

Day 1 | Ash Wednesday

LISTEN

Isaiah 6:1-13

THINK

Lent is a season of “keepin’ on, keepin’ on,” but it is bookended by drama. Forty days can be a long, unremarkable time, and it is easy to lose motivation, enthusiasm, and direction: “What was it that I was supposed to be doing?”

On the back end of Lent, though, is Easter — a bursting joy out of the deepest, darkest wilderness — so we have that to look forward to. On the front end is Ash Wednesday. Receiving the sign of the cross in ashes on your forehead is a pretty dramatic movement. It’s one of those distinctly Christian things we do that is peculiar but memorable, and its point is to set the tone, set the direction, for Lent.

This will be a time for mourning (hence, the ashes) our “uncleanness,” our distance from God, and the slow death of our self-serving sides. This mourning is a good thing, for it prepares our eyes to see the King, the Lord of hosts, as in Isaiah 6.

REPLY

Prepare my eyes, O Lord, to see you and to see how much I need you. Amen.

DO

Watch the Busted Halo video “Ash Wednesday & Lent in Two Minutes” on Youtube to inform yourself about Lent basics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3L3c23MfC0>

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 2 | Thursday

LISTEN

Matthew 4:1-11

THINK

Have you ever noticed that the temptation of Jesus comes after the baptism of Jesus? Or that his forty days in the desert come before he begins his ministry?

Baptism is like getting married in at least one way: in neither event do you fully know what you're getting yourself into. They're both the beginning of the journey. The hardest work and most difficult temptations are still to come.

Jesus' way of preparing for a life of ministry is to fast: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Fasting is like sacrifice — giving up something you love for something you love more. Fasting in a healthy way — from food or anything else that you can't seem to live without — is a reminder that we need God more than we need anything else.

REPLY

Prepare me for a life of ministry, O Lord, by helping me receive your daily bread. Amen.

DO

Traditionally, Christians have abstained from eating meat on the Fridays during Lent. Whether you participate in this practice or give something else up for all or part of Lent, commit to a way of fasting during this season.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 3 | Friday

LISTEN

Psalm 25:1-10

THINK

One of the major themes of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is “remembering.” God’s people are to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. They are to remember their slavery in Egypt and treat outsiders differently than they were treated. While they were in Egypt, it was God who remembered them, and answered them, when they cried out in desperation.

Today’s scripture passage is a prayer that God would “remember me, for goodness’ sake!” according to steadfast love. And it asks that God would not remember “the sins of my youth.”

What do you want or need to remember today? What do you wish you could forget?

REPLY

Don’t forget about me today, Lord, and help me to not forget about you. Amen.

DO

Use the rubber band or make a simple bracelet or necklace to wear during Lent. Let it be a reminder to you: “God loves me” or “God is here” or “God will provide.” Feel free to write that message on the rubber band or necklace.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 4 | Saturday

LISTEN

Luke 9:57-62

THINK

You can make a lot of money promising convenience to people. For what is made to sound like a reasonable price, you can have fast food and fast internet. DVRs, Netflix, and the Spotify premium upgrade can offer you entertainment with no commercial interruptions. You can even make things that aren't really that inconvenient even more convenient — have you seen those selfie sticks?

It's important, then, to notice that Jesus is about the only one not promising convenience. In this Luke passage, he actually turns people away — people who want to follow him! — because they ask for him to make some special (although very understandable) accommodations.

Following Jesus will be a lot of things — fulfilling, stretching, joyful, enriching, an altogether better, meaningful, and more abundant life — but it will not likely be easy. What do you think you could give up for Jesus? Better yet, what do you not think you could give up? Maybe Jesus will not ask you to give that up...but maybe that's just a convenient thought.

REPLY

Prepare me, O Lord, to follow you with no “ands,” “ifs,” and “buts” about it. Amen.

DO

Do an inconvenient thing on purpose today. Examples: Take the long way to wherever you're going. Call somebody instead of texting. Cook a meal from scratch with a family member instead of getting fast food.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 5 | Monday

LISTEN

John 15:12-17

THINK

Do you have a BFF? Do you have several? Do you use the word “friend” loosely or carefully? What is a true friend? To whom are you a true friend?

When you’re talking about being a disciple of Jesus — and when you’re talking about how costly it is to be a disciple — the servant/master relationship makes sense. We are called to serve God and serve those around us. We are called to lay down our lives for somebody else’s, just as Jesus ultimately exemplified.

In today’s passage, then, Jesus is kind of redefining things, which is kind of the Jesus thing to do. Here, Jesus connects servanthood to friendship. In describing what it means to be his friend, Jesus both starts and finishes with comments about “loving one another.”

We have some pretty flimsy definitions of “friend” and of “love” in our world. Now is the time to consider how Jesus defines these terms and ask for his help in living them out.

REPLY

Help me to be a true friend today, Lord, by laying myself down for somebody else. Amen.

DO

Draw a “family portrait” of your friend group, or of you and your best friend. Don’t forget to include references to inside jokes and your favorite memories together. Make this drawing a prayer of thanksgiving for the people God has brought into your life.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 6 | Tuesday

LISTEN

Psalm 105:1-11

THINK

Much of what we're trying to do during Lent is summed up in this verse: "Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually."

In what areas of your life are you particularly weak? Are you physically weak? Academically? Are you bad at keeping secrets, bad at keeping your word, bad at resisting the urge to gossip?

Now is the time to acknowledge your weakness and seek God's strength. It's not the time to take your weakness lightly, make excuses for it, or dismiss it like it's no big deal. Neither is it time to beat yourself up about it. God still loves you, likes you, and is calling you. In fact, weakness might even be seen as a prerequisite for being used by God, and some say helplessness is the only prerequisite for prayer.

REPLY

You are continually present in my life, O Lord. Help me to look for you and not overlook you. Amen.

DO

Look at the action words and commands in today's passage from Psalms:

- Give thanks to the Lord
- Call on his name
- Make known his deeds among the peoples
- Sing to him
- Tell of all his wonderful works
- Glory in his holy name
- Let your heart rejoice in him
- Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his presence continually
- Remember the wonderful works God has done

Pick one and try to follow that command today.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 7 | Wednesday

LISTEN

1 Peter 4:12-19

THINK

Have you heard the term, “first world problem”? It is usually used to sarcastically remind someone complaining in the “first world” (more privileged, “industrialized” countries) that what they’re complaining about isn’t really suffering — especially when “true” suffering is happening so often in the “third world” (vastly underprivileged regions and the overlooked poor in the first world).

The teenager who did the “First World Problems Rap” was one of the first to use the term and its sense of humor is a great teacher: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2p5svFJ9cQ>

During Lent, we focus on the suffering of Christ, especially on the cross. We also focus on the suffering we willingly take on because of sacrificing everything to follow Jesus. Finally, we are mindful of those enduring suffering through physical or systematic persecution in certain parts of the world.

REPLY

Help me to put my sufferings in perspective today, O Lord, by considering your suffering and the suffering of others. Amen.

DO

You may sometimes hear claims that Christians are being persecuted in the United States and having some right denied by someone in power. Sometimes, this is political posturing and may serve to distract us from those who are really having religious liberty denied.

Inform yourself today by learning more about religious liberty or taking this quiz to see if you’re religious liberty is, in fact, being threatened: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-emily-c-heath/how-to-determine-if-your-religious-liberty-is-being-threatened-in-10-questions_b_1845413.html

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 8 | Thursday

LISTEN

James 1:12-27

THINK

A bully is taking advantage of an Autistic boy in your school. You see it and with a boldness that comes out of nowhere you decide to stand up to the bully: “Hey! Stop it — that’s not cool, man.” He strikes again and calls your bluff, “What’s your problem? What are you going to do about it?”

You come home from an amazing weekend retreat with your youth group. The worship band made Christian music not sound so lame, and you really connected with the speaker. You even throw in a couple extra sentences beyond “It was good...” when telling your parents about it. Still, no one really thinks to say, “That’s awesome! Sounds like you heard from God. What are you planning to do about it?” and life goes back to normal when school starts back.

“What are you going to do about it?” is a challenging question. Lent is characterized by contemplation, reflection, and prayer. It is also a time for doing something. What small step can you take? What little life change can you experiment with? Who can you reach out to that you usually ignore? What risk might you take to put action to the word from God you’re hearing?

REPLY

Help me to hear your voice, O God, and when I do, help me to do something in response.
Amen.

DO

Do something today you’ve been talking or thinking about doing for a long time.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 9 | Friday

LISTEN

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

THINK

A lawyer once asked Jesus what the greatest of God's commandments is, and his response is now famous: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and oh, yeah, also don't forget to "love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus is actually quoting two passages from the Hebrew Bible here — from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. The Deuteronomy passage has been one of the most treasured and memorized in all of scripture. It is called the shema because shema, "hear" in English, is how verse 4 begins.

"Love" is an action word in this passage, as it often is in the Bible, and the emphasis to love with your whole self is poetically put: with heart, soul, might — Matthew throws in "mind" — with every part of you — love the Lord.

But it all starts with hearing. "Hear, O Israel." May you be quick to listen today and slow to speak. Do everything you can to put yourself in a place where you can hear. It's hard to obey if you can't hear.

REPLY

Help me to trust and obey you, Lord, and help me to listen, first of all. Amen.

DO

Practice active listening today by resisting distraction while others talk. Stop planning what you're going to say next, and avoid daydreaming. Look at the person who's talking with an inviting and hospitable look, whether they're a close friend, a cashier, or the most annoying person you know.

At the end of the day, report back to God what you heard when you truly listened.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 10 | Saturday

LISTEN

Leviticus 19:18 and 19:33-34

THINK

The other Old Testament passage Jesus quotes when asked about the “greatest commandment” is in Leviticus. Not many would say Leviticus is their favorite book in the Bible, and most assume it’s full of a bunch of strange but boring legal material that doesn’t really apply anymore. So you might be surprised to know that perhaps the most familiar instruction in the Bible — “love your neighbor as yourself” — is found there.

Jesus spends a good deal of time providing examples of what a “good neighbor” looks like — both with his own actions and with his stories and teachings. Most famously, the Good Samaritan parable is an answer to someone trying to narrow down who really counts as a “neighbor.”

But Jesus did not narrow the definition. No one is out of bounds, and none of us is off the hook. The Bible especially expands “neighbor” to mean those who are outsiders among us — “aliens.” Are you following the second part of the “greatest commandment”?

REPLY

Show me my neighbor, Lord, so that I may love them as myself. Amen.

DO

Do you know your literal neighbors, the people who live beside or near you? If not, introduce yourself to one of them today. It may seem awkward, but you can say, “Hey, we’ve been neighbors for a while now, and I just realized I’ve never made the effort to talk to you before,” or figure out something on your own.

If you do know your neighbors, do something “neighborly” for them today — volunteer to mow their yard, bring over cookies, or leave a nice note in the mailbox.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 11 | Monday

LISTEN

Psalm 42:1-11

THINK

Some versions of this psalm say “As the deer pants for water,” and when you read it out loud, it’s kind of funny to hear and imagine “deer pants.” Even if a deer wearing pants isn’t really your sense of humor, the word still offers effective imagery : desperately thirsty animals — with tongues hanging out, labored breathing, dragging feet — pant for water.

Deep down, even if we don’t always have the physical signs of desperate thirst, we desire God more than anything.

Does Dr. Pepper really quench your thirst? What about warm milk? Salt water? Salty potato chips? What’s the worst thirst-quencher you can think of?

Nothing does the job quite like water. And nothing quenches our longing for God except for God.

REPLY

My soul thirsts, O Lord, for you, the living God. Help me to drink from the well that gives eternal life. Amen.

DO

If you do not have health restrictions that would keep you from doing so, drink only water today, and fast from all other liquids. Pay close attention to your thirst and what it takes to quench it.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 12 | Tuesday

LISTEN

Romans 8:18-25

THINK

“Hope” is a word that sometimes gets more play during Advent than during Lent. The hope for a savior, even when it seemed most unlikely that one would come, characterizes the patience needed to anticipate Christmas.

Buddy the Elf in the movie *Elf* is filled with joy in hoping to meet his real dad. Kevin McAlister in *Home Alone* wishes away his family only to decorate and protect his house in hopes that they might return. *A Christmas Story*'s Ralphie hopes for a Red Ryder BB gun so much it hurts, and in *Christmas Vacation*, Clark hopes, more than anything, that cousin Eddie will back the RV out of the driveway and finally go home.

The hope needed during Lent — to be different, to be changed, to be closer to God — is an even stronger hope than what we see depicted in these Christmas movies. It's hard to see how God will work in us, but we hope for what we cannot see or imagine.

REPLY

My hope is you, O God. Show me your ways. Guide me in truth in all my days. Amen.

DO

Humor is critical in the midst of darkness or discouragement. Give the gift of laughter to someone today, and overcome the fear of being silly!

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 13 | Wednesday

LISTEN

Exodus 17:1-7

THINK

This passage is striking — no pun intended — for a few different reasons. Among them, the complaining done by those who God had delivered from Egypt sounds, well...just about right. What have you been complaining about lately? What's driving that discomfort you're experiencing?

Another fascinating piece of this episode is the closing question, "Is the Lord among us or not?" You've been there, too, haven't you? Sure, you know to say "yes, of course" if your Sunday School teacher asks "Is God always with you?" But it doesn't always feel like it in real life.

The season of Lent gives us the space to be honest about this sense of indirection and tendency to second-guess. "Is God here — or not?" Embrace the question. Embrace the doubt. See how God might speak through it.

REPLY

Even when it's easy for me to complain and hard to see where you are, please be present, Lord. Please be present. Amen.

DO

Sit in silence for at least 4 minutes. Do not strive to make anything happen. Just pay attention to your breathing and see how God meets you in the silence.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 14 | Thursday

LISTEN

Romans 8:31-39

THINK

It's hard to add anything to the truth stated in verses 38-39 there: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As straightforward as it is, though, it's easily forgotten. It is outnumbered by the "you are not loved" and "you are not (fill-in-the-blank) enough" messages we hear every day. Sometimes those messages come most strongly from within us.

The key word in this passage, then, may be the word "convinced." The writer is convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In Christian contexts, we usually emphasize the need for faith and not the need for convincing, so this passage really stands out. Until you are completely convinced, may you trust that God's acceptance of you — as you are and not as you should be, because you're never going to be as you should be — is the more believable message.

REPLY

Convince me of your love and acceptance, O God, or at least help me to trust in the midst of doubt. Amen.

DO

As many times as you can remember to do it, think the sentence "this is someone loved by God" about every person you encounter today. Put the paper reminder in your pocket that says "Everyone is loved by God."

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 15 | Friday

LISTEN

Psalm 19:1-6

THINK

C.S. Lewis once pointed out that “To some, God is discoverable everywhere; to others, nowhere...much depends on the seeing eye.” The band mewwithoutYou has a song with the line, “I used to wonder where you are / These days I can’t find where You’re not!”

The psalmist here, like most of us, has seen God in nature, in creation, in the sky, in the sun, in each day, in all the earth. Most of creation doesn’t use words — “there is no speech, nor are there words” — yet their message is loud and clear and everywhere: “Glory to God!”

At one point, Jesus mentioned that if his disciples were made to keep quiet, the stones would shout out. Let’s join the shouting — and the silence — that proclaim, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!”

REPLY

Help me, O Lord, to know when to speak up and when to keep quiet. In either instance, may you be glorified. Amen.

DO

Spend some time outside today pondering our Creator or just enjoying creation. If the weather isn’t cooperating, look out the window or at pictures of nature online or in a book.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 16 | Saturday

LISTEN

Psalm 19:7-14

THINK

Psalm 19 makes the claim that God is revealed in creation but also in “the law.” The word here is the Hebrew torah, which is really one of those words best left untranslated. Most English translations go with “law,” but American concepts of the “justice system” and law “enforcement” can get in the way of the broader, deeper meaning in Hebrew. Other translation options might include “instruction,” “teaching,” or “way of living.”

The artful construction of this piece of literature — especially the use of repetition — beautifully describe the gift of God’s “instructions” for living the good life. The “law” of the Lord is perfect, sure, wise, right, clear, enlightening, pure, enduring, true, righteous, finer than gold, sweeter than honey.

We have a God who does not stay hidden. God is revealed in nature and in the teachings of our faith. God lets us know how to live well, and this is a great blessing.

REPLY

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

DO

Memorize a verse or passage of scripture today that you want to remember in your heart. If you can’t find one that seems to fit, memorize as much of Psalm 19 as you can.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 17 | Monday

LISTEN

Exodus 3:1-15

THINK

Moses' call story serves as a model for so many others in scripture and in history, even to this day. A conflicted struggle with the questions "Who am I?" and "Which people do I belong with?" sends him into "no man's land," and he doesn't get clear answers for a long time.

Out of nowhere, God calls. What God has to say is surprising and perhaps even more unsettling than the identity crisis Moses dealt with. Moses can tell that it's a holy moment, but he feels immediate and tremendous resistance to accepting God's call. God seems to have a comeback for all of Moses' protests, and Moses knows he won't be able to pretend this never happened.

After a life of wandering aimlessly and playing it safe, Moses is confronted by God and called, sent. Apparently, all God has to say about this is, "I will be with you." In the end, that is enough.

REPLY

I don't think I can do this, God, but I know that you will be with me. Amen.

DO

Fast from the instinct to make excuses today. When you feel yourself trying to avoid something by offering a flimsy or false reason, stop and practice maturity by being honest.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 18 | Tuesday

LISTEN

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

THINK

What is trending? What is popular? Who is the strongest, smartest, richest? Who's got name recognition? Who's most accomplished? Who is the best leader?

God doesn't seem to think these questions are as important as some people do.

The earliest Christians, apparently, at least the ones in ancient Corinth, weren't the elite. Not many of them were powerful, noble, or even wise. The writer of this letter even thinks that God chooses the foolish, the unlikely, the scandalous, on purpose — to stick it to the “top tier.”

Is it wrong to be a successful person? To “be somebody”? To have a prominent place in the world? These questions may be beside the point. What matters is that God is “the source of your life in Christ Jesus.”

REPLY

Whatever I think disqualifies me from being reached and used by you, O God, doesn't seem to be an issue for you. My life is sustained by your strength and not my own. Amen.

DO

Go on a walk with God today, even if it's just up and down the hallways in between classes. Talk about life, people watch, and ask for help if you need to.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 19 | Wednesday

LISTEN

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

THINK

You've got to be at least a little bit crazy to buy into all this Jesus stuff. Or, you've got to be willing for people to think you're crazy.

What's the craziest, most outrageous, or most foolish thing you've ever done? What's the biggest risk you've taken?

For the earliest followers of Jesus — and for followers today — “proclaiming Christ crucified” is one of the most ridiculous things to do. What sets Christian belief apart is that we believe in the incarnation — God becoming human — and we believe in the crucifixion — God dying a shameful and lonely death. Why do we believe these things? Doesn't this just make us seem stupid to outsiders?

“God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.”

REPLY

We are bold enough, God, to proclaim a crucified Christ. You came and died for the whole world. Amen.

DO

Pay attention to your non-verbal communication today: smile at people, try not to roll your eyes, give someone an encouraging pat on the back.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 20 | Thursday

LISTEN

Psalm 33:18-22

THINK

We are halfway through Lent, and you may be getting a little weary. You may have found the idea of Lent interesting at the beginning, and that may have since worn off. Plenty of people have already forgotten what they planned to give up for Lent. Others may be disillusioned with so much sin talk, cost of discipleship talk, Jesus and the cross talk.

You may have hoped you'd see more change or growth in your spiritual life by now.

But still we wait. We wait for God to show up. We wait for change — because it takes a long time and usually happens in a hidden way. If change as we envisioned it never comes, even then, we still wait...because waiting for God is enough. The Lord is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, and we trust in his holy name.

REPLY

We wait for you, Lord, and find you in the waiting. Amen.

DO

Practice waiting by refusing to look at your phone when you have down time. Instead of filling up that time with mindless scrolling or playing games, be observant of how long it takes before you start to feel restless or impatient.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 21 | Friday

LISTEN

Isaiah 55:1-9

THINK

Verse 8 here — “my thoughts are not your thoughts, declares the Lord” — is a go-to verse for people trying to offer reassurance that God knows what God is doing. It also lets us know that our logic may not be God’s logic. God can be pretty illogical sometimes.

For instance, how can someone who has no money “come, buy, and eat”? And what kind of God “freely pardons” the wicked?

Are you thirsty, hungry for something that will actually satisfy you? Are “junk food” relationships making you feel great at first but lousy later? Is conforming to the pressure to succeed, achieve, get in, and get a scholarship more exhausting than exciting? Are you getting disillusioned with the superficial stuff “everybody” else seems to value?

“Come, all you who are thirsty; come to the waters....Why spend your energy on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me....Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.” It may not make sense to the rest of the world, but you won’t find rest until you rest in God.

REPLY

Your ways are not my ways, O Lord, but that’s probably a good thing. Amen.

DO

Take a long nap today or try to sleep in as much as possible tomorrow. Sleep can be a spiritual practice when it reminds us that we are not in control — the world can go on without us, and we can trust God to take care of us.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 22 | Saturday

LISTEN

Matthew 6:25-34

THINK

No judgment intended, but how much time do you spend getting ready in the morning or before you go out? We all spend time in front of the mirror, and sometimes it's helpful to ask "Why?" Am I trying to impress someone with my outfit? Am I worried about fitting in or not getting made fun of? Am I indulging in yet another moment of self-loathing because I do not like the way I look?

Were you aware that Jesus once specifically said not to worry about what you wear? Easy for Jesus to say, right?

The devotions this week have asked you to consider a calling that often comes out of nowhere, from God, and answering it will mean going against what most of the world considers a "good" life or a smart path. The key to being able to stay with God — on the better path — may be in today's passage about not worrying — about your life, about how you look, about what people think.

You are God's beautiful creation, and God will provide what you really need.

REPLY

When my biggest concern is how to put you first in my life, Lord, I can trust that you will take care of the rest. Amen.

DO

Go at least one full day without looking in the mirror to symbolically fast from being self-absorbed or preoccupied with what people think of your outward appearance.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 23 | Monday

LISTEN

John 2:1-12

THINK

In John's gospel, Jesus' ministry on earth begins with his response to thirsty people at a wedding. At the end, it is Jesus himself who is thirsty. The people in John 2 get the good wine. In John 19, Jesus gets the sour wine.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus tells his mother that his "hour has not yet come." After he does the first of his "signs," at least one person appreciates his timing: "most people just serve the good wine first, but you have saved the best for last." On the cross, Jesus drinks from a sponge, bows his head, and gives up his spirit. Now, "it is finished."

The most well-known refrain from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1968 speech during the march on Washington is the "I Have a Dream" repetition. Earlier on in the speech, however, his powerful repetition is of a line from Mark's gospel: "Now is the time!"

What do you make of Jesus' timing in your life? Is now the time for you to respond? To do something? To stand up for something? Know that you can live now for the One who drinks sour wine while giving others the best of the best.

REPLY

Dear God, I recognize that the time has come — the kingdom of God is near. Help me to repent and keep believing the gospel! Amen.

DO

Watch all of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech online. It's less than 20 minutes.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 24 | Tuesday

LISTEN

John 2:13-22

THINK

Not long after the fun wedding with the good wine, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem and gets a little worked up. For a gospel emphasizing that Jesus was God — fully divine — John sure does let us see Jesus' human side. In one moment, he's just one of the crowd at a wedding (talking back to his mother, no less). In the next, he's making a whip and using multiple exclamation points to drive salesmen out of "his Father's house."

The "signs" given by Jesus are not always obvious. They are not always the signs we asked for.

In this case, Jesus' temple talk is a sign — pointing to the resurrection of his own body. Speaking of which, the "body of Christ" is actually an important term for understanding what it means for us to be the Christian church. We are Jesus' human side now — at parties and at places of worship and everywhere. Do we point to the resurrection? Do we use our exclamation points in the right way? Lord, help us.

REPLY

Do we participate, Lord, in making your Father's house a marketplace? Help us to keep it holy. Amen.

DO

Watch the "Give me a sign" clip from the movie Bruce Almighty: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-YpUqQhops>

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 25 | Wednesday

LISTEN

Ezekiel 37:1-6

THINK

How dry do you feel, spiritually? Are you wiped out emotionally? Do you feel brittle, fragile, disconnected?

The breath of God can breathe life into the most lifeless of places and into the most lifeless of people.

In today's passage, Ezekiel finds himself in the middle of a valley. He is in a weak spot, surrounded by despair, death, isolation, and stagnation. He isn't exactly full of confidence. But where there is no life and no hope, God can envision new life. Where there is no life and no hope, God sends us...to proclaim that God "will cause breath to enter you."

Are you down? In a rut? Maybe the key to catching a breath of fresh air is carrying a refreshing word to others: "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

REPLY

Breathe new life into me, Lord, and send me to breathe new life into others. Amen.

DO

Pay close attention to your breathing today. When is it heavy, and when it relaxed? When are you out of breath? Also take time to sit alone with God and take deep breaths. You might even pray "I am one" when you inhale and "loved by God" when you exhale.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 26 | Thursday

LISTEN

Psalm 52:1-12

THINK

Yesterday, we imagined having new life, new hope, new energy — and bringing it to others — when everything seems dry, stale, and disconnected. But sometimes, your desire is for a new life, a fresh start altogether.

Have you screwed something up royally? Do you feel ashamed and embarrassed about something you've done or been doing? Do you wish you could just wipe the slate clean and start over? Psalm 51 is for you, then: "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

This psalm is remarkably realistic and human. It doesn't assume God's forgiveness and presence just because it's a rule that God has to provide it. It is a cry from the heart and sincerely desperate: "Please do not cast me away from your presence! Please don't give up on me! Change me! Change my heart!"

If you take God that seriously, that counts for something, even if your life hasn't been squeaky clean.

REPLY

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, Lord. Amen.

DO

Confess to someone today — not in the traditional Catholic method, necessarily, but in a way that will give you a fresh start. "Come clean" about something to a trusted friend who will just listen and suspend judgment. Admit your weakness to somebody. Ask your minister or parent if you could "get something off your chest."

Instead of always keeping your "dark" side secret, find ways to shed light on it and find people you can be transparent and naturally "confessional" with.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 27 | Friday

LISTEN

Matthew 5:1-12

THINK

You may get the great privilege of reading the short stories of Flannery O'Connor in school at some point. In one of O'Connor's most famous ones, "Revelation," the main character receives a startling vision after literally and figuratively being hit upside her head. She looks up and sees a procession of people entering heaven, and the people she least expected to see in line are actually getting to go in ahead of her.

Right as Jesus began his "Sermon on the Mount," he looked around and noticed in the crowds following him some of the same kinds of people — the ones not valued much by society. At that point, he took the opportunity to hit the entire society — especially his disciples — upside its head: "In the Kingdom of God, these people are considered blessed. Yes, you heard me right. The poor in spirit are blessed. The meek, those who mourn." It was a remarkable thing to say. Those we'd rather not bless — or consider blessed — are singled out for the Kingdom of God.

REPLY

Once again, Lord, I admit that your thoughts are not my thoughts. Help me to see people as you see them. Amen.

DO

Look for someone lonely that you can encourage today or this weekend — an elderly person who doesn't get much attention, a person at school that doesn't have many friends, or maybe even a "popular" person who is secretly lonely in plain sight.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 28 | Saturday

LISTEN

Matthew 5:13-16

THINK

Most Christians agree that we are “in the world but not of the world,” but there are several different approaches to living that out. Some take this idea to mean that we should have nothing to do with “the world.” If we listen to secular music or have too many non-Christian friends, this logic might say, we could get negatively influenced, brainwashed, and taken off the right path.

Others who call themselves Christians engage and consume “culture” just like everybody else, with no real thoughtfulness, and in a way that helps them ultimately survive, fit in, and even thrive in this world.

Somewhere in between these two extremes comes Jesus’ creative take: his followers are to be “salt” and “light” in the world. Are you bringing life to dry bones, helping people find meaning in the midst of shallowness, or bringing smiles and lightheartedness where cynicism reigns?

Finally, how can you live differently from most of the world without completely isolating yourself from people?

REPLY

Make me salt, Lord. Make me light. Let your holy fire ignite. Reveal your glory in my life. I am not ashamed to lift up your holy name. Make me salt. Make me light. Amen.

DO

Look and listen for God today in pop culture. Watch TV with God and see if you can find a Biblical concept illustrated. Or try to imagine a song you hear on the radio from a different perspective and maybe even turn it into a prayer.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 29 | Monday

LISTEN

Isaiah 53:1-6

THINK

How would you describe Jesus to someone who didn't know much about him?

At some point, Christians decided that this passage from Isaiah seemed to fit the description: despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering; acquainted with infirmity; someone people hid their faces from; of no account, really.

Christians are bold to believe this stuff. It's much easier in the United States to worship heroes — those who are superhuman in their courage and abilities, those who rise above all the rest, those who fit a romanticized notion of what it means to save, protect, and rule.

But we worship a nobody. Jesus, really, was a nobody's nobody. We know this because he was crucified. While crosses have since become fashionable jewelry and home décor, it wasn't always the case. Crucifixion was the death penalty reserved for those with no honor. The goal was to shame you, your family, and anybody associated with you.

REPLY

Unattractive as you may appear to the world to be, Lord, draw us closer to you. Amen.

DO

Make a photo album on your phone over the next couple weeks of all the crosses you see — displayed on walls, sold as necklaces, or otherwise. From time to time, scroll through these crosses, observe all the different designs and uses, and think about how Jesus transformed the meaning of the cross.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 30 | Tuesday

LISTEN

Isaiah 53:7-9

THINK

What is your “fight or flight” tendency? In the face of trouble, do you get aggressive, or do you head for the hills and hide?

And what is your “fight back” policy? Are you good at turning the other cheek? Perhaps you’re better at getting people back? We’re allowed to defend ourselves at least, right?

There’s an old folk song about Jesus called “He Never Said a Mumblin’ Word,” which draws attention to one of the most unbelievable things about Jesus: he was responsive without being reactive. He never indulged the temptation we all feel to stand up for ourselves, defend ourselves, and explain everything. We believe we can help people understand us, if only they’d just listen for a second!

Look at the witness of Jesus, even during his most trying hours: “he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

REPLY

Help me to know when to speak up, Lord, and when to be silent. Amen.

DO

Let your “yes” be “yes” today and your “no” be “no.” Resist the need to explain yourself today, and trust people enough to not try and shape their perceptions of you.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 31 | Wednesday

LISTEN

Luke 22:39-46

THINK

This passage depicts one of the most tense moments in the Bible. Momentum has been building and now is over the tipping point. The night is pregnant and about to pop — something's going to happen, and it's all going to go down tonight. Judas walked out of the upper room, and we can see the writing on the wall.

Most people would be pacing back and forth, gnawing on finger nails, or jittering both legs during this time. Jesus, as was his custom, escapes to the mountainside...to pray. His disciples follow him...but fall asleep.

Jesus prayed in this desperate moment, not because he was panicking and willing to try anything at that point, but because it was a habit he could take refuge in. When stress or crisis pulls you toward prayer, may you feel at home in a familiar practice.

REPLY

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done. Amen.

DO

Go in search of a place of solitude today. Tell God your deepest desires and ask for the strength to accept God's will.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 32 | Thursday

LISTEN

Galatians 1:6-10

THINK

What a great question — for any and every day: “Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval?”

It can also be a complicated question. We often have mixed motives for doing what we do, saying what we say, following who we follow. The more dedicated we become to serving Christ, though, the less interest we’ll have in pleasing people.

Be careful not to “desert the one called you in the grace of Christ,” but if you do, know that the One has not deserted you. God’s approval is something you already have. You can accept that you are accepted — loved, but also liked.

God loves you as you are and not merely as you should be...because you’re never going to be “as you should be.” Protesters who want to resist “cheap grace” need not worry — the experience of true acceptance will transform us. But we do not have to transform ourselves before the fact to get God to offer the grace we seek.

REPLY

I trust that the desire to please you, O God, does in fact please you. I pray that I would never do anything apart from this desire. Amen.

DO

Do a good deed in secret today. Do it for God and not for attention or recognition.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 33 | Friday

LISTEN

Luke 9:1-6

THINK

Lent is a season of fasting, of going without, and there's a dirty little secret that some people learn. Some people notice that they do not exactly need what they thought they did, or they do not need it as much as they thought they did, at least.

There's freedom in simplicity.

Most people will mention when studying the "rich young ruler" episode that "this doesn't literally mean that everybody is called to sell everything they have and give it to the poor." That may be so, but it might distract from another possibility. We perceive that Jesus is asking this man to (painfully) sacrifice. He has a lot to lose. Or does he? Wouldn't living with less stuff, less to manage, less to maintain, less to impress others with, less to upgrade...be at least a little bit relieving and freeing?

Jesus sends out his disciples in Luke 9 with absolutely nothing. Or did he? They had nothing with them that supported the illusion that they were self-sufficient — no possessions, no insurance, no security. They did, however, have the power of having been called and sent. This was more than enough to "bring the good news and cure diseases everywhere."

REPLY

With no bread for the journey, no bag, no money, O Lord, I still have enough. Amen.

DO

De-clutter your life and enjoy the freedom of living more simply. Go vintage and downgrade to a flip phone. Instead of getting those must-have concert tickets, spend a lot less money doing something informal with friends and invite someone who usually doesn't get included. Or just trim down your wardrobe (in fact, here's a video showing how and why: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3CLRL32Mcw>)

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 34 | Saturday

LISTEN

Mark 11:1-11

THINK

Those who praise you one day may tear you down the next. That was kind of Jesus' experience, at least.

Maybe that's why Jesus was sometimes quick to undermine the hype about him. He sometimes told people who witnessed a miracle not to tell anybody what they saw. He often retreated away from the crowds instead of trying to build up bigger and bigger followings for his own ego's sake. And he rode "triumphantly" into the holy city — not on a majestic high horse — but on a borrowed colt that had never been ridden.

Think about how often something goes from "trending" on social media to completely forgotten. Remember when the ice bucket challenge got so much attention? Is anybody still talking about ALS? Can you even remember what ALS stands for?

Jesus went viral on Palm Sunday, fell back under the radar during his lonely death, but then refused to play by the rules of "hype." Jesus didn't really arrive as the heroic military Messiah his people had hoped for, but his resurrection signaled that he had true staying power.

REPLY

Thank you, Lord, for being a steady savior, even when hundreds of other things are coming in and out of the public spotlight every day. Amen.

DO

Refuse to use your voice — especially on social media — to tear people down today.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 35 | Monday

LISTEN

John 12:1-11

THINK

Getting close to Jesus can certainly change your perspective of how much is enough and often leads people to live with fewer possessions and less busyness for the sake of busyness.

Don't be surprised, though, if a life of discipleship doesn't also make you more extravagant, at least toward others.

Those who recognize how much they're blessed, have had their lives altered by God's intervention, and see abundance where others see scarcity are often big givers. In this passage, Mary gives more than is reasonable, and it scandalizes all those who have held back some for themselves.

They take offense and come after the cheerful giver. They try to tell Jesus what they think he might want to hear: "Think about the poor who could've been helped! What a waste!" Jesus sees through the insecurity and the hypocrisy: "Leave her alone." She, above all the others in the room, knows that being at the feet of Jesus is enough.

REPLY

You are worth giving all I have, O Lord. Amen.

DO

Give some money away today — to a beggar, a person you know who needs it, an organization working on behalf of others, or your church.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 36 | Tuesday

LISTEN

Luke 15:11-32

THINK

The hit TV series LOST surprised viewers in exploring what it means to be “lost” in ways they never imagined. What appeared in the pilot episode to be a classic “stranded on a desert island” show about survival and rescue ended up telling a bunch of “prodigal son” stories, character by character.

Luke 15 is famous for its three “lost” stories and is powerful in its pattern. One thing is lost, but the one thing has immense value to the one who has lost it. The lost are found, and there is a lot of celebration.

Let there be no confusion: you matter.

As products of the most individualistic culture in society, we often read “me” when the Bible is really talking about “us.” The world of the Bible and its earliest hearers were much more group- and community-oriented in their faith. But this chapter is one that we can really understand as champions of a personal faith. Each individual matters. Each “sinner” is worth celebrating. Jesus goes after every last one of them, including you.

REPLY

While I was still a long way off, Father, you saw me and were filled with compassion. Thank you for welcoming me back. Amen.

DO

Give someone a second chance today, even if they’ve taken advantage of you in the past.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 37 | Wednesday

LISTEN

Mark 14:12-25

THINK

In a bit of foreshadowing, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which in Hebrew means “house of bread.”

Later on, Jesus would feed the hungry by multiplying loaves of bread. He taught his disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and identified himself once as “the Bread of Life.”

And on the night he was betrayed, Jesus broke bread: “Take; this is my body.”

It was broken for you and for all of us.

REPLY

Give us this day our daily bread, Lord, and help us not to betray you. Amen.

DO

Break bread with someone and take time to fellowship over a meal.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 38 | Thursday

LISTEN

John 13:1-20

THINK

An entire genre of leadership development material is based on the idea of servant leadership. In a world preoccupied with how to influence others, many have pointed to Jesus and his example of humbling oneself and serving others. That, they seem to say, is how you get people to follow you.

Jesus was one of the best teachers of all time, no doubt, but we might want to hesitate before making him into our own “corporate leadership” image. The teaching moment here in John 13 is but one of many examples of Jesus putting people above influence.

If someone is friends with you, nice to you, or gets close to you just so that they can get you to do what they want — even if they have good intentions and think it’s for your own good — then that person is more interested in influence than they’re interested in you as a person.

This is part of what seemed to bother the Pharisees and religious “leaders” of Jesus’ day. He kept reaching out to “sinners” with compassion, but it wasn’t to make them into upstanding citizens all of a sudden. He loved them for them — and not merely for who he wanted them to be.

This week, may we remember that we worship a relational — and not merely influential — savior.

REPLY

As you became a servant, Lord, may I be a servant to others. Amen.

DO

In the Bible, “servant” and “slave” are often the same word. Did you know that certain forms of slavery still exist in the world? Go to slaveryfootprint.org to discover how you may be contributing to a culture of slavery unknowingly.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 39 | Friday

LISTEN

John 18:1-40

THINK

As you take in this chunk of Jesus' story that moves very quickly from scene to scene, like an action movie racing to the ending, which character sticks in your mind?

Is it one of Jesus' betrayers — Judas or Peter? Is it the High Priest who questions Jesus and represents the religious establishment out to get him? Is it the governor Pilate, responsible for keeping the peace in the face of a bloodthirsty mob?

Or maybe you can picture yourself as one in the crowd, caught up in the groupthink, energized by the drama.

Or maybe, finally, those who have been betrayed, arrested, tried, and sentenced unjustly even today come to mind.

As you meditate on the end of Jesus' life, and as you try to comprehend these Good Friday events and apply them to your life, may God speak to you through the story, through the people in it, and through the suffering.

REPLY

For this you were born, and for this you came into the world, O Lord, to testify to the truth that you are King. Help me to listen to your voice. Amen.

DO

Good Friday is the day Jesus carried his cross. Help someone carry their load today, literally or figuratively.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

Day 40 | Saturday

LISTEN

John 19:1-42

THINK

The journey to the cross is a long one. Lent is a long season. And we have a long road ahead of us. But for now, we hit the pause button and rest. For now, Jesus pauses in the garden tomb.

In the time between the crucifixion and the resurrection, we return to waiting. We face the reality that we are still, even now, not fully formed. We have waited all this time to be changed, to see God, to accomplish growth.

You may not be able to see how this season has made any difference in your life. You may not feel any different, any better, any more faithful. You might think this is because you didn't try very hard. It's tempting to think that all this waiting is a waste of time.

In our world, though, wasting time with God is a really important thing to do. It is certainly one of the most radical things you can do. While everyone else around you exhausts themselves to get ahead; to posture themselves for a successful, or at least comfortable, life; to get to wherever they think they should be going, we relax in the love of God. We know that God is likely to interrupt our lives and our plans, anyway.

Take up your cross and follow Jesus. Wait with endurance for God to do God's work within you. And rest in the peace of Christ, knowing that resurrection will come.

REPLY

Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come into my life and help me to rest in you. Amen.

DO

Follow Jesus' example and forgive an enemy today — or, at least, pray for your enemies today.

REFLECT (IN YOUR JOURNAL)

3 DEVOTIONAL

About the Author



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