

are we there yet?

***Voices  
along the  
Journey***

Lenten Meditation Guide 2004

**CREDO Ecumenical Campus Ministry  
St. Louis, Missouri**

**Higher Education Ministries Arena**

The Higher Education Ministries Arena is a program function of the American Baptist Churches (USA), Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

## INTRODUCTION

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College students are strange birds because they inhabit a strange land; the years one spends in university are in between just about everything—childhood and adulthood, home and the world, early certainties of faith and those that have been put to the test. Precisely because of this strange locale, there is maximum possibility for transformation.

Although we are blessed by myriads of mentors who are willing to walk along side us and share the journey with others in community, there is also a solitary aspect to our path. It is the solitude of the desert sojourn, of Jesus in the wilderness.

During this Lenten passage of 2004, we invite you to escape the tyranny of time—with its compulsive work, attempts to prove oneself worthy, and striving to possess—and savor new challenges to our faith. In these pages you will find daily meditations written by those who have agreed to accompany you on the pilgrimage. Consider these writers as your conversation partners. Talk back to them. Share your feelings and perceptions about what they have written. And in the end, offer your deepest self to God.

Dr. Tim Carson  
Webster Groves Christian Church  
CREDO sponsoring pastor

CREDO is an ecumenical, congregationally based campus ministry. Students come from several of the universities in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

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## Wednesday February 25

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For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

*Luke 18:14b*

“Follow your bliss.” These words of Joseph Campbell, world-renowned scholar of mythology and professor of comparative religion, had a profound influence on me when I first came across them in college. At the time, I sensed there was a great truth buried within that simple notion that somewhere, out there, was that “thing” that would bring true happiness, true joy, fulfillment, and purpose. I imagined it would eventually be found in the perfect career, the most prestigious accomplishments, the hard-earned reputation, the envied lifestyle.

It took many years for me to understand that the goal was not to “find your bliss.” Bliss was not some prize to be discovered at the end of the journey. Rather, following one’s bliss is the journey itself, it is “the way” that Jesus speaks of in the Gospel of John, the way that takes you to surprising places and encounters with surprising people. It is a journey in which one must travel lightly and leave much behind: self-centeredness, lusts for material possessions, the need for prestige, our contempt for others, and our own sense of self-importance.

When we do lighten our pack, we open up ourselves to true life and we find that we are already on the journey toward bliss—toward that life-affirming and transforming experience of the love of God.

***Prayer: Help us, loving God, to lighten our packs of all those things, those desires, those distractions, that keep us from following you to new life.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Thursday February 26

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Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances.

*Daniel 9:3-5*

It is not possible to fall out of grace. Through our fall, we know grace. Grace is the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ. No matter how good we try to be it is not enough. No matter how many mistakes we make, there is grace for us still.

Following God is not easy. In fact, following God can be a lot of work. Work, however, is not all that God wants. God is interested in our love. In prayer we can remind God of how thankful we are for the gifts of life and grace.

***Prayer: I offer you my love Lord. May that love be full and grow toward you every day.***

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JOSHUA LONGBOTTOM

## Friday February 27

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Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

*Ezekiel 18:25*

How many times growing up, when things didn’t go our way, did we shout, “But that’s not fair!”? When a sibling received something we did not, when friends could go to parties or stay out longer, when some type of obstacle stood in our path, was our first reaction to blame our parents, life, or God about the unfairness of it all?

But maybe we were the ones being unfair, as God says in Ezekiel. Why should we expect to be the one who always receives? Why should we expect to always get our way? God knows what we need—those obstacles in our path might just be there for a reason.

During this journey of preparation for the Easter season, maybe we need to rethink our definition of “fair” and “unfair,” and look for the things we do that are just as unfair to our neighbor and to God. May we be so honest with ourselves that our beliefs and ways of life become consistent.

***Prayer: Loving spirit, may we be ever aware of your loving presence in the ups and downs of life, in times when chaos threatens to overwhelm, when things seem unfair, when we don’t know where to turn. Let us turn to you.***

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LINDA GOLDEN

## Saturday February 28

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I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

*Philippians 4:12-13*

Paul’s voice in this passage is sending us a very important message for the journey, particularly for college students. Paul is giving advice based on personal experience. He tells us he has known both poverty and wealth, and has learned something.

As a college student, finances become an issue for me. Many things I might want I have to live without because the money has to go to paying for school and supporting myself while I’m in school. Sometimes I find myself worrying about how I’m going to pay my loans when I graduate. Worrying about future circumstances can keep me from seeing what truly matters now and I have to remind myself that God continually opens doors, that college will help me reach more doors, and that no matter the circumstances “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

The more challenging the circumstances with which we are faced along the journey, the more we will realize what truly matters, and the better we will be able to look past just our own needs, to the needs of our fellow travelers. What keeps you from seeing what truly matters? Think about it in every situation. How much is a dollar worth to your family? To you? To a homeless mother? To a couple in Iraq? A child in Africa?

***Prayer: What do I truly need in life, O God? Where should I place my trust?***

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NATALEE CAYTON

## Monday March 1

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...I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever  
I will thank you forever, because of what you have  
done.

*Psalm 52:8-9*

One evening, I came home to my apartment extremely depressed. I had just returned to school from Thanksgiving break, and I already missed my friends. In the apartment, I was the only one of four roommates who didn't have a date or boyfriend over. I still had homework to do. My family was 500 miles away. All I had to look forward to the next day was getting up at 6 am to go to work, classes, and more homework.

Then I stopped. I had eaten dinner that night. I lived in a temperature-controlled apartment equipped with running water. I attended school and had the opportunity to travel home on holidays to see my family. Why was I complaining?

It helps to put things in perspective and place our trust in God's love. We're never alone on our journeys. May we remember to trust God, give thanks for all God gives through our prayer, and by giving back to others in all the ways we can.

*Prayer: You bless us, loving God, with the gift of life, the gift of love, the gift of others. May we celebrate those gifts in the way we live, love, and reach out to our brothers and sisters, your beloved children.*

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LINDA GOLDEN

## Tuesday March 2

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The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come  
near; repent, and believe in the good news.

*Mark 1:14-15*

Repent and believe in the good news. This is a simple statement to read, and yet one of the hardest to follow. There are so many interpretations of what we should repent for and what we should proclaim as the good news. How do we know which voice to believe? In conversations with many religious leaders from many different denominations I have discovered many different opinions. But the common denominator is that it is GOOD News, a message filled with joy and hope of the coming of Christ into the world.

Yet when we see all the darkness in the world, it is so hard to hold onto that joy and hope. There are times when the darkness seems so out of my control that I wonder how one man living 2000 years ago could possibly impact the chaos currently at hand. But then Lent comes along, this most precious season, and I hear Christ's call to repent and believe. Lent reminds me of the work Christ has already done for us, the example he lived for us. So once again I pick up the pieces of my faith, relying on God's love and grace to carry me through. By the time Maundy Thursday rolls around, I often remember the precious feeling of being a disciple of Christ and by Easter, I feel prepared to share in the GOOD News once again.

*Prayer: Thank you for never leaving my side, O God, even in the darkest hour. May the call of Christ fill my heart this Lent. Amen.*

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REGAN DOYLE

## Wednesday March 3

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As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

*Mark 1:29-34*

Near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we find him participating in a series of healings. Many people present their ailments to him and are left permanently transformed. Simon's mother immediately responds through acts of service, others clamor around the door to be touched and to know him. These episodes illustrate the many changes that take place as a result of encountering Jesus.

Meeting Jesus is a transforming event. It is God's action and our reaction, a touch of the heart and then a response. After we bring our broken selves to God we may then spend a lifetime in that healing presence. A journey of service begins with a single touch, a hug, and a push.

*Prayer: Take my hand, Holy One, and place it on those in this world who need your healing touch.*

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JEFF NELSON

## Thursday March 4

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The Lord was with Joseph, and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master.

*Genesis 39: 2*

Have you ever felt like you're working too hard and getting nothing out of it? Many times we feel like we don't deserve the negative things that happen to us. "Why do bad things happen to me? And what about the guy over there who sins constantly, cares for no one, and still prospers?" Sometimes, no matter how good we are, it seems that the bad things still keep on coming.

Joseph was a good man who was strong in faith for the Lord. His strong faith made him a good man, and a good servant to his Egyptian master, Potiphar. Potiphar liked him, and when he left, he put Joseph in charge of his household and everything that he owned. But for all his righteousness, Joseph still ended up in the worst situation: prison. Even when things were going their worst, he maintained his faith in God.

Despite challenging times that will come our way, our continuing faith in God, even through difficult times, will keep us going.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, no matter what may bring me down or what bad situations may arise in my life, help me to keep strong in faith. The future belongs to you!*

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JOHNNY CATHCART

## Friday March 5

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**“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”**

*Mark 2:13-22*

One of my favorite images of Jesus is as social activist and reformer. The story of Levi in Mark 2 is just one of many instances where Jesus challenges the status quo. Why did Jesus continually butt heads with the authority figures of the time? Was he consciously fighting discrimination against tax collectors, desiring to end segregation in the community? Or, in this instance was Jesus just ignoring cultural biases to look at a specific individual who needed to be called to God?

Today we are often challenged to lead a P.C. (politically correct) life, but not always recognizing why. Jesus saw each individual and the life he or she led as being of equal value in the eyes of God. Every person deserves the grace God gives us and Jesus led the example by which we can lead our lives, with love and respect for all our neighbors. The story emphasizes that Jesus saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, and spoke directly to him. Jesus envisioned reform on a personal level, calling to each individual to follow his lead.

What kind of change is God calling us to in our lives? Who are the people we ignore when Christ would have us see them? What voices are we ignoring along the journey that God wishes us to hear? Being P.C. has nothing to stand on if we don't all act on the truth—that God's love and grace is for everyone. As we continue along this Lenten journey, may we recognize the value of each individual we pass on our journey, just as Jesus recognized Levi's value.

***Prayer: Gracious and loving God, help me to live in Christ's example and truly see my neighbors as you see them, through the eyes of love and respect. Amen.***

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REGAN DOYLE

## Saturday March 6

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**Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.**

*1 Corinthians 4:1-5a*

Paul urges the Corinthians to be careful not to judge one another. More pointedly, Paul desires that they not be “puffed up in favor of one against another.” Such judgment can rip communities apart and destroy mutual support. Paul calls for a greater degree of humility. Regardless of what we have, “why do you boast as if it were not a gift?”

Self-reliance is the message of today's society. Asking for help is deemed a sign of weakness. Paul hopes the Corinthians will remember who they are and who gave them what they have. The alternative is becoming too hard-hearted toward one another. Humility builds community, and community makes a tough road a little smoother.

***Prayer: Remind me, O God, that I can't do it all myself and it's okay to say, "Help me." Show me what to do. Lead me with your love. Amen.***

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JEFF NELSON

## Monday March 8

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Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went through all the land of Egypt. During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty in the land of Egypt, and stored up food in the cities; he stored up in every city the food from the fields around it.

*Genesis 41: 46-48*

If God blessed me with the gift of a million dollars, I'd like to think I would use that money to take care of the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed. And I would probably pat myself on the back for not being selfish. But Joseph was unselfish in a different way. He did something even greater with the blessing he received from God. He listened. He heard God's message, telling him about years of famine to follow these years of plenty. So rather than rushing off to do what *he* thought best, he followed God's instructions, storing up the enormous blessing God was giving the people, waiting until the time came to do just what God wanted.

You and I will probably never be given a million dollars. But God does bless each of us in many ways throughout life's journey with gifts, talents, strengths, and opportunities. We are given much so that we can go and do wonderful and amazing things. God invests in us with each bestowed blessing, giving us more than we could have obtained on our own. The only expectation is that we will not waste that gift, but instead use it wisely in the calling God desires for us.

***Prayer: Help us to recognize the blessings you bestow upon us each day and prepare our hearts and ears that we might realize the use you have for them.***

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TABITHA KNERR

## Tuesday March 9

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Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Ca'naan, to buy food." Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.

*Genesis 42:6-8*

Little did the brothers of Joseph know when they sold their own brother, Joseph, into slavery, they would one day be asking *him* for food. That's how it is, of course. The tables turn, we find ourselves on the other end of the stick. What goes around comes around. But more than a kind of justice that catches up with us, the life of the spirit seems to operate by its own "un-rules." Just about the time you are sure what direction the path is heading, some unexpected variation changes your course, or for that matter obliterates the path. You get sold into Egypt but once you are there you find a place you never could have imagined. The famine in your land makes you so hungry that your feet take you to somewhere else just to survive, a refugee by no choice of your own. The only catch is that these necessary journeys bring you face to face with what you had hoped had gone away for good. Not!

Our journeys of agony, adversity, chaos, and confusion frequently head us toward places we would rather *not* go but *need* to go. I really don't want to humble myself before the one I wronged, for example, but in so doing I find my lost life. I find what I need precisely in the places I never wanted to visit.

All of our journeys take us where we need to go, whether we want to go there or not. Every road leads to *the* road. When we find ourselves, strangely, watching Jesus sweat blood in Gethsemane, or take the

abuse dished out by, well, us, we are in a place we would not naturally choose to go. So I may choose my path, but sometimes it chooses me. It's where I'm found: the right place for the wrong reason.

*Prayer: Take us there, O God, even if we kick and scream all the way. But more than that, let our hearts catch up with our feet, so we may actually see what's there when you show us the right place we thought wrong.*

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TIM CARSON

## Wednesday March 10

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**Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.**

*Psalm 119:73-96*

Our modern-day ears cringe at words like *servant* or even *mercy* and *law*. We want to focus on God's unending love for us, without really talking about the responsibilities of our faith. Our independent nature doesn't want to owe God anything—doesn't want to obey God. But are we just deceiving ourselves to say otherwise? We have separated ethics into a secular context to the point that we seldom recognize the religious context. Since Jesus challenged so many Jewish codes of conduct and then Christians routinely ignore a great majority of Old Testament laws, how can we seriously consider codes of conduct that are thousands of years old?

While growing up my grandma told me that God burns into our hearts what is right and what is wrong. So that if we feel bad for taking someone else's toy, then we know it is wrong. If we treat another person badly, we feel bad about it. The problem with that explanation is that many times we wrong others out of ignorance, without thinking, or even with knowledge but not caring. After all, we are only human. But this is where God's grace comes in. Out of love for God, we try our best to do right by our neighbors and the world, and out of love for us, God forgives us when we err. We may not always have the strength to do right, but God will give us the strength if we open our hearts and listen to God.

*Prayer: Loving Spirit, fill me with the courage to be true to the way of life you wish us to follow. Be patient with me and give me the wisdom to discern your will in my life.*

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REGAN DOYLE

## Thursday March 11

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“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

*Mark 4:30-32*

My wife and I bought a poinsettia near Christmastime. Not fully understanding the growth process of poinsettias, I quickly became frustrated at the amount of withered, dead leaves that I would find scattered around the pot each morning. I had been told that poinsettias can last for years, so observing leaves falling was disheartening, even for one without a green thumb. But recently I have noticed the beginning of new leaves forming. Finally I understood. The old leaves fell quickly, but the new leaves took longer to take shape.

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of all plants growing into the biggest of shrubs. The kingdom cannot be realized overnight, and there will probably be a lot of uncertain moments between the passing away of old things and the rising of the new, both in ourselves and in the world around us. In patience and diligence, the journey continues. Seeking newness of life in the smallest ways can bring the greatest results.

*Prayer: Help me, gentle and loving spirit, to honor the past and welcome the future, to take small steps and see them as bold moves in my journey with you.*

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JEFF NELSON

## Friday March 12

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He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

*Mark 4: 39*

There is a wonderful sight gag in the film *Bruce Almighty* as Jim Carrey tries out his newly-bestowed, God-given powers by parting the milk in his cereal bowl. Quite a trick! Filmgoers in-the-know instantly think of Moses parting the Sea of Reeds, or of Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha splitting the waters of the Jordan. Parting the waters is an act that happens so often throughout the biblical texts that one is tempted to say, “Enough already! What’s your point?”

In the ancient world, only God or God’s messenger could control the waters. The sea was a symbol of chaos, a primordial power beyond humankind’s ability to harness or manipulate. In Mark’s story, the waters of the sea threaten to destroy the disciples. They are terrified as the winds roar and cause the waves to crash upon their boat. They cry out for help, certain that any minute the boat will sink. Clearly this was more than they had bargained for!

In this time of Lent, we remember that journey Jesus must make from Jerusalem to Gethsemane and the cross. We are reminded that following Jesus might mean we are called to leave our comfort zones and get knee-deep in the lives of those who are hurting and crying out for help. We might be called to stand up for the oppressed, speak out for the voiceless, touch those others consider untouchable, love those others insist are unlovable. If we really want to join Christ in the journey, we’d better be ready for stormy weather, troubled times, rough roads, and even chaos. And we need to be ready to cry out to the one who brings true peace.

*Prayer: Life is tough, God. Do you know how hard it can be to follow you? I’ll try my best, but I need you there, too.*

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BRIAN KIRK

## Saturday March 13

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When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

*Mark 5:6-9*

Maybe it is a scene from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, or *Stigmata*, or *Shine*, or *Nuts*. Or as Bob Cratchit says of a dramatically changed Scrooge in Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, "He's popped his buttons."

In the story from Mark, the man from the country of the Gerasenes is crazy enough. But the Biblical story doesn't stop there. It describes these kinds of things in other terms; he is possessed by demons. That is, he is overcome with deep, dark forces outside his control. They are supernatural, evil, and dominate his control or reason.

This is a bit of a stretch for many of us, we who live in the world of psychiatric treatment, therapeutic culture, medical diagnosis, sociological theory, the scientific method, and explanations for every strange phenomenon. Almost.

The exception are things like mass genocides, addictions that decimate lives and families, and, yes, unexplainable dominations of people by forces that seem to attack from outside. There's more than meets the eye or can be explained away. I'm not the center of the universe, after all, and it's sure not in my control.

The ancients had a simpler way of looking at this kind of situation: If it's destroying you and the community, and it acts on you beyond your control, it's bad news and should be gone. God's the answer. And Jesus is going to order it out of the house.

As it is in the film *The Matrix*, evil is tenacious. It always makes a fuss on the way out. It likes to stick around because it needs a home. But when God moves into the building, the squatters have to go. There's

no room for both when Jesus walks up Main Street. And it only takes a little light to obliterate darkness on the journey.

*Prayer: The darkness and hatred and destructive powers are legion, O God. We'll keep trying to trust you anyway. We're betting the farm you've got it covered. Even in times like these, when all the evidence around us says it isn't so. Come on in. And soon.*

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TIM CARSON

## Monday March 15

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Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

*Mark 5: 21-29*

Healing is a major theme of *E.T. - The Extraterrestrial*, a touching film that tells of a boy named Elliot who befriends a small alien after it becomes stranded on planet Earth. When Elliot is accidentally cut by a saw blade, the E.T. touches the wound with his finger and Elliot is miraculously healed. From then on the boy and E.T. have a psychic link, sharing one another's feelings and experiences.

In Jesus' culture, anyone with an infirmity that caused bleeding would have been considered "unclean" and thus untouchable. Those coming into contact with such a person risked being labeled untouchable themselves. It's not surprising then that throughout the Gospels Jesus makes physical contact with the untouchables of his world, the "unclean," and thus intertwines their lives with his own. When no one else would dare, Jesus made contact with the outcasts, placing his hands on their wounded souls, bringing them back into the community of God's children.

Who in your own life needs your healing touch? Not a word of advice, a handout, or an off-hand promise of, "I'll keep you in my thoughts," but real honest-to-goodness healing touch?

***Prayer: Use my hands, loving God, to heal the hurting in this world.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Tuesday March 16

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**You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**

*Psalm 51:6*

Be true to yourself. If that were so simple, we never would have heard from the likes of Freud and Jung. Therapists and pharmaceutical companies around the world would be out of business. We now know so much more about the human body, how the biochemical pathways affect not just our physical self, but our mental state as well. Yet, are we any happier than this Psalmist was? Not really.

Self-help groups quickly realized that without faith of some kind, healing and recovery cannot be attained. Many people try all kinds of secular options to obtain that faith, but none of them have ever worked as well for me as faith in Yahweh, the maker and keeper of promises, ever faithful and present in our lives.

Truly, there are so many ways we can deceive ourselves. Maintaining our faith in God requires that we be honest and true to ourselves so that we may be honest and true in front of God. Relying on God is not a bad dependence, but a support, which we feel when we ask for help. God helps us remain true to ourselves and to God. That's why the verses later in this psalm have been a part of so many liturgies for so many centuries. It is still a perfect prayer to ask for God's help:

***Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.***

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REGAN DOYLE

## Wednesday March 17

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Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; but anyone who loves God is known by him.

*1 Corinthians 8:1b-3*

An ancient proverb, often attributed to Socrates, states: “Wisest is he who knows he does not know. ” Say that five times fast! It’s often said that we live in the “information age,” a period in history when information is coming at us so fast and from so many sources that we can’t possibly keep up with even a tiny portion of it. We go to college to fill our heads with as much of this knowledge as we can and eventually we come to an amazing revelation: the more we learn, the more we realize how little we know.

Paul urges us to remember that sometimes a little knowledge can be dangerous, for it can lead one to becoming static, unyielding, and overly certain that we have reached the ultimate truth. God is too big to be found in one definition, one doctrine, one understanding, one theological system. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to give up “knowing” and just start “experiencing” God in all that we are and all that we do—and in all those people we encounter.

***Prayer: You know me God and still you love me. That is amazing grace! I just can’t help but love you back.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Thursday March 18

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I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”

*1 Corinthians 9:22b-23*

You meet a lot of people along the journey, and there are no two alike. A question always appears: How in the world can I relate my faith to this incredible diversity of persons? It’s downright baffling. There are the psychological differences—introverts and extraverts, thinkers and feelers, calm and anxious. There are the cultural differences—the way we’ve been shaped by all the social factors surrounding us. There is gender, life experience, religious background. Where does one begin?

The apostle Paul was a specialist in reaching out to folks beyond the walls. His whole mission was about going beyond what he knew to what was unknown. And so he describes himself as a kind of chameleon: To a Jew, he becomes a Jew. To the weak, he becomes weak. I have become all things to all people, he says. Hmm. Looks like a problem.

How can you become all things to all people and still be you? Don’t you compromise your own identity, integrity, and honesty in taking on the features of the other? Paul didn’t think so.

If he could only reach a few, he was willing to take the risk to meet people in the middle for that conversation of the Spirit. That means caring enough to find out about the other, of course. If I can discover the life frequencies of another I can try to tune into their channel. But unless we get on the same wavelength, nothing is ever going to happen.

Maybe meeting in the middle, becoming all things to all people, is more like Java, the computer language. It’s a language that talks to all other languages. It’s a Star Trek translator, taking you from Vulcan to Earthling. Without it, there is no conversation at all. But if you care enough to learn the life language of another being, then you can begin to converse in that tongue. In time, you may even be able to give and receive the fruits of your learning with your new neighbor. And that is no small thing, not a small thing at all.

*Prayer: Help us to cross the boundary between ourselves and those who seem strange, other and perplexing. Give us the spiritual Java to enter into their lives, even as you have entered into ours. And by the way, Lord, we're not going to be able to do this one on our own, not even close. We're waiting on the journey. Amen.*

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TIM CARSON

## Friday March 19

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**Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked... My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.**

*Psalm 73:1-3, 26*

I love the Psalms. They are such human prayers, filled with the self-doubt and insecurities I often feel. They reflect my own desperate attempts to reassure myself of God's presence. It is reassuring to just have these ancient prayers to read. They remind me that thousands of years ago even God's people were plagued with jealousy because of the injustices of the material world. It is hard to keep our eyes on such an intangible prize as salvation when the world attempts to convince us that possessions equal wealth and status equals success. But in our hearts, we know that true wealth and success only come from being with our God and Savior.

How do we stay true to such a difficult way of thinking? One very important way is to do exactly what this psalmist is doing: talk to God. This Psalm is filled with the kind of doubts and judgments God does not desire; they reflect what the psalmist needed to purge. God hears the frustration in our voices and responds. And by hashing it out with God, just as one does with a therapist, we eventually get to the same point the psalmist did, recognizing God's role in our lives as being bigger than our sometimes petty worries. Lent is a perfect time to hash out the difficult parts of our relationship with God and God is always ready to listen.

***Prayer: O Loving Creator, thank you for being there when I stumble, for being the strength of my heart in times of doubt. Continue to hear my prayers and steady me when my steps may slip.***

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REGAN DOYLE

## Saturday March 20

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Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

*Mark 7:14-15*

It’s not what you take in, but what you produce, says Jesus in today’s reading. What one brings into the world can be more destructive than what one takes in. These days, we have the opportunity to take in a lot of negative things: racism, sexism, classism, materialism, etc. The list is endless. All these things can make one spiritually ugly, and it shows.

But these effects can be resisted; the defilement can end with a keener sense of what is going in and what is to be done with the information. That which has the potential to defile can also inform and prevent, and thus brings one ever closer to the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

*Prayer: God of love, you know me inside and out. You see me as I am, and love me still. Let me love as you love.*

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JEFF NELSON

## Monday March 22

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Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”

*Mark 7:26-27*

Whoa! Is this my Jesus, sweet and loving, preaching forgiveness and reaching to the outcast? I think not. This seems like some nationalistic, take-care-of-my-own bigot. No thanks. I’ve got no time for this. If this is the way it is, I’ll just get my religion on-line.

After all, this woman’s daughter was possessed, lined up for the lead role on *The Exorcist*. Of course her mother would ask for help. Wouldn’t you? The fact that she was a Gentile—a non-Jew—was quite beside the point. She was just one of those seafaring peoples living along the Mediterranean coastline as they had for thousands of years.

But Jesus was in his *family ties* stage and heading out among his own people to bring the new message of God’s reign. If charity begins at home, his ministry was exemplary. He started with his own. But it didn’t stay that way for long.

Finally the time comes for the showdown at the Gentile corral. The request has been made and now it’s his turn to respond. Everyone freezes and time stands still. And what comes out of his mouth is a shocker, and it shocks you differently, depending on who you are. “Now we can’t go giving the children’s food to the dogs, now can we?” That’s the party line, alright. All card-carrying members had that line memorized. And then the woman responds with her own showstopper: “even the dogs get the crumbs that fall under the table.” Well.

Some things just can’t be seen unless they are in the original language, and this is one of them. In the Greek text the word we have translated as *dog* has a very specific meaning. This is not a street dog, wild dog or even working dog. This is rover, a lap dog, a *house dog*. This is the family pet that has the privilege of eating all the scraps that the family sneaks under the table when no one is looking. This is a

cared-for dog, loved and pampered.

What the people were used to hearing was language about Gentiles being mongrels, mange-infested vermin roaming the face of the earth. But here—between Jesus and this Gentile woman of faith—we hear that the table of grace overflows to all people, and that even the Gentiles are cared for and loved as a part of the household. It is a gentle and compelling image, for the feeding of the few flows over into the feeding of the many. That's what God's way is like, after all—a table groaning with the bountiful feast of God.

*Prayer: Feed us, God. But feed them, too. And when we begin to worry if there is enough of You to go around, bring us to our senses so that we can understand just how amazing your grace actually is. Amen.*

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TIM CARSON

## Tuesday March 23

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**For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

*1 Corinthians 11: 23-26*

Our lives are centered around the table, around the nourishment that sustains us. There's something special that happens when people break bread together. Differences, quarrels, suspicions, and fears melt away when you share a meal. Sadly, we often hesitate to share a meal with those we don't like or don't agree with, for this very reason. We don't always want quarrels and hatred to disappear.

The table set by Jesus is, in many ways, just like every other table to which we come. We approach with hunger, we leave satiated, and sometime in between, those we thought were strangers become our friends. However, the Communion Table is different from other tables, too. We cannot exclude those we don't like or don't agree with from coming to this table, from sharing in God's grace.

To partake of Communion is to be reconciled, whether or not we want to be. Choosing to take Communion then, is not a choice taken lightly. Each time we come to the table, we surrender ourselves to the reconciling power of God's grace.

*Prayer: Remind us, Lord, that the table is yours, open to all you call “my child.” Keep us ever humble, surrendering our biases, hatreds, and quarrels to your reconciling grace.*

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TABITHA KNERR

## Wednesday March 24

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**Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**

*1 Corinthians 12: 4-7*

I remember this friend from high school who was so popular that during our senior year he was voted Most Scholarly, Most Humorous, and Most Dramatic. Talk about overkill. As it turned out, our school only allowed him to accept one of these distinctions, with the others going to the runners-up. And thus it was that I was given the secondhand honor of being declared “most dramatic.” Lucky me. It does often seem like some people were given an abundance of gifts while others can think of literally nothing to say when asked, “And what are you good at?” Perhaps this is because our understanding of gifts is a little too narrow.

Paul’s words invite us to see “gifts” beyond those “talents” that our culture prizes so well and to open our eyes to the gifts of the spirit. Who among you has the gift of listening, the ability to let another pour out their heart and then offer a word of comfort, a word of wisdom? Who among you has the gift of healing, the ability to reach out to others in their time of crisis and need and make the touch of God real and tangible? Who among you has the gift of leadership, the ability to energize others to put their faith into action in places where our brothers and sisters are hurting? Paul reminds us that for all our individual gifts, we move together as one on this journey called life, and it is those spiritual gifts that draw us together and nurture us as a community.

***Prayer: May the Spirit be within me, use me, move through me, and reach out to the Spirit within the other.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Thursday March 25

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**Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

*1 Corinthians 12:27*

Whenever I read this text I think of the Musketeers’ motto, “All for one and one for all.” Paul is writing about how unity happens even amid diversity. I think that in today’s global community, we quickly cling to the first half of the motto: *All for one*. Perhaps it’s the media or cultural indoctrination to become homogenous, but we can recognize the interconnectedness of humankind and take joy in it.

But what about the *one for all* part? We are not living in a world where becoming a martyr or saint is considered an attainable goal. It is something that someone else does. We sheepishly laugh when we do something selfish, proclaim our right to live in our “well-earned” luxury, and remain in blissful ignorance about the state of the rest of the world.

Paul does talk about the glories of living in one body in Christ. But he also mentions the responsibilities: “...but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” If there is one of God’s beloved creation suffering across the globe, then the entire body of Christ suffers. So then, how do we respond to the suffering in the world? By ignoring it and believing it is not our problem? Perhaps, as a member of this unified body, we should listen to the woes of the other members and respond as if the very *existence* of the body of Christ depended on it.

***Prayer: Generous God, show me the way to interact with the rest of your creation. Teach me how to tread lightly and carefully amongst my neighbors that I may do no harm to them. Open my eyes to the joys and concerns of your children. Amen.***

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REGAN DOYLE

## Friday March 26

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Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.

*Exodus 2:1-5*

For Moses, one journey began with being spared from Pharaoh's senseless killing of Hebrew infants. Later, another journey would begin by fleeing Egypt and settling within Midian. And yet Moses is constantly aware of being different in some way. He remembers his ties to the Hebrew people and calls himself an alien in a foreign land as he names his first child. This sense of "otherness" helps him make sense of who he is, and paves the way for an important journey yet to come.

People of faith have their own identity of "otherness." We recognize that we are claimed by God and seek to live out of that awareness. A life of faith can take one on a very different journey indeed, sometimes painful, other times joyful. Yet constant reminders such as worship, prayer, and meditation can help make sense of who one is as God's creation, and the journey one is on.

***Prayer: Claim me, use me, lead me, O God.***

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JEFF NELSON

## Saturday March 27

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**Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.**

*Psalms 119:105*

I know what's going to happen to me by the end of today. I'll come back to my dorm from class, with more studying, and more work to do. I'll go downstairs in the evening to eat more bland cafeteria food. At night, I will stay up late studying and talking to my friends. I will enjoy the freedom of the weekend by going out with my friends. I will go to church on Sunday and get a good breath of God. I am pretty sure that I will be going to school for the next couple of months.

However, there is just as much I don't know. Who am I going to meet? What kind of situations will I encounter? Will I run into people who need some encouragement about their lives or about God? Will I lose someone I love, or will I comfort someone who loses someone they love? Will I be racing towards a prize, or will I be running from a threat. Will I be called some place? I don't know any of this.

However, what I do know is that God will show me the way. God is a *lamp* unto our feet. Not a *floodlight*! We know how we will get through the day or maybe the week. But what God has in store for us farther than that...we can only wonder about! But we can be certain of one thing: whatever may come, God's love will lead us through and light the way! God shows us the way one step at a time, not miles and miles ahead. In the uncharted lands of the future, God is always there for us.

***Prayer: Dear God, help me to be open to what lies in the future and to not worry about what may happen, for I know that you will be lighting my path.***

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JOHNNY CATHCART

## Monday March 29

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Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

*Mark 9: 33-35*

Anyone who has been on a long trip knows how the journey can wear on even the best of friends. Tempers can flare and arguments start over the silliest things. Jesus overhears his disciples squabbling and throws in his two cents, sharing with us a teaching about servanthood that is troubling. As Christians, we are so accustomed to tossing around “servanthood” language that we hardly think about the implications of suggesting that we are all to become “servants” for the kingdom of God. It could be argued that the *choice* to be a servant can only be made by one in a position of power. How is this “good news” for those who are already servants or slaves due to oppression and circumstances beyond their control? How is it good news for victims of abuse who want liberation, not servanthood?

The predominant image of God in scripture is of one intimately involved in relationship with God’s people. We, too, are called to live in intimate relationship with all God’s people, Rather than serving others by giving them what *we* think they need, in a community built upon mutuality the “other” has as much to offer me as I have to offer them. There is give-and-take in our relationship with God and that same give-and-take is to be modeled in the Christian community.

***Prayer: Loving God, help me to see you in the other, to see you in the face of the stranger, to see you in the eyes of one who is reaching out to me, and give me the strength to reach back.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Tuesday March 30

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You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy.

*Exodus 5:7-8*

Okay. Here is the deal. You’ve got to cut twenty lawns before noon. That gives you four hours. But because you are whiney, we’re taking your lawnmower away. But that does not mean that you are off the hook for the twenty lawns. You still have to cut exactly the same as before, but with no lawn mower. And remember don’t whine. It’s not becoming.

You might say this is a high-expectation, low-respect environment. That’s what Moses and the children of Israel had: unreasonable expectations and not even the kind of materials necessary to do the job. That’s usually the strategy a boss uses to drum an employee out of a job—terrible working conditions, high expectations, low respect. But there’s no getting out of this one. And there is no bricklayers union either.

If you’re thinking that this is setting the stage for some kind of revolution, you’re right. People can take only so much before they snap. This is the lesson eventually learned by every despotic tyrant on the planet: crush your people only if you want to eventually get crushed yourself.

The thing about oppression is that it makes perfect sense—to the ones with the power, that is. It is perfectly reasonable for people of power to believe that maintaining their charmed life may require the suffering of those without power. I expect you to make bricks without straw because I can get what I want. At your expense. Perfectly reasonable.

Unless of course you have some strange idea about justice, which, as it turns out, the God of the Bible does.

Just when Moses is about to give up on the whole mess, and give up on the God who brought him to it, some voice from the deep

wells up and reminds him who is really in charge. And it's not those who expect the impossible from their workers. In the end the mighty hand of God sets free the oppressed, and when that happens, it's no picnic for the bad guys. Which is just another reason to make sure you're not on the wrong side.

*Prayer: It's about time to set the people free, God. Just look at this mess. How long before you raise your little finger to help? It better be soon. There's a whole world out there cranking away without so much as one hay bale at their disposal. That's just not right. Is it, God? Amen.*

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TIM CARSON

## Wednesday March 31

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**People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.**

*Mark 10: 13-16*

My summers in between each year of college were spent in the woods of Camp Timber Acres, an outdoor day camp for city children: Three months in the sweltering heat trying to keep 60 kids entertained, happy, and make sure they knew somebody cared about them. It was a tough job for little pay and a lot of grief. I loved every minute of it. Children have a way of giving us a very different perspective on this journey we are on together.

As Mark's Jesus stops on his journey to Jerusalem to encounter people on the side of the road, anxious parents begin rushing forward to have Jesus touch their children. Amazingly, Jesus does just that, much to the consternation of his disciples. "Why is he wasting time with those kids?" they were likely thinking—and with good reason. Children were one of the groups in Jesus' culture who were powerless. They were essentially property, with no status whatsoever. Given this fact, why on earth would anyone want to lower themselves to the level of a child?

"Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." In becoming like children, the disciples would, in a sense, be giving up all status, all security, and allow themselves to become vulnerable to others. Only in this way, could they follow Jesus on "the way" to what lay ahead: persecution, torment, death. Perhaps if the disciples truly knew what was waiting for them just down the road, they would have had second thoughts. Had they

been paying attention, however, they might have noticed the clue right under their noses: Jesus sitting with the children. This simple act was a radical restructuring of the world. Suddenly, “the least of these” demanded all of Christ’s attention and all the rules about who was worthy of God’s love went right out the window.

We would be wise, as we hurry along in this journey of life, to take time to stop along the road and open our lives to “the least of these,” to make ourselves vulnerable to the ones everyone else is passing by, to expose our hearts and share our very selves with those children of God, young and not-so-young, who need to hear the good news we have to share of this God of love and peace.

*Prayer: Loving God, overflowing with grace, keep me from speeding through life, unaware of those children you have placed on my path who need me to stop, to meet them on bended knee, to reach out a hand of healing and hope.*

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BRIAN KIRK

## Thursday April 1

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**And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.**

*2 Corinthians 3:18*

This verse is inspiring and encouraging. Paul tells us that once we remove the veil, by seeing the glory of God in the world around us, we will be transformed into that same glory.

I recently participated in a photography contest centered on the theme, “Created in the Image of God.” I used an abstract image because the word “image” implies what can be seen; yet I think the word goes beyond the physical, in the same abstract way that Paul is saying that Glory can be seen. How do we remove the veil so that we can become transformed into this image of God? Perhaps by becoming aware of where God’s glory is in our daily lives or by considering how our every action offers a chance to make real God’s love in the world. Once we begin to do this, we open ourselves to being transformed by God to a higher level of understanding that we could not have possibly understood before taking note of God’s glory.

What will that transformation feel like? Might it feel like the blind man in the film, *Amelie*. Determined to intervene in the lives of others for good, Amelie helps a blind man gain his “vision” by vividly describing everything around them as she helps him across the street. The transformation might be as shocking as the end of the film *The Sixth Sense* as Malcolm discovers that his world is not at all what he believed it to be. One thing we do know is that however the transformation occurs and whatever it feels like, it will be amazing, and we will be faced with the pure glory of God.

*Prayer: O God, make me new, fill me with your love, transform me.*

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NATALEE CAYTON

## Friday April 2

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He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”

*Mark 10: 32b-34*

Mark’s Jesus sure doesn’t pull any punches here! He’s telling it like it is—bad news and all. Growing up, things were usually very tough financially for my family. We had plenty of love, but we weren’t always certain whether we’d be able to pay the electric bill, buy decent clothing, or put much food on the table. Though my parents might have been tempted to sugarcoat the situation, they always chose to be honest with my brothers and me about our money problems. Those were tough words to hear, and I respect my parents for having the courage to speak them.

The people of Mark’s community were barely surviving following the Roman-Jewish war. Hated by the Romans and rejected by their fellow Jews, they couldn’t see how life could get any worse. The last thing they needed was someone telling them, “look on the bright side” or find “the silver lining in every cloud.” When Mark’s Jesus talks about being mocked, and spit upon, and condemned to death, they knew exactly what he was talking about. They had been there themselves. Jesus’ story was *their* story. In his words they could hear him say, “You aren’t the first to go through this. Life is really hard. But if you will endure, like I endured, there is hope down the road.”

***Prayer: Be with me, Lord, as I face the tough times in my life.  
Walk with me as I endure the pain, as I try to make sense of  
the chaos, as I journey toward hope and healing.***

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BRIAN KIRK

## Saturday April 3

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So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

*2 Corinthians 4:16*

Some things pass away, and some things last. But to be honest, even on a good day most of it passes away. That’s what Paul is thinking about when he talks about his outer nature wasting away. Our bodies, the peaks of mountains, cathedrals—things that we think will last forever—all melt away some day. It’s a rather depressing thought, especially if you hold on to grandiose illusions to the contrary.

Just for fun, try to name one thing that won’t eventually pass away. Time’s up. Except for God, you can’t think of one. But we *live* like some things will last when they really won’t. In other words, we position some things like they *are* God when there’s no way. And the human proclivity toward this is huge. That’s why national capitals and cemeteries are full of great big stone memorials. Somebody wanted something to last—a memory, an idea, a way of life.

But Paul’s a realist. He knows better. Like the Buddhists, he knows that nothing is permanent. There is only the *illusion* of permanence.

That’s not the end of the story, however. It’s not just one big period at the end of the sentence. To the contrary, at the same time outward things are passing away, the most important things are being renewed. The insides of life are gaining strength. And there is a paradox for you: As things appear to get weaker they can actually gain strength.

I once had a friend who developed cancer. She gave a long, heroic fight, but near the end she accepted the inevitable. The mysterious and unexplainable thing was this: Every time that I visited her and witnessed yet more loss of weight, draining of strength, and increase of pain, she became more and more beautiful by degree. Her eyes just radiated an increasing and growing peace and love. By the end that’s just about all there was left of her—beautiful love. Everything else had been peeled away. And what couldn’t be seen with clarity

before, when she was shielded by her strong exterior, had become as transparent as crystal in her weakness.

There is something about the cross that is like this. After everything was taken away from him, what remained was what mattered most. When there is nothing left but darkness, the darkness is about to pass. Because darkness and death don't last forever either. They pass away, too. And so we ask, "Where, O death, is your sting?"

*Prayer: As beautiful as your creation is, O God, we know it's all on a timer. For everything there is a season, and that means us, too. Help us to fold up the tent when we're done with the journey, not fearful or bitter, but grateful for that which cannot be lost in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

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TIM CARSON

## Monday April 5

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**Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**

*Roman 6: 3-4*

It is hard to imagine, when we are young, that death will some day be a reality for us. Maybe it's true that most of us really don't confront death until our own parents are gone, when nothing seems to stand between us and the end of life. Our culture loves to avoid talking about death. Even in our churches, we'd rather focus on birth, baptism, and weddings—but death? That discussion can wait until later. I suspect this is less a case of procrastination and more a fear of the unknown.

It is to this very fear that Paul speaks when he says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into death?" Paul is reminding his community that they no longer need to fear death as the "end" of the journey, for the death that truly matters has already happened in their baptism: death to an old way of being, the old self. And with that death has come an amazing rebirth into new life in Christ, a life that is to be saturated with an awareness of the love and grace of God not only for us individually, but for all of God's children.

*Prayer: Loving God, help me today to celebrate my rebirth, to see you with new eyes, to experience you with a new heart, to love with a renewed commitment to your way of grace and forgiveness for all.*

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BRIAN KIRK

## Tuesday April 6

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**For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself.**

*John 5:26*

There is one word which most young adults hate to hear. The “R word.” Responsibility. If one is looking for a way to completely disrupt fun and merriment, you need only whisper this word and the desired impact will be had. Responsibility. There is a great deal of pressure in that word. It implies bills, jobs, commitments, and, yes, the future. It is a scary thought for those of us who have had to deal with a minimal amount of responsibility throughout our lives, and right around the time we enter our 20s, it gets a whole lot scarier. The idea that the word “teen” is no longer attached to the end of our ages suddenly puts life in a different perspective.

Is there anyone out there who wants to go back to being 16, 17, or, 18? Well, it is impossible. And contrary to what some might be thinking, it is a good thing. Responsibility is a good thing. Once you are given control of your life, life suddenly takes on more meaning. Any decision you make or path you choose no matter the outcome is more extraordinary because it was *you* who decided and chose. It was you who took the risk, you who used your free will, your heart, your faith to make a decision and live with its consequences. Responsibility is a beautiful possession, especially at this point in our lives. It means not only that we are well on way towards maturity, but that we are also trusting in and following the Lord, not because someone else told us to, but because we have chosen to love God back.

***Prayer: I've got lots of decisions to make, God. I hope I know what I'm doing. The older I get, the more I know one thing: I can do a lot on my own, but I still need you beside me.***

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LORI SHERRILL

## Wednesday April 7

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**For in hope, we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.**

*Romans 8:24-25*

There are going to be times in life when it seems your world is crashing down around you. Or it may be that all those little things just seem to nag at you until you can't take anymore. When the challenges of life become too great a burden, we look to God for hope.

Find solace in God to get through the day. You may not be able to see God standing beside you, but God is always there. By trusting in God, we are saved each and every day. God's love brings peace of mind and saves us from an eternity of death. Jesus died to save us, and we hold to the hope that he will come again. Considering the alternative, a life lived outside a conscious experience of God's overwhelming grace, I think we can stand to have a little patience.

***Prayer: Please God, help me to get through everything that life throws at me, and don't let me ever stop hoping.***

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KATIE McCOMB

## Thursday April 8

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Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’... ”

*John 8:54*

Whenever I feel the need to ground myself and place any problems I might be having in proper perspective, my thoughts turn to the violence in the Middle East. Just that one thought makes me think perhaps life is not as bad as I may feel it is. I have been blessed, but sometimes I forget and need a reminder. For me, that reminder is the Middle East.

Who am I that the Lord should bless and glorify me? Who are any of us for that matter? Without the Lord, I am nothing, but with God I am everything, and I am blessed—blessed by life, by love, by God’s creation.

We have all gone through experiences in our lives that have taught us humility. As with anything, however, it is easy to forget if we are not reminded every once in a while. I recommend finding your own “Middle East.” For me, it keeps me humble and lets me know I am blessed.

*Prayer: I give thanks Lord for the blessings you give to me and all your beloved children—the blessing of life, of love, of being, and the blessing of your wondrous creation.*

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LORI SHERRILL

## Friday April 9

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Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

*Amos 5:14-15*

God’s law is a promise and God’s promise is law. That may not always seem so great; but rest assured, God has our ultimate best interest in mind.

The book of Amos is a book of judgment for a people who did not hold justice in their hearts. Perhaps it is a word of judgment for us as well. At times, we too fail to hold justice in our hearts. We fail to speak out for the oppressed, to fight against prejudice, to stand up for those who cannot stand for themselves. At other times, justice can be our desire—and in those moments we know we are close to God. God’s judgment may not always be an appealing thought but this same judgment is our guarantee of justice.

*Prayer: May your will be epitomized in me. May your desire for justice teach me to change my ways and comfort me as a promise of your benevolence.*

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JOSHUA LONGBOTTOM

## Saturday April 10

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“I am the resurrection and the life...”

John 11:25

Timing is everything, as they say. And when the right thing comes at the wrong time, the missed opportunity mocks our hope. The fire truck arrives *after* the house has burned to the ground.

So it was when Jesus showed up fashionably late to his good friend's death. By the time Jesus came waltzing into Bethany, Lazarus had long since died. What's more, he was already entombed and the natural process of decay was well underway—like an episode of *Tales from the Crypt*.

It seems that upon hearing about Lazarus's imminent demise, Jesus intentionally dilly-dallied around another couple of days just to make sure the cavalry *didn't* make it in time. He may have loved this special family from Bethany, but it didn't change his plans to make sure Lazarus was really, really dead. Wildly successful in this strategy, Jesus arrived on the scene only after Lazarus was just about as dead as a person can be. What else could Mary and Martha do but to sob through tears, “If only you had come earlier...”

As it turned out, Jesus *was* on time; in fact, more than on time. The time is always the right time when the *Resurrection and the Life* stands before the *really, really dead*. And when that voice calls from the deep, “Come Out!” the stone inevitably tumbles away and the bindings fall off like tissue paper.

It's a name that's called, and called with the sound of all names, like Lazarus, Sally, and Ben. It's your name and my name, of all things, the sound of which awaken us to who we are and jolt us out of the dark and back into the light.

Even Jesus heard his name called out of death. Though he was really, really dead, the Resurrection and the Life was not. In fact, death was issued a restraining order that has been in effect ever since: *You do not have the last word*. This is mostly because as much as an event, resurrection is a power at the center of things, and you can't kill that, no matter what time Jesus gets there.

*Prayer: Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? In Christ is life, life beyond the power of death, life lived deeply, life lived fully, life lived eternally in the midst of God's wide mercy and love.*

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TIM CARSON

