equal. In God’s kingdom, we don’t get what we deserve, but we receive what we need: His grace and forgiveness.

I’m so thankful that God doesn’t operate on a system of fairness but on one of grace, and in that, we can find hope. The criminal’s confession and repentance brought him into the presence of Jesus, and the same grace is extended to us.

As you pray, take a moment to reflect on your own life. Are there areas where you feel you haven't received what you think is fair? Confess those feelings to God and thank Him for His grace that covers us all, no matter what we deserve. Ask for a renewed heart of gratitude for His mercy.



For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Prayer in our lives is vital but we struggle to pray and war in this way...We’re all so busy, it’s hard to find time to pray, and when we do it can seem “boring” and hard to focus. However, we must remember that prayer makes a difference. The theologian Walter Wink said this beautifully: “Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the way of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current forces. Prayer infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present. History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being. Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes. These shapers of the future are the intercessors.”

Prayer DOES make a difference! Tragically, very few modern Christians actually believe this. Much less think of prayer as “spiritual defiance.” Few of us live with Jesus’ worldview, what some theologians call a “warfare worldview,” that sees humanity as besieged by evil forces, and Jesus as it’s Savior come to liberate occupied territory with the Kingdom of God, and prayer as how we join Jesus in the fight.

As you pray, ask the Lord to lead you, open your eyes, and remind you that our struggle is not against other people but against spiritual forces that seek to influence us and our world. Trust Him and PRAY!



Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us...

Hebrews 12:1

In ancient Greek races, the runners would literally strip down to nothing before participating in the foot race. They literally throw off everything that would hinder them at all.

The preacher points out two things that the audience must throw off for a successful race. Weight and sin are two different things here that the writer is exhorting them (and us) to throw off both.

Weights (those things that hinder): Here the call is to take off, throw aside, anything that would hinder commitment to Jesus Christ. He is encouraging his audience as I do to you today to free yourselves from associations and engagements, however innocent in themselves, that would hinder your freedom for faithful action. Becoming a disciple of Jesus, a fully committed one, means that those things like unbelief, falsehood, anger, gossip, impurity, excessive attachment to possessions, worldly security, and the esteem of others be surrendered and laid aside as well.

Sin: This is not a reference to sins but the ruling nature of sin itself. We are called to grow in maturity and holiness which is Christlikeness. Faith finds its essential character in commitment to God and to a lifestyle that reflects devotion to Him alone.

As you pray, look to Jesus, and address whatever it is that the Spirit of God is asking you to throw off today or perhaps asking you to simply but profoundly surrender to him totally?



*The men said to them,
“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”*
Luke 24:5

I have had the opportunity to travel to the Holy Land. Each time I have visited the Garden of Gethsemane, I sat under an olive tree and I thought about the agony that Jesus experienced, where He cried tears of blood. Then when I walked the narrow Via Dolorosa, I could imagine hearing the soldiers screaming names at my Lord, and hearing the onlookers as they pressed in, shouting "Crucify Him".

Then on to Calvary where Jesus was crucified. I must see the Garden Tomb! Every pilgrim visits the empty tomb. Why? Jesus died for our sins. He was buried and he rose again.

The message of the empty tomb is God proclaiming over his creation that "It is good". The empty tomb is God's great promise that, at the end of the day, truth will not be denied and goodness will not be overcome. The message of God's amazing grace and love is the story of Easter.

As you pray, start by thanking God that he came to die for us so that we might live. Thank him for his faithfulness. Ask God to help you live your life for him so that you may reflect his love every day.



Then David got up from the ground... he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped.

2 Samuel 12:20

We may struggle with fasting because we are unsure what we're not supposed to do. Do we abstain from food, drink, or from whatever distracts us from God? The purpose of fasting is to focus on prayer, scripture, and worship.

First, fasting is a time to pray. Jesus said that some things (i.e., demons cast out) are accomplished only through prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21). Perhaps our prayers are unanswered because we don't pray and fast. Secondly, it is a time to read the Bible. When Jesus fasted 40 days, he overcame the devil's temptation by quoting scripture. There is no better defense or offense to be used against the Evil One.

Finally, fasting is a prelude to worship. In 2 Samuel 12, King David fasted and prayed for 7 days that his sick newborn child would not die. The child did die, but then David got up and went to the house of the Lord and worshiped.

As you fast and pray, humble yourself, ask God to meet your need, then bow down in worship. Fasting isn't primarily about getting the answer from God that you desire, but becoming the worshiper that He desires.



He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden.'?" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Genesis 3:1, 4-6

We know this story, or we at least have some familiarity with it. The serpent deceives Eve with a lie. He twists the words of God, as he is keen in doing, in such a way as to position God as withholding the best from His children. Take note the Devil is a liar!

When we choose sin, we ultimately try to shortcut God's good purposes and plans for us, His children, and creation. Sin = my will over God's will be done. I once read, "Sin would have fewer takers if its consequences occurred immediately." I urge you to obey God, not your feelings!

David Benner notes, "St Ignatius of Loyola said, 'Sin is unwillingness to trust that what God wants is our deepest happiness'. Until I am absolutely convinced of this, I will do everything I can to keep my hands on the controls of my life because I think I know better than God what I need for my fulfillment."

As you pray, ask God to reveal areas in your life where you are taking shortcuts and living disobediently. Surrender your will to God and pray that his will would be done in your life. Ask him for the faith and courage to trust him.



Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

1 Peter 5:6

Ever say to someone, “Wow, now that was a humbling experience!”? It might have been when you had a credit card declined, forgot where you parked the car or absentmindedly walked into the opposite-gendered rest room (hand raised).

But all that pales in comparison to what may be the most humbling, most humiliating experience in human history. The Apostle Peter had promised his Lord and friend that he would stick by him through thick and thin. But then, when the going was its toughest, Peter denied Jesus with a curse. Flat out denied him.

Luke’s subsequent account is perhaps most poignant. Peter had just denied Jesus for the third time. Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Looked straight at Peter.

We feel for Peter. But, at the same time, we know where to find an even more humiliating experience. It’s there on the cross.

When you think about the Lord’s atoning sacrifice during this Lenten season – bearing the weight of all sin on that cross – don’t forget the shame He endured for you. Carrying the shame that was yours and mine. It’s humbling. And it should be.

As you pray, remember His shame, express your gratitude and ask Him for a humble heart. Like His.



As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side....They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.

Luke 19:41-44

I think our perspective about Palm Sunday is wrong. You see the story of Palm Sunday as it sits at the beginning of what we call Passion week is really about spiritual blindness.

Can you see today? What’s your perspective? On this story? When it comes to Jesus? So in the midst of all of the joyous celebration as Jesus enters into the city we often miss what is really going on with Jesus...the Word of God tells us in Luke’s account that as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he weeps...this is in stark contrast to the shouts of praise and joy from the people as he enters.

He mourns their spiritual blindness; their misunderstanding of who He is He sees what is unseen; the crowd only sees that which is temporary. He weeps because their hearts are turned inward. He weeps because they do not truly know him or why he has come. He weeps over what sin has done to the hearts of the people. He weeps because they do not recognize He is God in the flesh, who has entered into the humanity in which He created so that we might know Him and be known by Him. He made you and I for relationship with himself and with one another

As you pray, ask the Lord, am I treating you like those during the first Palm Sunday and Passion week, or as the Lord and King of my life?



You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

It's easy to let culture dilute our values if we are passive in our discipleship to Jesus, but resist conformity to the pattern of this world and be transformed by the renewing of your mind according to the Word of God.

If you are in Christ, a disciple of Jesus, you shouldn't be the same as you were 10 years - 10 months - or 10 weeks ago. We must cultivate the habit of denying ourselves daily. It has 'fallen out of fashion' in contemporary Christianity in the West. But it is the way of Jesus — the only way. Deny yourself (your flesh) - Take up your cross daily (your surrender) - Follow Him (your Lord and Savior)

Being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit does not mean the absence of temptations in your life. It is a life of holiness unto the Lord in the midst of temptations. The church is called to be a counter-narrative people in the world in which they live. A people enlivened and led by The Word and His word. Not led by: politics, or culture, or our fleshly desire.

Real discipleship: Whole hearted service/devotion to God, in the way of Jesus, is the only answer to the evil and ailing predicament we find ourself in.

Only the hope and power of the Gospel unhindered in our lives can make this possible.

As you pray, open your hands and heart in complete surrender today.



Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

Psalms 24:3-4

According to Matthew 21, Mark 11, and Luke 19, Jesus returns to Jerusalem today and, seeing shameful practices in the Temple area, he cleanses the Temple. John's Gospel also records that he rebuked the unbelief of the crowds. Mark 11:19 records that he returned to Bethany that night.

Holiness people optimistically believe that our spiritual lives can be impacted by the work of God's holy love to such a degree that old wounds, destructive tendencies, and long-buried sins can be healed, forgiven, and redeemed in the light of that love. We are a people not content to allow ourselves to remain as we once were; rather, we find ourselves deeply yearning for the work of the Spirit in a real and tangible way—both in us and through us.

Human nature often leads us to attempt to take matters into our own hands. It's easy to believe that we can effort our way into better behavior and a holier life. Struggle and strength of will are the tools by which we try make our way to that holy land. There eventually comes a moment, though, when we realize we cannot do it through strength of will alone. We desperately need the work of His grace and power to purify us and make us holy.

As you pray, ask your Heavenly Father to wash your hands clean and to purify your heart of all unrighteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit. And to help you stop trying where you need to be trusting.



When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Luke 23:33-34

When is the right time to forgive?
When you stop hurting?
When they apologize?
When they truly understand how wrong they are?
When they prove they’ve changed?

Sometimes forgiveness is easy. A loved one makes a mistake and is remorseful. They apologize, and we pardon them because, honestly, it impacted them more than us. But sometimes forgiveness is so hard. Words cut deep, and consequences linger. Trust is broken, and anger sneaks up and takes over. You feel unseen, unloved, and out of control.

Time heals all wounds, they say, but our Savior gave an example of healing while the hurt was still happening. There on the cross, His body broken, His character attacked, His words doubted, and His suffering mocked. And yet, as they murdered Him, He asked the Father to forgive them.

He didn’t ask for power to escape His own pain because He trusted God’s plan. Rather, He advocated on their behalf to the One whom they don’t even know they’re attacking: the God who tenderly created, cared for, and was at that very moment doing everything in His power to free them.

The right time to forgive is now, and the power to forgive is found in surrendering your right to hate this person and choosing to seek the good of their soul.

As you pray, reflect on those who’ve wronged you. Following Jesus’ example, pray for their forgiveness from the Father with compassion, knowing God has a good plan and is already working to heal your broken heart.



Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Matthew 26:39

There are times that I have a few suggestions for the Lord. I trust Him, sometimes joyfully, sometimes because what other choice do I have, but whether the trust feels easily given or more difficult I often am left looking at how I’d prefer things go.

Jesus knew everything. Jesus had the assurance that what lay before him was what needed to happen to deliver the world from great suffering. But that great suffering was already happening all around him. It was suffering they were used to. It was suffering that was so a part of their lives that they didn’t even comprehend that it was going on. It was suffering that had long since passed or suffering that wouldn’t happen for millennia. Jesus was looking at the present, at suffering that he would know and was at that very moment aware of to a depth we can’t fathom.

How often do I evaluate my pain like this? God, get me out of my struggle. See my desires first. I know what this pain is, and I’d rather choose any other reality than this.

There is comfort in knowing that Jesus himself evaluated his situation in a similar manner. Jesus was brutally honest with the Father. And because Jesus was able to be honest, I can trust that I can be honest with God when I wish things were different.

The challenge lies in the closing of his prayer, “Yet not as I will, but as I will.” Can I...will I make that my honest prayer, too?

As you pray, be honest with the Lord about your thoughts and ask for help surrendering to His will.



So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said.

John 18:3-5a

Jesus stood forward when His moment of suffering had come. In the Garden, our Leader-Lord had the courage to willingly endure the greatest struggle in history. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," He said. You cannot follow God apart from courage, which may be why our bibles tell us so often to "Fear not!" and "Be courageous"

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." - Joshua 1:9

Let me paraphrase this for you, "Be strong and courageous because you are never alone."

The Promise Land lay on the other side of Joshua's courageous leadership. What is on the other side of your "Yes" to God? God's Word is full of people who failed and in God's great grace, He still used them. You and I can take courage because we are loved and cared for by our Heavenly Father. When we are in Christ we can know for a FACT, even when we don't feel it, that He is with us, and we are never alone.

As you pray, ask the Lord to forgive you of the ways you've been living by fear. Ask Him to give you courage and faith to believe and act on His promises so that His purposes for your life might be fulfilled.



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

Psalm 139:23-24

As David laments the evil in the world and the faults of others, he concludes the Psalm by looking inward, essentially praying, "Lord, don't let me be a hypocrite. Search me, test me, correct me. Don't let me be blind to my own evil."

We do NOT clearly SEE ourselves or KNOW ourselves as we often believe. We believe we are more virtuous than we really are. Our seeing is biased and our knowing is incomplete. But the one who created you and called you and came to save you, He sees you and knows you inside and out. That should comfort us and both righteously terrify us at the same time.

When you ask God to search you, you may not like what He finds, but you will love how He redeems it.

There is no reason to hide. He knows it anyway but you and I need to know it so we can repent and renounce it and experienced His redemption and renewal and reward.

However, if you choose to not engage in this prayer, in sincerely inviting the Lord to search and know you, what might you be missing? Knowing His presence intimately, His power, His purity, or His peace?

As you pray, make the words of Psalm 139:23-24 your prayer today.



Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 19:25-27

Mary stood beneath her son, the infant tender and mild, now grown to Messiah in his coronation of crucifixion. The Word Made Flesh hung before her in unspeakable agony.

All that she'd held close and treasured in her heart, all that had made her wonder in the words of the angel years before, and now what? What would the angels say if they could speak to her now?

Two other Marys close at hand. With their own grief and horror, what words of comfort could they offer to his mother? If only there were words to speak that could make a difference.

Then the words came forth from Jesus. In the midst of his suffering, he saw hers. He was not selfish in his pain. He took time in his agony to ease hers. Not alone, mama. Never alone.

Your Savior sees you, knows your heart, knows your hurts. The crushing weight which broke his body was hardly wood and nails, but rather the brokenness of a world gone wrong. He bore that burden for all mankind, but also for his mother. Also for me. Also for you. He's already felt the weight of your suffering while he suffered. Don't hold back from him. You aren't alone. Never alone. He sees you.

As you pray, be brutally honest with your Lord about the hurts you are experiencing and trust Him. He sees you.



When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

1 Corinthians 15:54-55

Sometimes I imagine Good Friday like a nightmare, a terrible black day where the adversary stormed the gates of Eden. He ripped loose thorns from roses as he pressed towards the tree of life and wove them into a crown. He broke off sturdy small branches to attach the whips of the scourge. He found a long stick and sharpened the end to form a spear. Finally, reaching the heart of the garden, he took an axe to the tree of life. He struck and then threw back his strong arms to lower the blade again. He split timbers and he erected a cross. He hacked those willowing vines and lit them with all the fires of hell. He gathered all he had made and threw it all on the shoulders of Christ.

This is the decimation, devastation, and destruction in which we must trust. This is where, if you have not put your faith in Christ, you will remain, surrounded by hopelessness. But God is the gardener and Jesus is the vine, and no disaster of the Devil will destroy the design of God.

Take heart! Have hope! Death shall not have the final word. From the garden of Eden to the garden tomb, victory was always the Lord's.

As you pray, allow yourself to sense the fullness of what it means that Christ has the victory and you are living in the spoils of a war he's already won.

