

# JOURNEY OF THE CROSS



LENT 2021



# **Journey of the Cross**

**A Devotional for the Season of Lent**



**Exchange Church**

Rolesville, NC

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*Journey of the Cross: A Devotional for the Season of Lent* by Exchange Church (Rolesville, NC). For more information or other resources, please visit [www.exchangenc.org](http://www.exchangenc.org).

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Then Jesus told his disciples,  
“If anyone would come after me,  
let him deny himself and  
take up his **cross** and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24

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# The Journey of the Cross

At the heart of the Christian faith is the cross of Christ. It is at the cross that Jesus faithfully demonstrated his love for the Father and his love for his people, bearing the full weight of our sins and reconciling us with God through his righteousness. Yet, the life of Jesus was not merely a journey *to* the cross, for that was not the end—it was a journey *of* the cross, whose end was the resurrection, in which he was raised again to new life, bringing forth the beginning of a new creation.

By God’s gracious design, the full story of the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—is the story that is offered to each and every one of us. In fact, Jesus tells his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). We are thus called into this journey of the cross, whose end is the resurrected life, the abundant life, in Christ Jesus. It is in light of this journey of the cross, that we prepare our hearts during the season of Lent to celebrate the glory of the resurrection at Easter.

## **What is the Season of Lent?**

The “Church Calendar” was set up by the early church fathers who ordered time according to the story of Jesus Christ, which begins with Advent during the season of Christmas to remember the incarnation, and culminates with Easter to remember the crucifixion and resurrection. Lent is the season leading up to Easter, in which the Church prepares for the celebration of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world and his victory over death in his resurrection.

The season of Lent has been traditionally marked by the forty days leading up to Easter, beginning with the first day, which is “Ash Wednesday.” The word “Lent” literally means “to lengthen” (from Old English) and was used to refer to the period of Spring, in which the days were “lengthened.” The significance of the number *forty* is associated with the period of temptation Jesus experiences in the wilderness as he fasted forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4; Luke 4), which not only served as the affirmation of his identity and role as the Son of God, but also the preparation for his ministry as the Messiah.

The Church has traditionally observed Lent by participating in some type of fasting (whether that be food and drink, or a form of comfort or entertainment) during the forty days (with the exception of Sundays). Fasting takes place

throughout the week (Monday through Saturday), while certain types of feasting takes place on each Sunday.

## **Why Observe the Season of Lent?**

For centuries, the church has intentionally and collectively engaged the season of Lent which culminated with the celebration of Easter. Together they prayed, studied, fasted, and feasted, all with the aim to prepare their hearts to once again celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Easter stands each year to remind us that we are part of a story that is greater than any one of us. A story that provides a hope and a future. A story that binds a people together under the banner of the Suffering Servant who became the Victorious Resurrected King of all.

Although Easter is the day on which we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is not meant to be a celebration that is to come upon us suddenly, without notice, without preparation, without reflection. It is the culmination of a season, around which we are to alter, orient, and tune our lives. The aim of the season of Lent is to renew our focus and refresh our love for the Savior, by putting off the tangible comforts of the world in order to reflect upon the glorious nature of the cross. By embracing this journey of the cross—aligning the rhythms of our life with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—we may put into practice the alignment of our story with his.

Therefore, Easter is more than a day. It is a season that is set aside and ordered according to the story of redemption, into which we are invited to enter through the cruciform life that bears witness we belong to a Kingdom not of this world. Just as Jesus “sets his face to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) to suffer and die for the world, we are to follow him in this journey by denying ourselves, taking up our own cross, and following after Him (Luke 9:23). And being so united with in his death, we are so united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:5). As we thus embrace this season of fasting and repentance in light of the cross, we also prepare our hearts for feasting and celebration in light of His resurrection and the resurrection to come.

# How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed in the long tradition of the church observing the season of Lent to walk as a Church through the season of Lent by daily meeting with the Lord in Prayer, in Scripture, and in Reflection. Each day of the guide provides a form of worship with Daily Practices to shape the disposition of our heart, to set rhythms of worship for our soul, and to reflect upon the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The aim is to approach the throne of God together as his people—established by Grace, formed by his Word, and sanctified by his Spirit—for our good and for his glory.

The guide will walk you through the weeks of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, followed by the six Sundays, and culminating with the final days of Easter: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Since we will be reflecting upon the journey of the cross, we will have daily readings from the Gospel of Matthew of which we will complete the entire book by the end of Lent. Every Sunday will focus on one of the “stages” of Jesus’ ministry, and there will be provided a liturgy (or order of worship) for your community of friends and family to feast together.

It is our prayer that that we together as a unified body: our hearts engaging the same rhythms and readings, praying the same prayers, reflecting on the same questions—all with the aim of being conformed more and more each day into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. In light of this prayer, this guide will be most effective if it is done in community, with another person, or with a Small Group.

Let Scripture and Prayer guide your thoughts, form your affections, and strengthen your peace. Use this guide daily as you are able, in whole or in part, by His grace and for His glory.

The following will explain each element of the guide more thoroughly.



# The Daily Practices

The following framework describes each of the practices that is to help foster your daily fellowship with the Lord. Although it is designed to guide you through an intentional journey of prayer, it may serve as a template, to be used as closely or as loosely as you find helpful.

- Silence and Stillness  
Each morning will begin by practicing Silence and Stillness. This is a chance to stop, slow down, and be with Jesus. This will help us declutter and be fully present. It will encourage us to *be* before we *do*.
- Invitation to Meet with God  
A passage from Scripture will invite us to meet with God. We must remember that our worship, our prayer, our devotion is always in his initial grace and invitation.
- Time of Confession  
As we reflect on Christ's work on the cross to pay for our sin, we take time to search our hearts, confess the sin we continue to struggle with day by day, and thank God for his gracious faithful promise to forgive us and cleanse us. Each day will provide a guided confession to use as you find it helpful.
- Scripture Reading and Reflection  
Every day we will be invited to read, to pray, and to live God's Word. We will read through the Gospel of Matthew in its entirety over the course of Lent, with readings from the Isaiah on Sunday.
- Praying the Lord's Prayer  
When asked how to pray, Jesus provided his disciples what is known as the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:9–13). This prayer can serve as a comprehensive framework to guide our prayers on what is most essential. Each day of the week we will pray through one line of the Lord's Prayer, focusing on that particular emphasis of the prayer. In this way, we will pray the entire Lord's Prayer throughout each week one day at a time. (For an overview and further explanation, see Appendix 3, pp. 87–88.)
- Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom  
Each day ends with God's blessing and commission from his Word to live out the true story of the Gospel by extending God's love to his world.

## **The Design of this Guide**

The form and content of this devotional is purposefully designed to orient our souls, hearts, and minds to the immutable truth that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and on the third day rose again from the dead. Therefore, every element is meant to serve as a movement within a symphony that tunes our heart to sing the song of Christ Jesus' victory on the cross.

By reading through the entire Gospel of Matthew we are immersing ourselves in the story of Jesus Christ. As we read this Gospel, we will be compelled to follow him on the journey of the cross that culminates in his resurrection. To follow Jesus is to become his disciple and to become his disciples is to become more like him. In order to contemplate more deeply on this journey, we will offer reflections on the *Stages of Jesus' Ministry* and the essential characteristics of the flourishing life in Jesus, which are called the *Beatitudes*.

### ***The Stages of Jesus' Ministry in the Gospel of Matthew***

The goal and ultimate aspiration of the Christian life is to become more like Jesus. But how does one become like Jesus if they do not know personally the intimate details of his life, words, and actions? How can we be conformed to the image of Christ if we cannot observe his image with our eyes?

We come to know who Christ is, what he was like, and what he teaches by reading the four books that document his life in the greatest detail. The first Gospel in the New Testament is the Gospel written by Matthew and it offers a firsthand glimpse into the life and ministry of Jesus. One of Jesus' original 12 disciples, Matthew had the great blessing of knowing Jesus on a deeply intimate level. Every miracle, every confrontation with the teachers and scribes, every crowd captivated by his teachings, Matthew was there to witness them all.

The follower of Jesus today may not have the luxury of seeing him in the human body he chose to enter the world with, but that does not mean we lack an example to follow and model our lives after. The Gospel of Matthew offers a unique portrait of our Lord and Savior; his compassion, his zeal, his kindness, his uncompromising dedication to the will of the Father. By observing and reflecting

on Jesus as he appears in this book through the season of lent, we align ourselves in the endeavor and goal of becoming more like him.

On Sundays we will pause to settle our hearts and focus on seven different facets of Jesus' life. These seven events and categories are not exhaustive, but they do offer an intimate look into the heart and mind of Christ. These topics include:

- The Baptism of Jesus
- The Temptation of Jesus
- The Miracles of Jesus
- The Teachings of Jesus
- The Suffering of Jesus
- The Crucifixion of Jesus
- The Resurrection of Jesus

As you read about Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, you will have many opportunities to encounter the person who made it possible for you to experience a restored relationship with God.

There will likely be times when the Spirit identifies an area of life where you are not being conformed to the image of Christ. Take note of these moments and thank God that He has seen fit to show us where we are lacking. Celebrate these moments of revelation by sharing with the people of God what he has shown to you. It is in our neediness that the church can respond with grace and fulfill its duty to build up one another for the purpose of glorifying God as his representatives on the earth.

### ***The Beatitudes***

A key feature of the Gospel of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7), which is a collection of Jesus' most famous teachings, including the *Beatitudes* (5:3–12) and the *Lord's Prayer* (6:9–13). In these chapters, Jesus is presented as a new Moses, who ascends the mountain and teaches his followers how they ought to live in light of the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' discourse on what it means to flourish as a human being made

in the image of God. Or, in other words, Jesus is teaching what it means to be his disciple.

Foundational to this discourse are the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes are eight proclamations of what the blessed life looks like according to Jesus:

- Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven
- Blessed are those who Mourn, for they shall be Comforted
- Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth
- Blessed are those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness, for they shall be satisfied
- Blessed are the Merciful, for they shall receive Mercy
- Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they shall see God
- Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God
- Blessed are those who are Persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

The word “Beatitudes” is the Latin word for “blessed,” “happy,” or “flourishing.” This Latin word and the Greek word for blessed (*makarios*) are essential concepts in a larger philosophical conversation that took place in the ancient world. The philosophical question then (which is still most relevant and pervasive today) was: “What is the good life?” This question can be phrased several different ways, such as “What is happiness?” and “What does it look like to flourish in life?” But an essential part of the answer to this question was to determine how one ought to *live* (the vital practices, habits, and dispositions) in order to be considered “blessed” or “happy” (*makarios*).

If one were to ask, “What does it mean to live the good life?” or “What does it mean to be happy?” for the broader western society today, it would be generally defined in hedonistic terms of material prosperity and comfort that precludes significant hindrances for achievement. Happiness has been reduced to a mere platitude, expressed as a simple hashtag to mark a positive event, however trivial it may be.

Yet, look at what it means to be blessed according to Jesus. It is to be one who is *Poor in Spirit*, to be one who *Mourns*, to be one who is *Meek*, and even to be

one who is *Persecuted*. This moral vision of the good life went against the grain of the good life according to the imperial expectations of ancient Rome, and it directly counters an overly secularized ideal of the good life today. For Jesus, to be blessed, to be happy, to flourish in life as his disciple is to be marked by the particular ways of being that are not of this world, which he himself embodied perfectly and to which he has called all those who claim to be his. As we see in the Gospel of Matthew, the blessed life of Christ is the journey of the cross—a life of denial of self and desperation for God.

The Sermon on the Mount, and the Beatitudes in particular, reveal who we are, who we ought to become, and how we get there. With these beatitudes, Jesus is “offering and inviting his hearers into the way of being in the world that will result in their true and full flourishing now and in the age to come.”<sup>1</sup> And if we truly desire to follow Jesus, to be his disciple and live a blessed life, we must become not only hearers of his Word but also doers of his Word (Matt. 7:24).

Such a calling is nothing less than the call to be “perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). However, to live such a life of blessing we cannot do it on our own strength with our own resources—it is only by the grace of God. To flourish in this calling, we desperately need:

- Jesus Christ, the one who is happiness, goodness, and blessing, who has gone before us in perfect faithfulness as the Son of God
- The Church, the community of saints, fellow pilgrims who are also on this Journey of the Cross
- The Holy Spirit, the one who empowers the blessed life in Christ, through the presence, peace, and power of God<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 144.

<sup>2</sup> S. McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount. The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 13–14.

# Fasting and Feasting

Inasmuch as the story of the Gospel is formed by both the cross and the resurrection, the Season of Lent is marked by the rhythm of fasting and feasting. Fasting brings to focus the significance of the cross, while feasting anticipates the celebration of the resurrection.

## Fasting

The season of Lent provides an opportunity to practice self-denial through fasting and repentance, enabling our hearts, souls, and minds to reflect upon and be formed by the weight of the cross.

Throughout the days of the week (Monday through Saturday), you are encouraged to engage in some type of fasting, which is voluntarily going without food, or some other good or comfort regularly enjoyed. There are different types of fasting that one may partake during this time. The most common is a fast from food and drink, whether that is fasting from certain types of food or drink (such as dessert, caffeinated drinks, etc.), or fasting from all food on particular days (though, one should not fast from water). Other types could include fasting from entertainment such as TV, movies, music, the internet, or social media. The purpose of these fasts is to set aside the things that may ultimately distract us from self-reflection and communing with God.

It is important to note that fasting is not to be understood as a means by which we are able to get something from God or to earn his favor. Nor are we to fast in order for us to be praised by others: as Jesus warns his followers not to partake in fasting and prayer in order to be seen by others (Matthew 6:16), we should be all the more careful not to bring attention to our disciplines, especially with posting on social media. Let your disposition and discipline be that your fasting “may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:18).

Fasting and prayer are to provide reflection upon the state of our souls in order that we may express our dependence upon God’s provision, our desperation for God’s grace, and our devotion to God’s glory. In this way, fasting is not to be a burden of guilt but an opportunity for grace. In fact, we should understand our call to fast in light of our call to feast, in which our fasting from the things of this world anticipates our feasting with the King in his glory (Revelation 19:6–9).

## **Feasting**

The season of Lent also provides an opportunity to practice celebration through feasting and fellowship, enabling our hearts, souls, and minds to anticipate and be formed by the glory of the resurrection.

Every Sunday, you are encouraged to engage in feasting. The feast can be the enjoyment of the thing from which you have decided to fast (such as desserts or caffeine), or it can simply be the enjoyment of a meal that intentionally focuses on God's grace, goodness, and glory. Since the Christian life is never meant to be lived in isolation the purpose of this guide is to be done together as the Body of Christ. Therefore, the feasts that we choose to observe should be intentional in gathering with our friends, family, and neighbors. The purpose of these feasts is to incline our hearts and our hopes to the glory of the resurrection to come.

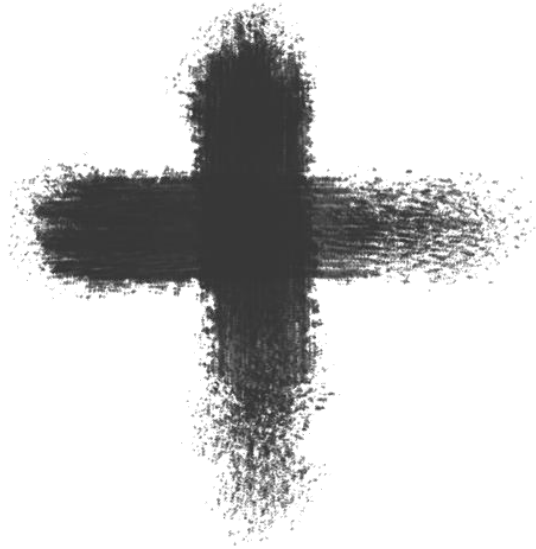
Please take some time to pray and reflect upon the areas of your life where fasting might help you rely on the grace of God in order that you may better reflect on the glory of God. Also consider how you may spend your times of feasting with your family, friends, and neighbors to edify one another.

### **By His Grace for His Glory**

As a final word of encouragement, this guide is in no way to be used as a measure for our righteousness nor should it become a burden for our guilt. Rather, it is meant to assist each of us to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ and encourage one another in this race of endurance (Hebrews 12:1–2). In this light, we should approach this guide with the grace that is found in Christ Jesus—for our good and for his glory.

○ Lord, who hast mercy upon all,  
take away from me my sins,  
and mercifully kindle in me  
the fire of thy Holy Spirit.  
Take away from me the heart of stone,  
and give me a heart of flesh,  
a heart to love and adore Thee,  
a heart to delight in Thee,  
to follow and enjoy Thee,  
for Christ's sake, Amen.  
*St. Ambrose of Milan (AD 339–397)*





## **Ash Wednesday**

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

# Ash Wednesday

Every year the Season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. In Scripture, ash or dust symbolizes death and frailty (Gen. 18:27), judgment (Deut. 28:24), mourning (Job 2:12), and repentance (Jon. 3:6). In this light, Ash Wednesday is meant for us to meditate on our own sin and death; that we come to terms that we are dust and to dust we shall return (Gen. 3:19).

As the Season of Lent is to prepare our hearts to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter, and an important part of our preparation is to remember why Jesus Christ had to die in the first place. In the beginning, the first man and the first woman disobeyed God in the garden, desiring to live on their own terms instead of entrusting themselves to God's good will (Gen. 3). This rejection of God, who is our life and the length of our days, meant for them and for all humanity, death. In God's punishment for humanity's sin, He declares, "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Like Adam and Eve, we have all "gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way," and for this rebellion, "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6).

Ash Wednesday is thus meant to be a solemn reflection upon the profound truths of the Gospel, in which we are to:

1. Reflect upon our mortality, sinfulness, and need for the Savior
2. Repent of our sin and renew our commitment to follow Christ
3. Remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, let us reflect upon our sin and our own mortality, *in order that* it may lead us to repentance, to recognize that we desperately need a Savior, and to rejoice that Christ has conquered death and sin. Even as we mourn our sin on Ash Wednesday, we can take heart that Easter Sunday is coming.

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<sup>3</sup> *Worship Source Book*, 541.



## **Ash Wednesday | February 17**

*“Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God: Psalm 40:17**

#### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer guide your time in confession

We dream, make plans, and talk about what we’ll do in the near future. We don’t always think about what you want. Instead, we make choices that we think are good for us. But we are only here because you take care of us. We confess that we forget we need you all the time. We confess that sometimes we make choices that aren’t what you want. We don’t know what is best for our lives. Holy God, we are sorry for our sin. Help us to remember we live because of you. Help us to do what you want us to do through Jesus, our Lord. *Amen.* (WSB, 546)

#### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Genesis 3; Psalm 90

1. Behold God: What does today’s reading tell us about God?
2. Live for God: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Jesus, we acknowledge that there is a REASON we had to be redeemed. All that touches our hands falls apart eventually. Left to ourselves, we like the laws of entropy that govern our world, will fall into more disarray, not less. We confess we cannot save ourselves from the mess that we have made. We cannot make it all better. But thank you that we do not have to, for in your mercy you entered the muck and mire of our own making and you took it on yourself and then gave us your goodness and righteousness and holiness instead. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

#### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Romans 16:25–27

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! *Amen.*



## Thursday | February 18

*“Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 86:1–4

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer guide your time in confession

Lord God, it is hard to think that we will die someday. We dream, make plans, and talk about what we'll do in the near future. We don't always think about what you want. Instead, we make choices that we think are good for us. But we are only here because you take care of us. We confess that we forget we need you all the time. We confess that sometimes we make choices that aren't what you want. We don't know what is best for our lives. Holy God, we are sorry for our sin. Help us to remember we live because of you. Help us to do what you want us to do through Jesus, our Lord. *Amen.* (WSB, 90)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 1:1–25

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

We acknowledge that the great exchange of our sin for your righteousness is the most critical we can ever make, and we make it gladly. Jesus in our place, Lord. Thank you that it's enough. That as we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). That there is now no condemnation for those who have hidden themselves in your goodness (Romans 8:1). The work that you did on the cross has covered the sin and shame and given us a new life here and now and the hope of heaven in your presence for all eternity. In Jesus' name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord:** 1 Corinthians 16:13–14

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.



## The Beatitudes | Poor in Spirit

Jesus begins his beatitudes with, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 5:3). According to the standards of the world, to live a good life, to be truly happy, it is necessary to have wealth and independence. These characteristics are essential to what would constitute success today. However, Jesus counters this ideal of happiness with two aspects of one characterized as “poor in spirit.”

First, Jesus is saying that to be poor, to be oppressed, and to be destitute does not exclude one from the good life, but rather it is characteristically an advantage for those who desire to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Luke 6:20, 24). According to Hannah’s prayer, “The LORD makes poor and makes rich, he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes” (1 Sam. 2:7–8). This reversal of fortunes is echoed in the Magnificat of Mary, where she prays, “[God] has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty” (Luke 1:53). In other words, God deeply cares for the poor, the outcast, the refugee. And if one finds himself or herself in such a state, Scripture promises that God sees and God knows (cf. Ex. 2:25) and will make things right.

Second, Jesus is saying that to be poor *of spirit* is to rely fully on God for grace for the undeserving, justice for the oppressed, and mercy for the outcast. It is not merely to be economically destitute but to be spiritually destitute, which is to recognize a state of desperation for God, trusting in him for the redemption and restoration of all things. In other words, to flourish according to Jesus is to need him, to be desperate for him, to be absolutely dependent upon him for every breath. The opposite of this beatitude is to be one who is a wealthy oppressor of others (whether actively or through mere indifference) and arrogantly self-dependent, refusing to see one’s desperate state before God, which is the condition for every person.

Therefore, Jesus is calling people to recognize their own dependence upon God for every part of their lives *and* to contribute to the needs of others (both physically and spiritually). To be poor in spirit is true flourishing for “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,” which is the full participation of God’s reconciliation of all things to himself.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Where are you putting your trust and your hope today—in God or in the things of the world?
2. Do you find yourself needy and desperate for God, even in the small things?
3. What are some ways you can “contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” to the poor, the outcast, and the refugee?

## **I Need Thee Ev'ry Hour**

I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Most gracious Lord;  
No tender voice like Thine  
Can peace afford.

I need Thee, oh, I need Thee;  
Ev'ry hour I need Thee;  
Oh, bless me now, my Savior,  
I come to Thee.

I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Stay Thou nearby;  
Temptations lose their pow'r  
When Thou art nigh.

I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
In joy or pain;  
Come quickly and abide,  
Or life is vain.

I need Thee ev'ry hour,  
Teach me Thy will;  
And Thy rich promises  
In me fulfill.

*Annie S. Hawks and Robert Lowry*



## Friday | February 19

*“Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 109:21–22

But you, O GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name’s sake; because your steadfast love is good, deliver me! For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. *Amen.* (Ps. 51:1–2, 6, 10–12; WSB, 545)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 2:1–23

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

We confess we have all sorts of ideas of how to most effectively serve you, Lord. We confess we, like Adam and Eve from the very beginning, think we know best how this whole thing works. Yet you, from the first have shown us an upside kingdom. Leading by serving. Laying down your life to save it. We don’t have the right instincts, Jesus. And we’re sorry. Order and reorder our loves and allegiances and methods until they look like yours. May we humble ourselves to serve and to love, just as you showed us. For as you said, no servant is greater than his master and we certainly are no exception. Less of us and more of you, God. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Ephesians 3:16

According to the riches of his glory may God grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.



## **Saturday | February 20**

*“Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 113:5–7

Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. In this season of repentance, restore to us the joy of our salvation and strengthen us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy, in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* (WSB, 548)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 3:1–17

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

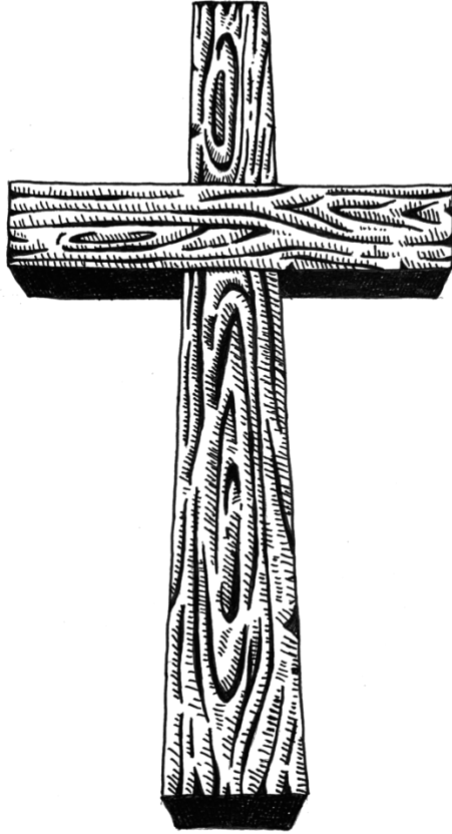
### **Prayer of Adoration**

Father, forgive us for holding the sacrifice of your Son so lightly, for scorning it to do what we want. Forgive us for doubting that a life surrendered to the one who loves us most and best will not be enough to satisfy. Since you did not spare even your own son for us but gave him up for us all, won’t you also surely give us everything else? (Romans 8:32). Thank you, thank you, Lord Jesus—for taking the pain and shame and death that we rightly deserved, and giving us abundant life and meaning in this world and hope for the next in return. Thank you for being our deliverer, once and for all. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Colossians 1:10–12

Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.





## First Sunday of Lent

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer*



## The Baptism of Christ Jesus

Matthew 3:13–17

The baptism of Christ has become such a familiar part of the Jesus story that we often overlook its significance to his life and ministry. We know what baptism represents now, but have you ever considered why Jesus went to be baptized? Or why he had to be baptized by John specifically? The answers to these questions show important spiritual truths about who Jesus was and how we are to live as his followers.

Baptism, even before the founding of the early church, was an important ritual in the Jewish religious system. Ceremonial bathing (Exodus 29:21; 30:17–21; Leviticus 8:6), sprinkling (Numbers 8:6–13), and washing (Exodus 19:10–17) with water were commanded in the law in order to properly approach and worship God. Ceremonial washings were generally reserved for the religious class in Israel (Priests and Levites), but bathing and washing were also used to cleanse people and items that were considered ceremonially unclean (Numbers 19:11–22; Leviticus 11:24–40; 13; 14). When a person was unclean, they were essentially forbidden from participating in Jewish society. Only after they had been cleansed of their defilement could they return to community.

John's baptism ministry was a notable departure from these traditional Jewish baptism practices. While the religious leaders in Israel "baptized" to fulfill what was commanded in the Mosaic Law, John baptized so that the people of Israel could have the opportunity to repent of their sins before the promised Messiah arrived. In this new expression of the ceremonial washing, John was fulfilling his role as the "voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight'" (Matthew 3:3).

We are not told how John knew Jesus' true identity as the one who would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11), but this knowledge informs his humble response to Jesus' request. "*You should be baptizing me!*" John replies in disbelief. His initial hesitation to baptize Jesus recognized the backward nature of their interaction. John, called to prepare the nation of Israel for Jesus' public appearance, did not even consider himself worthy to carry Jesus' sandals, let alone baptize him. Against all expectations and common sense, John had the honor and privilege of baptizing the one who had come to seek and save the lost.

What does Jesus' faithfulness to be baptized by John demonstrate? There are two implications. First, this entire event draws the reader to the overarching narrative of Scripture, specifically, the nation of Israel's miraculous rescue from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea. Consider what immediately follows Jesus' baptism: he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to face temptation and testing by Satan (Matthew 4:1–11). Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we will see the true and faithful Son of God fulfill the plan of God, a plan that the nation of Israel could never hope to accomplish. Second, Jesus demonstrated that his life would not be

characterized by the authority that he rightly held, but by his submission to the will of the Father. All throughout his life and ministry, every word Jesus spoke and action he did was in accordance with the will of God. Consider the response of the voice from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Father delighted in Jesus’ decision to be baptized because it was the first public demonstration of his laying down his will and power for the plans of God. Remember Jesus’ prayer of anguish in the garden of Gethsemane, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus modeled what he calls each of us to when we surrender our lives to him: obedience and submission to the will of the Father.

Baptism in the New Testament, like other important Jewish rituals and traditions (Passover, Sabbath) was appropriated by the new faith community that Jesus established and the apostles expanded. After the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the anointing of the church (Acts 2:1–4), we see the first reference to baptism as the primary means by which someone repents and shows allegiance to Jesus in Acts 2:38. It was at this time that the followers of Jesus began to view baptism through a new lens. The cleansing of sins by being washed with water would no longer suffice; only the blood of Christ could accomplish that. All throughout the book of Acts, baptism becomes the way for people to identify with the risen Christ and the body of believers, united under the cross of Christ and bonded together by the filling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:13–16; 8: 36–40; 9:18; 10:47–48; 16:14–15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:1–5).

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. As you begin this journey through the Gospel of Matthew and a season of fasting and feasting, begin to identify the areas in your life where you are not submitting to the will of the Father.
2. What are you holding onto that the Spirit is leading you to let go of?
3. Is there a decision you know God is leading to you make that you are fighting?
4. Is there a specific person the Lord is putting on your heart and in your path to share the Gospel with? Think about Jesus’ example of submission and obedience this week as you participate in the daily practices.

If you or someone in your family is interested in Baptism, please contact Ed Martin at [ed@exchangenc.org](mailto:ed@exchangenc.org).



## **Sunday | February 21**

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God: Psalm 5:11**

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.

### **Time of Thanksgiving: Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving**

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. He took upon himself the weight of our sin and carried the burden of our guilt. He shared our life in every way, and, though tempted, was sinless to the end. Baptized as your own, he went willingly to his death and by your power was raised to new life. In his dying and rising, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit. (WSB, 577)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Isaiah 40**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Jesus you are the one who knows what is in our hearts today. Only to you can we pour out our hearts before you, declaring that you are a refuge to us—because you already know exactly what actually has happened. And you are ready to hear us and you draw near to answer. We have questions, but we know that all the questions are answered fully and find their rest in you. So for now, we rest, and we wait and we trust that you are making all things new. In Jesus' name, *Amen*.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord: Psalm 9:11**

Sing praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!



## Monday | February 22

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 30:11–12

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Almighty God, you despise nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts, that, truly repenting of our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, we may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* (WSB, 561)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 4:1–25

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

Who in Heaven can be compared to you, God? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to you, Lord? Truly, who in heaven do we have but you? And on earth who is your equal? In every single way that counts, you are not like us. You are complete when we are broken. You are constant while we are tossed about by the emotion and circumstance of this present moment. Thank you that you never change, and that in your case that’s a very good thing. We love you. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.



## Tuesday | February 23

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God: Psalm 31:7–8**

I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul, and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid your time of confession**

O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. Send out your light, send out your truth, and let them lead us to our home. Take from us the weight of our sin, that room might be made for the spirit of truth. If we prepare a dwelling place, that spirit will abide within us, and the truth will set our spirits free. Then shall we love not only in word or in speech; then shall we love in deed and in truth, and by this know that our service is faithful. O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 5:1–26**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

**Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Lord we fight for our own kingdoms with a fervor that never ceases to surprise me. Our kingdom. Our will. But you show us a better way. You trade our sad, failing kingdoms for your own. Our wills traded in for the wise rulings of a King whose ways are above our ways and whose thoughts are better than my thoughts. Your kingdom will stand, ours is already falling. We submit with joy to your leading in our lives today. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 2 Corinthians 13:11**

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.



## Wednesday | February 24

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 51:15–17

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**Time of Confession:** Use this prayer and the space to the left to aid in your confession  
God of compassion, you are slow to anger and full of mercy, welcoming sinners who return to you with penitent hearts. Receive in your loving embrace all who come home to you. Seat them at your bountiful table of grace, that, with all your children, they may feast with delight on all that satisfies the hungry heart. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 5:27–48

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Give us this day our daily bread

Thank you, Jesus that you care about our daily bread. Thank you that over and over again in your Word you tell us to ask you for what we need. You are not a God who is unfamiliar with what it is to be human, or what it is to be in need of the physical things that sustain us. God you are good and you do good so we ask your in mercy to provide for us this week. In each and every way. These are strange days, but you are still the God who sees us and knows just what we need even before we ask. We trust you today, Jesus. Thank you for giving us what we need. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** I Thessalonians 5:14–16

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always.



## Beatitudes | Those Who Mourn

The next beatitude is “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). But why is mourning a requisite characteristic for flourishing? How does the command to mourn (James 4:9) square with the command to rejoice (Phil. 4:4)? How is the virtuous practice of mourning different from the vicious practice of grumbling (1 Cor. 10:10)?

The mourning that Jesus says is essential to flourishing as his disciple, is the proper recognition that the world is not as it should be—both within our souls and throughout the world. We grieve over the evil, injustice, and oppression that is in the world, just as we grieve over our own sin, depravity, and pride that is within.

Mourning is thus related to the Christian understanding of joy in that it is a *longing* for all to be right in the world. Whereas joy is a heart that is anchored to the eternal satisfaction in the person of Jesus Christ, mourning is a heart that grieves over the current state of exile, unrest, and rebellion caused by sin. In this sense, mourning and joy are two sides of the same coin, in which we recognize that we were made for another country, which our souls rightfully pine after until we come home to our eternal rest with Jesus Christ our King.

Mourning is thus different than grumbling, for grumbling is the dissatisfaction of not getting what we want *of this world*. To mourn over temporal and trivial concerns, to treat the loss of our personal comfort or status as tragedies, reveals that our loves are disordered. For all the gross injustice and terrible oppression that occurs in our world, not to mention the tragic state of our own souls, true and blessed mourning should never be wasted. To waste our mourning is to be like Jonah who dramatically mourned the loss of his shade from a tree, when the Lord was concerned for the “120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle” (Jonah 4:11). To mourn wrongly is to love wrongly.

Therefore, let us mourn over the things that God mourns over. Let us mourn over our own sin and the brokenness in the world. But, let our mourning not stay merely at an emotional level, but let it break out into a life, empowered by the Spirit, that bears witness through faith, hope, and love, to the comfort we have in Christ Jesus who will one day make all things right and beautiful.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What are the things in this world that cause you to mourn and how can you align with that which cause God to mourn?
2. How can the Laments of the Psalms (cf. Pss. 6, 10, 42, 43, and 130) teach us to mourn properly?
3. How can our mourning lead us to action in battling our own sin (Col. 3:5–17) and in participating in God’s justice in the world (cf. Is. 58)?



## Sweet Comfort

Whatever my God ordains is right  
His holy will abides  
I will be still whatever he does  
And follow where he guides  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Yet shall fill my heart  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Sorrow shall depart  
Whatever my God ordains is right  
He makes my feet to stand  
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine  
He holds me in his hand  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Yet shall fill my heart  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Sorrow shall depart  
This bitter cup, I take it  
My fainting heart restored  
So here I stand, unshaken  
I trust upon the Lord  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Yet shall fill my heart  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Sorrow shall depart  
He is my God though dark my road  
He holds me, I shall not fall  
Whatever my God ordains as right  
To him I leave it all  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Yet shall fill my heart  
Sweet comfort, sweet comfort  
Sorrow shall depart

*Sandra McCracken*



## Thursday | February 25

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 71:19–21

Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my greatness and comfort me again.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

God of mercy, you sent Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost. We confess that we have strayed from you and turned aside from your way. We are misled by pride, for we see ourselves pure when we are stained and great when we are small. We have failed in love, neglected justice, and ignored your truth. Have mercy, O God, and forgive our sin. Return us to paths of righteousness through Jesus Christ, our Savior. *Amen.* (WSB, 563)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 6:1–34

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

We have sinned, Lord. We know that and you know that. So in your grace, have mercy on us, for we know that we cannot fix ourselves. Search us, O God, and know our heart. Try us and know our thoughts. And see if there be any grievous way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Jesus, we pray this for ourselves and for all your people. We thank you, God, that you care enough about us to continue the work of changing our hearts, and conforming us into the image of your son. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.



## Friday | February 26

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 119:49–50

Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Most merciful God whose Son, Jesus Christ, was tempted in every way, yet was without sin, we confess before you our own sinfulness; we have hungered after that which does not satisfy; we have compromised with evil; we have doubted your power to protect us. Forgive our lack of faith; have mercy on our weakness. Restore in us such trust and love that we may walk in your ways and delight in doing your will. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 7:1–29

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

The world is wrecked with sin. At each turn, there is a chance to fall into evil. But you already know that. Would you not only deliver us from the evil inside and around us, but also lead us away from temptation? We are failing in this. But you have already won the battle, Jesus. We need only tuck our hand into yours and follow. Show us your ways. Lead us in your truth. We will follow you with joy. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Hebrews 4:15–16

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.



## Saturday | February 27

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 10:16–18

The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

God of mercy, whose Son, Jesus Christ, longs to gather us in the wide embrace of his love, we confess that we have been wayward children. We have disobeyed your commands; our ears have been deaf to your call; our hearts have been cold to your love. In thought, in word, and in deed we have hurt others and dishonored your name. In your great mercy receive us yet again as your well-beloved children, not because we are worthy but for the sake of him who loved us and gave himself for us. *Amen.* (WSB, 563–64)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 8:1–34

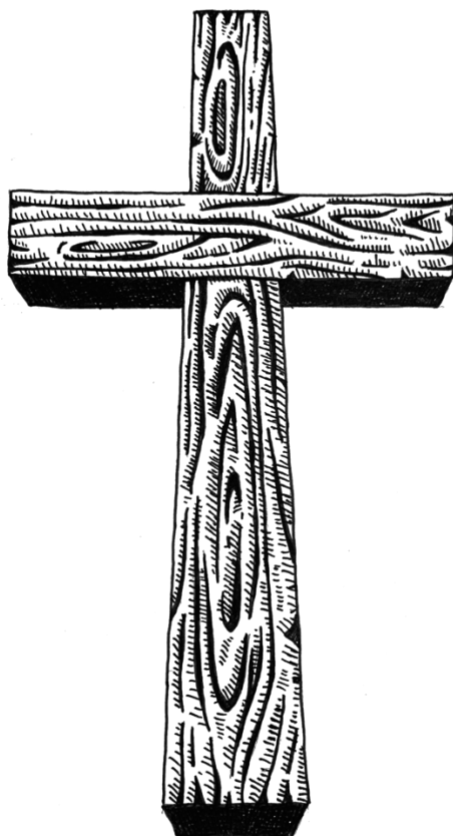
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

You promise that the sad and bad and hard of this world will one day be made perfectly whole. But that day is not today. While we wait, we ask that you still show us your kingdom, your power, your glory here on earth. Encourage our hearts as we walk roads that do not yet make sense to us. Remind us that we are pilgrims here, our home is another Country. Lead us further in and further up, Lord. In Jesus name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** James 4:8–10

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.



## Second Sunday of Lent

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer*

# The Temptation of Christ Jesus

Matthew 4:1–11

After being baptized by John, Jesus is immediately led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, the wilderness became synonymous with refining, testing, and preparation. The wilderness was a space where God's people suffered the consequences of their sin (Numbers 14:28–38) but it was also a place where God met with and provided refuge for His faithful servants (Exodus 3:1; 1 Samuel 23:13–14; 1 Kings 17:1–5).

In his encounter with Satan, we see Jesus confront, combat, and ultimately defeat the accusations and attacks of the enemy. By overcoming temptation, we again see that Jesus succeeds where humanity has previously failed. In this we rejoice because we know that Jesus understands what we experience on a daily basis as we navigate a fallen world. Before we look at how Jesus overcame this series of temptations, let us first consider the identity and nature of our enemy.

Satan, above all else, is a predator. Like all predators, the devil knows how to identify prey that is easy to catch. Think back to every show you've seen where an animal is stalking its next meal. What does the predator look for in potential prey? It looks for the weak, the isolated, the slow, the young. The lion hides below the tall grass, waiting for a warthog to stray from its group. The crocodile drifts slowly to the bank of a watering hole while a herd of thirsty wildebeest drink, unaware of the danger. The same tactics and strategies used by these predators are what the devil employs to discourage, discredit, and destroy the people of God. When Satan tempts Jesus, he exploits the most basic human needs, weaknesses, and desires to derail the mission of God.

When does Satan begin to tempt Jesus? *After he had fasted forty days and forty nights.* Satan comes to Jesus in a moment of weakness. Under these circumstances, any person, no matter how disciplined or determined, could choose sin if satisfaction or delivery from those circumstances was promised. In desperation, in weakness, in isolation, we become all the more susceptible to these attacks.

In Satan's first challenge to Jesus, we tend to focus on the miracle he tells Jesus to perform because we know that he was hungry. We can immediately empathize with Jesus because we know what it feels like to be hungry. You may not have gone days without food but you likely know the hunger pangs that arise when you skip breakfast. What is not always apparent in this temptation is the accusation that Satan levels against Jesus. "*If you are the Son of God...*" he whispers, provoking Jesus on the basis of his very identity. This challenge is not just about exploiting Jesus' hunger, but his humanity and our potential for pride. Where else have we encountered that questioning tone that so easily sows the seeds of doubt in God's character and goodness? (See Genesis 3:1–7)

Think back to a moment when someone questioned what you were capable of. What did you immediately do? You showed them that you were indeed able. Does Jesus have the ability to do what Satan asked of him? We know that he was capable of much more. But what does his refusal and response to Satan's accusation tell us? Jesus refutes Satan's claims not by showing

that he could do what he asked (a demonstration of humility), but by appealing to the truth of God's greater goodness and faithfulness.

Satan is a bit more crafty in his second temptation. Taking Jesus to the highest point of the temple, Satan commands him to jump from the edge to prove that God would rescue him. Satan appeals to Scripture in his challenge, citing two verses that speak about God's protection of his servant (Psalm 92:11–12). Jesus responds, also appealing to Scripture, "*it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'*" (Deuteronomy 6:16).

There are many principles to gather from this temptation, but perhaps the most pressing is one that speaks to this current season we are living through. Be watchful of those who would misuse the Word of God. In order to overcome the accusations of Satan and the lies that circulate throughout his kingdom (the earth), the follower of Jesus must be rooted in God's Word. One can only accomplish this by regularly reading the Bible individually and in community. If Satan and the demons under his authority have knowledge of God and His Word, how much more time should we, the people of God, dedicate to reading the Scriptures. It is the sword by which we combat the attacks of the enemy.

You can almost sense Satan's frustration in the final temptation. Notice he has dropped the "*If you are the Son of God,*" as though Jesus had confirmed his identity as the Son of God through his refusal to submit to Satan's commands. Jesus may not have succumbed to the first two temptations, but how could he refuse what so many before him had dedicated their lives to pursuing and accumulating?

If he bowed down to Satan and worshiped him, Jesus would receive "*all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory*" (Matthew 4:8-9). Whether or not Satan ever thought Jesus would do such a thing, we cannot be sure, but consider how you would respond to the offer. Before you think "*I would never, in my whole life, for anything, bow down to Satan*" and move on, pause and reflect on the daily battle for your heart and affections. To be human is to encounter Satan's offer for power, control, and the desires of the flesh on a daily basis.

Is there an area of life, a possession, an aspiration, or an idea that is drawing you away from Jesus and being conformed to his image? What are the compromises you make to the detriment of your relationship with the Lord?

There will come a time when Satan will challenge your identity as a follower of Jesus. How will you combat the accusations and attacks of the enemy? To whom will you turn? We can take great comfort in the truth that Jesus overcame, and in so doing, made it possible for us to throw down the shackles of our sins and live by the leading of the Spirit.



## **Sunday | February 28**

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 10:16–18**

The LORD is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

### **Time of Thanksgiving: Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving**

With joy we praise you, gracious God, for you have created heaven and earth, made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—even when we fell into sin. We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord, by whose grace we may triumph over temptation, be more fervent in prayer, and be more generous in love. Therefore we join our voices with all the saints and angels and the whole creation to proclaim the glory of your name. (WSB, 576)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Isaiah 43**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Jesus, this world can be very, very hard. And right now so many things are. We hear you when you tell us not to fear, that you have redeemed us and called us by name. When we pass through the waters you will be with us. So we will not be afraid, because you are with us. You are no stranger to our weakness and suffering. You see us and you know. We trust you. Show us what walking in your ways looks like, right here, right now and we’ll do it. In Jesus’ name, *Amen*.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord: Psalm 30:4**

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.





## Monday | March 1

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 22:25–26

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Everlasting God, fountain of all life and the true home of every heart: our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Yet we confess that our hearts have been enslaved by selfish passion and base desire. We have sought after many things and have neglected the one thing needful. We have not loved you with our whole hearts; help us to turn to you and find forgiveness. Lead us home, that we may again find in you our life and joy and peace. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 9:1–38

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

We are constrained by our humanness, and from our birth you can take our measure. What we are and what we are not. But not you. You have no measure and no limit to your power, to your holiness. Yet you chose to limit yourself to take on flesh with all its constraints and walk among us so you could say with confidence that you are not unfamiliar with the burdens we bear. Yet you still did it all without sin. Even as you became like us, you were still all that we could not be. Thank you Jesus for living a life that we could not live and dying the death that was meant for us. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Titus 3:1–2

Be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.



## Tuesday | March 2

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 37:3–5, 11

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act... But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

God of compassion, in Jesus Christ you did not disdain the company of sinners but welcomed them with love. Look upon us in mercy, we pray. Our sins are more than we can bear; our pasts enslave us; our misdeeds are beyond correcting. Forgive the wrongs we cannot undo; free us from a past we cannot change; heal what we can no longer fix. Grace our lives with your love and turn the tears of our past into the joys of new life with you. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 10:1–25

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

**Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven Lord Jesus, your kingdom far outshines the weak attempts at empire building our hearts and minds have produced. Yet we continue to fight for our rights to build them. Forgive us. Forgive us for the rebellion in our hearts that continues to spread the lie that we can do this on our own. We acknowledge with joy that we cannot produce anything that matters apart from you. We need you every hour. Thank you for being all that we cannot be today. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** James 3:17–18

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.



## Wednesday | March 3

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 69:29–30

But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high! I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid your time of confession

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ, our Lord. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 10:26–42

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Give us this day our daily bread

God, you have always provided for us in the past. Your faithfulness has been tested and found true at each turn. We are a faithless, forgetful people, but you are an utterly faithful, always remembering God who cares for us. Thank you that as you have always provided, you will continue to do so. We trust you for the needs of THIS day, Jesus. We thank you that you are even now providing what is required. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Galatians 5:22–24

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.



## Beatitudes | The Meek

The third beatitude is, “blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The Greek word for meek (*praus*) may refer to someone who is afflicted, which is not merely from difficult circumstances but primarily because they choose to restrain their strength for a greater good or purpose. The meek are those who “do not throw their weight about” in relation with others.<sup>4</sup> When slapped, they turn the other cheek (5:39). When someone takes their tunic, they give away their cloak as well (5:40). When someone forces them to go one mile, they go two (5:41).

“Meekness” was not a celebrated virtue in first century Palestine, and it is certainly not a virtue celebrated in twenty-first century United States. There is something in our nature that bristles at being offended, specifically when there is no recourse for that offence. When it comes to the slightest infringement upon our rights, our hearts demand the severest exactitude of justice. For this reason, this beatitude goes against the grain of the common attitude prevalent in our society today: We must get ours. We must get what is owed to us. We must not show deference to others lest we be taken advantage of. It is this fretting about our own personal rights that leads to clamoring, scheming, and bickering over the things of the earth that leads to full injustice and empty hearts.

And yet, Jesus shows us a better way. Jesus is the gentle and lowly king (Matt. 11:28–30; 21:5) who, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6–8). Jesus is the meek king, who has all the power in the cosmos and chooses to lay down all of his heavenly rights, because of his devotion to the good of the people and his faithfulness to the glory of God the Father.

In the only passage in the Gospels that Jesus describes his own heart, Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek (*praus*) and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29).<sup>5</sup> Jesus offers true freedom for those who face difficulty, oppression, and suffering by trusting the Lord, delighting themselves in the Lord, and committing their way to the Lord (Ps. 37:3–4). And for such meekness, they will inherit the earth (Ps. 37:11), which is to experience the fullness of peace and presence of the Lord.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is the practice of meekness difficult for you? How does Jesus’ life demonstrate that a life of meekness is a life of freedom, blessing, and rest?
2. List the virtues commanded of the meek person in Psalm 37:1–9 and list the activities of God.
3. How is God calling you to be meek today in your relationship for the good of others and for the glory of God?

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<sup>4</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 166.

<sup>5</sup> Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 17.

## **I Surrender All**

All to Jesus I surrender  
All to Him I freely give  
I will ever love and trust Him  
In His presence daily live  
All to Jesus I surrender  
Humbly at His feet I bow  
Worldly pleasures all forsaken  
Take me, Jesus, take me now  
I surrender all  
I surrender all  
All to Thee my blessed Savior  
I surrender all  
All to Jesus I surrender  
Make me Savior wholly thine  
May Thy Holy Spirit fill me  
May I know Thy power divine

*Judson W. Van DeVenter*



## Thursday | March 4

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 82:3–4, 8

Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked...Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Lord, we have denied you by refusing to know you. We have betrayed you by keeping our distance. We have mocked you by pretending we are not yours. Lord, we are lost; let your forgiveness find us. Welcome us into your strong, forgiving arms and let us feel reconciled again. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 11:1–30

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

Jesus, you have made provision for our sin by your death on the cross. We know that because of your work and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you can and will cleanse us from all our sin and all of our bent ways and bring us closer to you. Thanks Jesus that it’s YOUR work and YOUR goodness that can do this- not our own attempts at conjuring up goodness in ourselves. We ask your forgiveness for the things we have done and left undone. For the things we said without consideration of the name we now represent. We thank you for being faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, Lord. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Romans 14:7–9

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.



## Friday | March 5

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 119:105–7

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word!

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

O God, in gracious love you promise to care for the creatures of earth; in steadfast love you keep your promise. But we, who so quickly embrace your covenant, just as quickly betray it; we, from whom you desire worship, too often offer only scorn. For making and then keeping your promise in the greatness of your mercy, we sing your praise, Lord; and for accepting and then spurning your covenant in the greatness of our sin, we ask your forgiveness. *Amen.* (WSB, 565)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 12:1–32

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

We are unable to save ourselves. This has been proven without exception, Lord. On our own we will plummet further into the hole our own actions, and the actions of others has dug for us. But that is not your way. When we were flailing about helpless, you saved us and put our feet on the rock. In your sovereignty, you provide us a way out and into flourishing. Thank you, Jesus, that you do not leave us to our own foolish devices. Thank you for saving us. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 1 Corinthians 9:22–23

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.



## **Saturday | March 6**

*“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 140:12–13

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy. Surely the righteous shall give thanks to your name; the upright shall dwell in your presence.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

O God, our great shepherd, you tenderly gather us as lambs, carrying us with your all-embracing love. Yet, like sheep, we wander from you: following our own ways, ignoring your voice, distrusting your provisions. Forgive our stubborn rebellion, our hardened hearts, our lack of trust. Refresh us once again by your quiet waters of mercy and restore our souls by your redeeming love. Guide our paths, that we might follow you more closely. Through Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, we pray. *Amen.* (WSB, 565)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 12:33–50

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

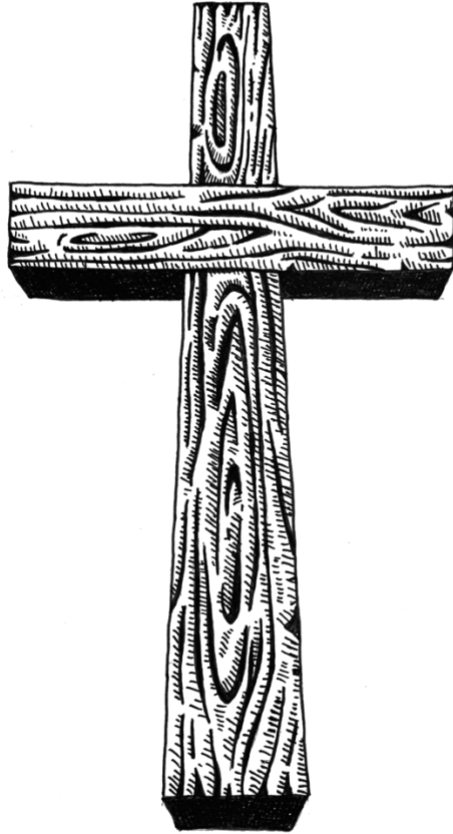
### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

Jesus, from the day of our birth we’ve been building our little domains and asserting our power to rule them. You know our hearts. You see the tendencies and the well beaten pathways towards crowing ourselves the King and Queen of whatever it is we’re doing and building. We’re sorry. We’re wrong and we’re sorry. Yours is the kingdom. Yours is the power. It is your right to build our lives according to your kingdom. You have bought us with the blood of your son—you’ve called us your children and your heirs with Christ. We choose your kingdom and your power, Lord. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 2 Corinthians 12:9–10

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.





## Third Sunday of Lent

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

# The Teachings of Christ Jesus

## Matthew 5–7

From the outset of his ministry, Jesus was a respected and gifted teacher. Despite not being trained in the Scriptures like the scribes and the religious leaders of Israel, Jesus captivated crowds of people as “one who had authority” (Matthew 7:29). It was the respect and adoration that Jesus received among the people that eventually led to his crucifixion.

Perhaps the most famous collection of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Teaching on a variety of topics, Jesus did not so much give new teachings as he breathed new life into the old, providing further insight and showing listeners the heart of God’s commands. As you read through the Sermon on the Mount, you may notice a pattern in Jesus’ words and teachings: *Jesus did not make obedience to the law any easier*. In fact, he often made total and complete obedience nearly impossible. Think about the phrase Jesus repeated throughout the Sermon on the Mount that increased the burden of obedience:

*“You have heard it said...but I say to you.”*

With one phrase, Jesus accomplished two goals. First, he challenged the religious teachers and the compromises they had made in their observation of the law. Second, Jesus drew a clear distinction between the laws of humanity and the laws of God. What the Kingdom of God required was law-keeping that was humanly impossible. Consider some examples from the Sermon on the Mount:

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:21–22)*

No reasonable person would try to make a case for anger and insults being the same as murdering someone on the scale of wickedness, but is this not what Jesus is saying? Have you and I not made concessions and compromises about the sins that we deem less than the “greater” sins? Consider the teaching that immediately follows:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27–28)*

It would have been easier to live under the law as a Pharisee. Even the strictest and most pious Pharisee would have gone back for the second glance and felt no remorse.

Why did Jesus raise the bar so high? Why was he setting such unrealistic expectations of those who wished to follow him? Did he only want the most faithful? The most disciplined? The most restrained? Or was he trying to make a greater point?

In addition to confronting the religious leaders on the inadequacies of their teachings, Jesus regularly taught about the Kingdom of God. In parables that were often cryptic, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a variety of relatable human experiences. Even though he used language and imagery that the average person could understand, he concealed great spiritual truths about the nature of God and the Kingdom He would establish (Matthew 13:10–13).

In all of his teachings, Jesus showed humanity a different way; one that completely defied their expectations of him and the Kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God, the first was last, the weak was strong, the poor was rich. It was a complete reversal and upending of what they believed to be true. By challenging their assumptions and not conforming to the image they manufactured for their messiah, Jesus was preparing them for the culmination of his ministry and the fulfillment of his mission: his death on the cross to atone for the sins of humanity.

Jesus' teachings give us great insight into what he thought, but his actions speak louder than his words. As you continue to read through the Gospel of Matthew and work through the daily practices, think about the ways in which Jesus defies and challenges your expectations. What characteristics do you see in Jesus in his interactions with people? How does he regard those who expected respect because of their position or possessions? How does he treat the poor and outcast? What you see about Jesus when you really begin to study his life and words may prompt further reflection. Be open to the refining and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.



## Sunday | March 7

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 17:15

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

### **Time of Thanksgiving:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving

O Educator, be gracious to thy children, O Educator, Father, Guide of Israel, Son and Father, both one, Lord. Give to us, who follow thy command, to fulfill the likeness of thy image, and to see, according to our strength, the God who is both a good God and a Judge who is not harsh. Do thou thyself bestow all things on us who dwell in thy peace, who have been placed in thy city, who sail the sea of sin unruffled, that we may be made tranquil and supported by the Holy Spirit, the unutterable Wisdom, by night and day, unto the perfect day, to sing eternal thanksgiving to the one only Father and Son, Son and Father, Educator and Teacher with the Holy Spirit. (Clement of Alexandria, 150–215 AD)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Isaiah 50

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Lord you tell us that you are our portion, but we confess we struggle to believe it. We see scarcity and want around us and inside us. Remind us, Provider, that you sustain us with a word when we are weary, giving strength and joy to bones that are weary. Convict us of where we are finding our peace and rest and sustenance, and reorient our hearts to look only to you. As Peter said, where else would we go? Only you have the words that bring of life. We trust that you are making ways for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Psalm 47:5–7

God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!



## Monday | March 8

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 34:8–10

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. Send out your light, send out your truth, and let them lead us to our home. Take from us the weight of our sin, that room might be made for the spirit of truth. If we prepare a dwelling place, that spirit will abide within us, and the truth will set our spirits free. Then shall we love not only in word or in speech; then shall we love in deed and in truth, and by this know that our service is faithful. O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 13:1–30

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name

Lord God, we thank you that you do not become less holy by taking on our lot—you just make everything around you holy as you go. And that includes us. You chose us to be in your family. Through you we may become children of God. You are conforming us into your image, all this to the praise of YOUR glorious grace, not ours. And you deserve every ounce of that glory, God. We give it to you with joy. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Romans 6:12–13

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.



## Tuesday | March 9

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 42:1–2

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Almighty God, because of Christ’s blood, do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are, any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly clings to us. Forgive us just as we are fully determined, as evidence of your grace in us, to forgive our neighbors. By ourselves we are too weak to hold our own even for a moment. And our sworn enemies—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—never stop attacking us. And so, Lord, uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory. (based on Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A’s, 126–27; WSB, 566)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 13:31–58

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Thy Kingdom, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Our Lord Jesus, our wills have made this world a disaster. Your kingdom come and may it come soon. We need what you have to offer us, God. Because the fixes and solutions we have to bind up this weary and broken world are not working. Our world needs a rest from its toil and labors that only kingdom with you as its rightful King can offer. So come, King Jesus. Fix what we’ve broken. We trust you to do this as only you can. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Ephesians 5:15–18

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.



## Wednesday | March 10

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God: Psalm 63:1–4**

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

God of exodus and wilderness, God of refuge and help, hear us now as we make our confession to you. In times of temptation we forget what you have done for us. You give us everything we need, yet we often remain unsatisfied; you trust us to care for creation, yet we often abuse that trust and spoil what we have been given. You show us the way we are to follow, yet we often continue on the path of self-indulgence and self-centeredness. Forgive us, we pray. We ask for your direction, your patience, your love, in the name of Jesus Christ, who, in spite of his temptations, was faithful to your saving Word. *Amen.* (WSB, 566)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 14:1–21**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Give us this day our daily bread

We need your help, Jesus. Today we need your help as the world around us feels so broken. And the path set to our feet is more uncertain than ever. But you are the God who made us in our mothers’ wombs. You knew us before we were born. And you see us and know us now. Our health is in your hands. The health of our families is in your hand. Thank you that we can place them back in your hands again today with confidence that you are good and you do good. We trust that you are providing what we need today. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Philippians 1:9–11**

May your abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.



## Beatitudes | Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

The fourth beatitude is, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt. 5:6). As human beings we are born with innate appetites that are necessary for our physical well-being. But life is so much more than food and drink (Matt. 6:25), as Jesus answered Satan’s temptation to give into his hunger: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). At the same time, because of our sinful nature, we also have intense cravings for the things of the world that bend our souls away from the righteousness of God. Yet, such “lusts of the flesh” only leave us emptier, avidly longing for that which will never satisfy the truest and deepest longing of our souls.

Therefore, in light of our natural inclinations and in spite of our sinful proclivities, the faithful and flourishing disciple is the one who rightly orders every longing and love to the will of God. To hunger and thirst for righteousness, is to desire a life that is rightly aligned with “God’s nature, will, and coming kingdom.”<sup>6</sup> It is the voracious longing to live in such a way that pleases our Father in heaven.

But as Jesus commends all throughout the Gospel of Matthew, this righteousness cannot simply be an external display of one’s devotion to God. It cannot merely be a filtered Instagram post of our quiet time in Scripture or a 144-character tweet against the injustice of society. Jesus’ call to follow him must be more than a curated portrayal of a righteous lifestyle that exists online, which may gain virtual friends, likes, and retweets, but has no truth in our hearts and ultimately costs us nothing. Such “trumpet blasts” may be the only reward we will receive (cf. Matt. 6:1–6) leaving us only wanting for more.

To flourish as Jesus’ faithful disciple is to yearn to live rightly as unto God even if it means persecution, hardship, and difficulty. But as Jesus declares, this person who hungers and thirsts rightly is blessed because this person will be fully satisfied, overflowing with the good pleasure of God.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. How has the practice of fasting during Lent helped you order your hungers and thirsts according to the will of God?
2. How does social media tempt you to “practice your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them” (Matt. 6:1)?
3. How do you cultivate an inward yearning for God’s kingdom and righteousness that satisfies your purpose and belonging to God (Matt. 6:33)?

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<sup>6</sup> J. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 91.



## My Worth is Not in What I Own

My worth is not in what I own  
Not in the strength of flesh and bone  
But in the costly wounds of love  
At the cross

My worth is not in skill or name  
In win or lose, in pride or shame  
But in the blood of Christ that flowed  
At the cross

I rejoice in my redeemer  
Greatest treasure  
Wellspring of my soul  
And I will trust in him, no other  
My soul is satisfied in him alone  
As summer flowers we fade and die  
Fame, youth and beauty hurry by  
But life eternal calls to us  
At the cross

I will not boast in wealth or might  
Or human wisdom's fleeting light  
But I will boast in knowing Christ  
At the cross

I rejoice in my redeemer  
Greatest treasure  
Wellspring of my soul  
I will trust in him, no other  
My soul is satisfied in him alone  
Two wonders here that I confess  
My worth and my unworthiness  
My value fixed, my ransom paid  
At the cross

And I rejoice in my redeemer  
Greatest treasure  
Wellspring of my soul  
I will trust in him, no other  
My soul is satisfied in him alone  
And I rejoice in my redeemer  
Greatest treasure  
Wellspring of my soul

And I will trust in him, no other  
My soul is satisfied in him alone  
My soul is satisfied in him alone

Keith Getty



## Thursday | March 11

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 107:8–9

Let us thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Word of God Incarnate, you came to this world to accomplish salvation. By your grace you call us to repent, to be crucified with you, that we might be raised as new creations. But we confess that often we do not live as renewed people. We confess that often we “go with the flow” instead of stemming sin’s tide. Forgive us when we do not show evidence of renewal. Forgive us when we let the fruit of the Spirit be choked by the weeds of evil. You have made us your children, members of your kingdom. Help us to show evidence of that every day as we work to bring your justice, peace, gentleness, goodness, love, joy, and hope to all we meet.

For Jesus’ sake, *Amen.* (WSB, 566)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 14:22–36

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

We are not good at this, Lord. Any of it, if we’re honest. We do what we should not do, and we don’t do the things we should. Forgive us. Humble us to remember just how much there is in need of forgiveness in our lives. Thank you for being the Just and Good King who is faithful to forgive the dark and twisted places. Thank you that you are all that we are not. Thank you that you give us your righteousness in exchange for our sin. We cannot do this on our own. Thank you that we don’t have to, for you are with us and for us. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 1 Timothy 4:7–8

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.



## Friday | March 12

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 143:5–6

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.  
*Selah*

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are your covenant people—one church, drawn from all nations. Our citizenship is in heaven. Yet we confess, O Lord, that we sometimes lose sight of your kingdom and its ways. We confess that we sometimes live more as citizens of our own land than as citizens of your kingdom. By your truth you call all peoples to account. Forgive us for losing our distinctiveness. Focus us on the cross and on the salvation you give through him who is the Lord and King and Judge of us all, Jesus, the Christ, in whose name we pray. *Amen.* (WSB, 566–67)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 15:1–20

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

Lord we need your help. You lead us into places of flourishing, but to be honest, it doesn’t always look like we think. A lot of times it doesn’t look we think it should. Your deliverance doesn’t always look like deliverance. When we find ourselves still in the battle, still in the struggle, we ask for your nearness. And that your nearness would be our good. You will not leave us or forsake us. Remind us why that is enough. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 1 Timothy 6:11–12

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.



## Saturday | March 13

*“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”  
Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Invitation to Meet with God:** Psalm 106:1–3

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.  
*Selah*

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Righteous God, in Christ you became sin for us. You took what we are so that we might become what you are. But we confess that often we ignore our sin. We confess that too often we do not confess. We keep silent about the sin that clings to us. But our sins are too great a burden for us. Forgive us. In Christ take away our iniquity. You are our stronghold, our hiding place. May we confess our sins, that we might then rejoice and be glad in you and in the righteousness that flows over us as a mighty stream of grace. In Christ, *Amen.* (WSB, 567)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 15:21–39

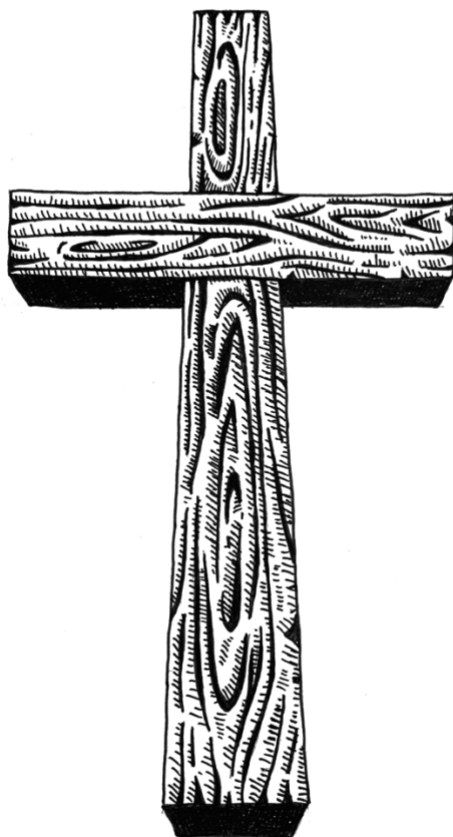
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

Lord, we are your servants, and it is to be our joy to work as a servant in your kingdom. We echo Peter in saying where else would we go? Only you have the words of life. Only in you is there life to be had. Your kingship is the only one that restores our hearts and this world. Retrain our hearts and our wills to bow with joy to what and how and where you lead—to want what you want. We lay down the lesser things—and they’re all lesser things—for this better in every way kingdom you’re building. We say together it’s better. In your name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 2 Peter 1:5–8

Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



## **Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer*  
**The Miracles of Christ Jesus**

Throughout the course of his life and ministry, Jesus performed many miracles. They are often the parts of the Jesus story that we remember the most. What are some of the miracles that stand out to you from Jesus' life?

Is it Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding (John 2:4-11)? Or when he brings Lazarus back from the dead (John 11:1-44)? Is it the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:13-21)? Or is it when Jesus calms the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8:22-25)? There are certainly too many to list here.

Why are so many of us captivated by the miracles and wonders Jesus did during his time on earth? There are likely as many reasons as there are miracles in the Gospels, but perhaps we love to read and hear about miracles because they give us hope. Miracles are a foreshadowing of the future restoration of all things. They are a glimpse into the coming Kingdom of God, a place and society characterized by the order God intended and not the chaos introduced by sin. Second, there is a certain confirmation that accompanies the miraculous act. No one can doubt a miracle when they see it with their own eyes. In many ways, a miracle is the evidence that an expression of faith is not in vain. Think about the healings Jesus did for the sick, disabled, and demon-possessed.

The man who had been paralyzed from birth jumps up from his pallet (Matthew 9:1-8). A man with a withered hand stretches his fingers and the hand is restored (Matthew 12:9-14). A dead child opens her eyes, rises from her bed, and walks around the room (Mark 5:35-45). A man terrorized by demons at every hour of the day is calm and in his right mind after an encounter with Jesus (Mark 5:1-20). The people who witnessed these miracles beheld something that was nothing other than the hand of God. They had been witness to a great display of God's power and nothing could convince them otherwise.

You might not have personally witnessed a miracle but you have likely prayed for one. You've asked God to heal a loved one with a Stage-4 cancer diagnosis. You've asked God to move in the life of a son or daughter who no longer believes. You've prayed for provision to be able to pay the stack of bills on the dining room table.

We pray for miracles because we (1) believe God is capable of doing the impossible, and (2) because we know this world is not as it should be. Just stop to look around at our world and especially our country. There is chaos and disorder on every screen, in every home, in every city. Creation too experiences the same brokenness and suffering that was introduced into the world through sin:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Romans 8:19-22).

This was the world that Jesus entered into; a world of great economic inequality, rampant oppression, widespread injustice, and crushing hopelessness. When Jesus began to proclaim

the arrival of the Kingdom of God, he set about the process of making all things new in a way that no one expected. Not with major declarations or in a militarized overthrow of Roman oppression, but through interactions and encounters with people at the lowest levels of society. By his love and compassion, Jesus would save humanity.

There is a common thread in many of the miracles that Jesus did. They were most often done when there was a clear expression of faith and belief in who Jesus said he was and what he could do. As you read the Gospel of Matthew, make a note of the expressions of faith of those whom Jesus heals. Below are a few examples:

- A man with leprosy: “Lord, *if you will, you can make me clean*” (8:2)
- The Roman Centurion: “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but *only say the word, and my servant will be healed*” (8:8)
- The woman with a discharge of blood: “*If I only touch his garment, I will be made well*” (9:21)

These miracles were fulfilled because they believed Jesus was capable. The working of a miracle may result in someone coming to faith, but more frequently a miracle is done because of the presence of great faith.

As you participate in the daily practices this week, reflect on the purpose and significance of the miracles as they appear in Matthew.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How does Jesus use miracles and displays of power to bring about the will of God?
2. How might this understanding of miracles influence or inform your prayers? Have you stopped asking God to do the impossible altogether?
3. Be encouraged by the faith of those you read about this week.



## Sunday | March 14

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord:** Psalm 25:6–7

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

### **Time of Thanksgiving:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving

Glory be to you, almighty Father, you have given to those who fear you the heavenly bread of life, that we may be mindful of the marvels which you have done on the earth, by sending us your only Son, fully human, born of a pure virgin. We give you thanks, Holy Father, for you created us before we were, and while we were still sinners you made us partakers of your heavenly grace; through your Son, our Lord and God, who with you and the Holy Spirit makes, orders, and rules all things, now and forever. *Amen.* (Dunstan of Canterbury, 909–988 AD)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Isaiah 61

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Lord, we declare with joy that you are the Lord, the God of all flesh and all the earth. Is anything too hard for you? (Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:27). We are limited, but you are limitless; but in your mercy you work all things together for your glory and our good. We are a broken people in body and in spirit. Come be our healer and mend what is torn in our world. Only you can make all the bad things come untrue, and we trust that you are doing that, Father. Be merciful to us and bring us rest. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Psalm 66:1–4

Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.” *Selah*





## **Monday | March 15**

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 28:6–7**

Blessed be the LORD! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ you love us, but we have not loved you. You have opened your heart to us, and in our pride we have spurned your care. You have given us all things, and we have squandered your gifts. We have grieved you and caused hurt to others, and we are not worthy to be called your children. Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we are ashamed and sorry for all we have done to displease you. Cleanse us from our sin and receive us again into your household, that we might nevermore stray from your love but always remain within the sound of your voice. *Amen.* (WSB, 567)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 16:1–28**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name**

Thank you, Lord that before any of us were, you ARE. You have no beginning and you have no end. And with that comes the reality that ALL that you are has no beginning and no end. No end to your grace. No end to your love. We will never see the end of your goodness, your holiness, your justice, Lord. We love that you are our Father and you graciously share all things with your children. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Romans 12:1–2**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.



## Tuesday | March 16

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 40:11**

As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

God, forgive our doubting, questioning hearts. Like the scribes who witnessed Jesus' miracles of healing and heard his proclamation, yet spurned belief, we too have seen wonders, yet have hardened our hearts. We confess the many times that our pessimism has caused others to doubt themselves and your Spirit, the times that our criticism has wounded others, the times that our dejection has dampened the enthusiasm of those inspired by your Word and work. O God, forgive us and in your mercy renew us, that with open hearts we may believe and never pose an obstacle to the faith of others. *Amen.* (WSB, 567)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 17:1–27

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

**Praying the Lord's Prayer:** Thy Kingdom, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven  
Jesus you're better than all that we lay aside in your name and for the sake of your kingdom. Our treasures and dominions are a small thing compared to all that we gain from a life fully devoted to following you. So show us where we are holding on to our empires. The areas we still proclaim MINE. Let our kingdoms fade and die their deserving deaths. Let our wills and dreams go also. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. Here. And for eternity. In Jesus' name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 1 Peter 2:9–10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.



## **Wednesday | March 17**

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 51:1–2**

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

Almighty God, you despise nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts, that, truly repenting of our sins and acknowledging our brokenness, we may obtain from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.* (WSB, 561)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 18:1–34**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Give us this day our daily bread**

Jesus, we thank you that you tell us to ask you for our daily needs—that you remind us in your Word that you take care of your people according to their need. So we ask you, Jesus, for your sustaining mercy and provision today for us as your Body here at Exchange. These are deeply uncertain times. But you are the Waymaker. And you are making ways for us. Here. At Exchange. In our lives. In our bodies. In the air we breathe. In our homes. By the jobs you’ve provided to us. By the help you give us through each other. Forgive us for not seeing you, not looking for you in our daily provisions. Reorient our minds to see you in the very bread we eat. Remind us that you are a God we can count on—because you’re good and you love us. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Jude 20–21**

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.



## Beatitudes | The Merciful

The fifth beatitude is, “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matt. 5:7). To be merciful is to show compassion to others who are in a state of need, which could arise from unfortunate circumstances or from having committed an offense that is deserving of a particular consequence. The merciful are those who are in a position to do something about another’s need and decisively act to extend generosity, peace, and forgiveness.

It is for this reason that mercy is at the very heart of Christianity, for it is a primary attribute of who God himself in relation to his people (cf. Exodus 34:6–7). In light of our own desperate situation as sinners in need of forgiveness, God shows us mercy by entering into our chaotic world and our weary flesh in order to bring us to himself and for us to become more like him.

We see all throughout the Gospel of Matthew how Jesus Christ demonstrates the mercy of God over and over again to those who are desperate: women who are outcast (Matt. 9:20), men who are blind (Matt. 9:27), parents whose children are suffering (Matt. 15:22; 17:15), people who are crippled, sick, exhausted, and anxious. To all these and so many more, Jesus eagerly, graciously, and lovingly shows mercy—it is who he is. And even when people come to Jesus for far less, Jesus reaches farther down to grant sinners forgiveness for their sin so that they may be reconciled to God.

And just as we have received mercy, Christ calls us to show mercy to others. Therefore, the practice of mercy is essential to flourishing as Christ’s disciple. To be generous, to show compassion, to forgive others are the expected marks of the blessed life in Christ Jesus. It is not the proud condemnation of those in need through ignorance or indifference. It is not the withholding of forgiveness to those who have wronged us. It is not the trite, shallow expressions of “tolerance” and “niceness” that pervade social media but does little for the oppressed in society. Christ-like mercy is defined by the sincere, tangible, compassionate acts towards those in need, entering into their chaos, weariness, and desperation with the hope of Christ.

Christ promises that if we have been merciful in this life, we will be shown mercy in the life to come. Such a promise not only reveals what is in store for those who are in Christ, but it also reveals that we are always and ever needy for the mercy of God.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some tangible practices of mercy and compassion that you can develop into rhythms with your community?
2. How are you cultivating an awareness of your need for the mercy of God, while also cultivating an awareness for the needs of others?
3. What acts of compassion have been shown to you for which you may give thanks?

## **Lord, Have Mercy**

For what we have done and left undone  
We fall on Your countless mercies  
For sins that are known and those unknown  
We call on Your name so holy  
For envy and pride, for closing our eyes  
For scorning our very neighbor  
In thought word and deed we've failed You our King  
How deeply we need a Savior

Lord have mercy Christ have mercy  
Lord have mercy on us  
Lord have mercy Christ have mercy  
Lord have mercy on us

For what You have done Your life of love  
You perfectly lived we praise You  
Though tempted and tried You fixed Your eyes  
You finished the work God gave You  
And there on the tree A King among thieves  
You bled for a world's betrayal  
You loved to the end Our merciful friend  
How pure and forever faithful

For hearts that are cold for seizing control  
For scorning our very Maker  
In thought word and deed we've failed You our King  
How deeply we need a Savior

*Matt Papa and Matt Boswell*



## Thursday | March 18

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 103:1–5**

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. Send out your light, send out your truth, and let them lead us to our home. Take from us the weight of our sin, that room might be made for the spirit of truth. If we prepare a dwelling place, that spirit will abide within us, and the truth will set our spirits free. Then shall we love not only in word or in speech; then shall we love in deed and in truth, and by this know that our service is faithful. O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 19:1–30**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

### **Praying the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**

Jesus, we confess we use our own nature to excuse ourselves. We think if it's who we are, we have no power over it. We glorify our bent ways in the name of self-love, and we're sorry. But you have always shown a better way. Your ways, your goodness, your kindness, your faithfulness, your gentleness over our own. You call us to better. Thank you that you care deeply for our hearts, enough to go to those places and expose our sin. Humble us to welcome your exposure. Help us want what you want. In Jesus' name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Ephesians 4:31–32**

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



## Friday | March 19

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 130:1–4**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

God of compassion, you are slow to anger and full of mercy, welcoming sinners who return to you with penitent hearts. Receive in your loving embrace all who come home to you. Seat them at your bountiful table of grace, that, with all your children, they may feast with delight on all that satisfies the hungry heart. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew Matt. 20:1–34

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

You say in your word that if we love you we will follow your commands. You say that if we are your people we will hear your voice and obey. Build in us a reflex to be quick in our response of “Yes Jesus!” when you lead us. Help us to know your Word deeply so we can recognize your voice easily and follow it faithfully. To know you is to love you, Lord. And we desire to know you in spirit and in truth. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 2 Timothy 2:23–25

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.



## **Saturday | March 20**

*“Take heart, your faith has made you well.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 143:1–2**

Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

God of mercy, you sent Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost. We confess that we have strayed from you and turned aside from your way. We are misled by pride, for we see ourselves pure when we are stained and great when we are small. We have failed in love, neglected justice, and ignored your truth. Have mercy, O God, and forgive our sin. Return us to paths of righteousness through Jesus Christ, our Savior. *Amen.* (WSB, 563)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 21:1–27**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

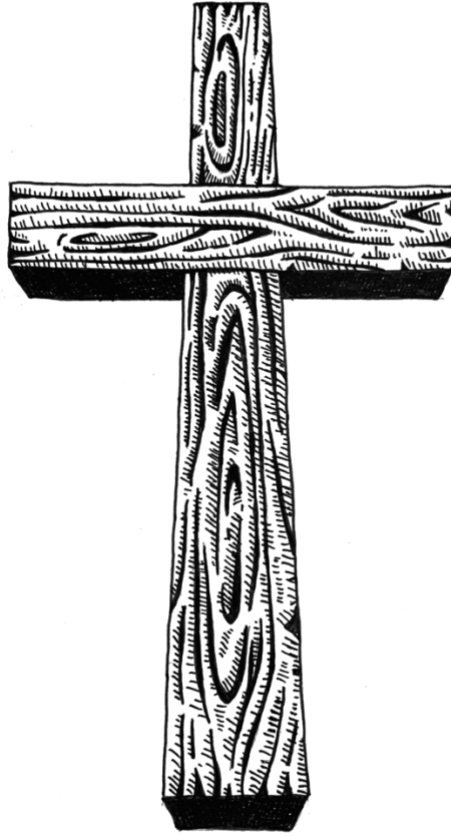
### **Praying the Lord's Prayer: For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.**

Lord, it's a very good thing that it's your kingdom and your power. Because the empires we build and the power we throw around are deeply ineffective to hold back the horror and evil and sadness and brokenness we see firsthand. Not to mention the things that we may never see that go on in the shadows. We only need to look around to see the limits of the power and rule of men. Whether in government, or in medicine and science or in the day to day social workings all around us. We don't have this. But his power is without a rival. His kingdom is eternal...no beginning and no end. Nothing can stand against it. We are a vapor. He is eternal. We have a measurement, he is immeasurable. Our strength has definitive limits, but his is utterly limitless. There is nothing he cannot do. In Jesus' name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Romans 12:9–13**

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.





## **Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer*

## The Suffering of Christ Jesus

By the time Jesus entered the world, the Jewish people had suffered much persecution, hardship, and oppression. In its history as a nation, Israel had been enslaved for more than four centuries, endured a civil war that divided their once prosperous kingdom, and was exiled and ransacked by two different empires. During the years between the Old and New Testaments (the Intertestamental Period), a small band of Hebrew fighters led revolts to reclaim territory that had been captured by the Greeks. Their sovereignty over the land was short-lived, as they were overwhelmingly crushed by what would prove to be the ancient world's strongest superpower: the Roman Empire.

Placing governors in prominent cities and regions, the Romans imposed heavy taxes and stationed their impressive military throughout the Empire to maintain order. There was widespread poverty, rampant injustice, and a plague of hopelessness among the conquered peoples. This was the world that Jesus was born into.

In many ways, the sufferings of the Jewish people were the sufferings of Jesus. There are glimmers of Roman oppression all throughout the Gospel of Matthew if you look closely. A centurion, a commander in the Roman military, is stationed in Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–13). Jesus calls Matthew from a Roman tax collector's booth to be his disciple (Matthew 9:9). The people Jesus encountered during his travels were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a Shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). The Pharisees question Jesus about whether it is right to pay taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:15–22). Ultimately, we know the Romans are the ones who carry out the crucifixion of Jesus, though the religious leaders bear as much, if not more, responsibility.

It was this climate of oppression, tension, and hostility that largely informed the people's expectations of the promised messiah in Jewish thought. By the time Jesus was born, the people were already looking for the person the prophets had spoken of; the one who would reclaim the homeland and expel the invaders, returning Israel to its former glory. For the majority of the people, the Kingdom of God was not a *new* kingdom but the revitalization of the kingdom that had fallen to in-fighting, exile, and occupation. The people were waiting for a conqueror, a warrior, a savior. Jesus was not at all what the people expected.

When the Jewish people were looking for a savior, Jesus appeared as a servant. When they hoped and prayed for a warrior to bring about the “just” destruction of their enemies, Jesus appeared to take the full wrath of God, willingly suffering an unjust death to save them from their own eternal destruction. When the people desired that their will be done, Jesus appeared saying with great anguish, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Time and time again, Jesus defied the expectations of the people around him. Think about the moment when Jesus is betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. When one of Jesus' disciples attempts to protect him from the mob that had come to arrest him, how does Jesus react?

Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” (Matthew 26:52–54)

Jesus would not allow even his death to prevent him from following the will of God because *this was the will of God.*

As you reflect on the suffering Jesus endured on your behalf, consider the role suffering plays in the life of the follower of Jesus. What does it mean for you this week to pick up your cross and follow him in faithfulness? Has the threat of suffering in its many forms hindered your witness for the Gospel? Have you suffered for Christ well up to this point?

Suffering in the life of the believer can occur in many forms. It might be rejection, ridicule, or something more wicked. We must be prepared not only to suffer, but to fight against our tendency as humanity to flee that which is difficult, uncomfortable, or harmful. When our brothers and sisters around the world face intense persecution, whether loss of job, family, or life, we thank God for the freedoms he has blessed us with. But we cannot allow this freedom to breed complacency. We are called to bear witness to the suffering servant, the savior of the world, so that those around us have the same opportunity to experience the freedom and grace afforded by the cross.



## Sunday | March 21

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 9:1–2**

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.

### **Time of Thanksgiving: Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving**

Lord, because you have made me, I owe you the whole of my love; because you have redeemed me, I owe you the whole of myself; because you have promised so much, I owe you my whole being. Moreover, I owe you as much more love than myself as you are greater than I, for whom you gave yourself and to whom you promised yourself. I pray you, Lord, make me taste by love what I taste by knowledge; let me know by love what I know by understanding. I owe you more than my whole self, but I have no more, and by myself I cannot render the whole of it to you. Draw me to you, Lord, in the fullness of your love. I am wholly yours by creation; make me all yours, too, in love. (Anselm 1033–1109)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Isaiah 54**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration:**

Give us the hearts of those who are taught, Jesus. You see what we cannot see, and you are making ways for us, God, that we cannot even begin to fathom. Align our hearts to what you’re doing. Give us eyes to see how you’re working, to see the things that you’re healing and making new all around us already. Create in us clean hearts. Thank you for your Word, for what it reveals about you, for how it leads us to worship you in spirit and in truth. In Jesus’ name, *Amen*.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Psalm 95:1–3**

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.



## Monday | March 22

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 19:14**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

**Time of Confession:** Use this prayer and the space to the left to aid in your confession  
God of mercy, whose Son, Jesus Christ, longs to gather us in the wide embrace of his love, we confess that we have been wayward children. We have disobeyed your commands; our ears have been deaf to your call; our hearts have been cold to your love. In thought, in word, and in deed we have hurt others and dishonored your name. In your great mercy receive us yet again as your well-beloved children, not because we are worthy but for the sake of him who loved us and gave himself for us. *Amen.* (WSB, 563–64)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 21:28–46**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name**

Sovereign in all your ways, we thank you that we can trust you. All that is before us today, you already know. All that we will encounter, and all the places we will go, you have already gone before us. We trust that you are working out a story today that is consistent with who you are and who you have always been. Forgive us for still trying to write this story to our own liking. And we thank you for gently leading us in the ways that are better. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Philippians 4:8–9**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.



## Tuesday | March 23

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord:** Psalm 51:10–12

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Everlasting God, fountain of all life and the true home of every heart: our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Yet we confess that our hearts have been enslaved by selfish passion and base desire. We have sought after many things and have neglected the one thing needful. We have not loved you with our whole hearts; help us to turn to you and find forgiveness. Lead us home, that we may again find in you our life and joy and peace. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 22:1–22

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Thy Kingdom, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Thank you that you gently pry our hands open, taking what is not true treasure and replacing it with what is incorruptible and eternal. We confess our pride and self-sufficiency. We confess that we think we have this under control. But in your mercy you show us a better way. That our sin and twisted ways will find their answers in your holiness. The injustice, the sickness, the homelessness, the deeply sad hopelessness will find their rest in only in you. We cannot fix this. So come Lord Jesus, we’re waiting for you. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Hebrews 10:21–23

Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.



## Wednesday | March 24

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 26:1–3**

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

God of compassion, in Jesus Christ you did not disdain the company of sinners but welcomed them with love. Look upon us in mercy, we pray. Our sins are more than we can bear; our pasts enslave us; our misdeeds are beyond correcting. Forgive the wrongs we cannot undo; free us from a past we cannot change; heal what we can no longer fix. Grace our lives with your love and turn the tears of our past into the joys of new life with you. *Amen.* (WSB, 564)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 22:23–46**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Give us this day our daily bread

God, you are our portion. We thank you that you have said over and again that you withhold no good thing from us. We ask for contentment, and confidence in the provision you are giving us now. You have said that you are all that we need, so show us what that means today. In the midst of our confusion, in our loneliness, in our fear of the future, show us how the promise you give matter: that you never leave us or forsake us, that you have given us everything that we need for life and godliness, that you are our inheritance. We thank you that you are giving us all that we need. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 1 Peter 1:22–23**

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.



## Beatitudes | The Pure in Heart

The sixth beatitude is, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (5:8). To be “pure in heart” is to be holistically devoted to God in thought, word, and deed. In the Bible, the heart refers to seat of the will, which drives our decisions and commitments. For this reason, it is also referred to as the “inner person” (Eph. 3:16), for it ultimately defines who we *really* are. For a heart to be “pure” is to have our external actions correspond to internal intentions. This is what it means to have *integrity*—to have an undivided commitment to God in what we believe and what we do. The desire for such holistic devotion to God is what drives David to pray, “unite my heart to fear your name” (Ps. 86:11).

This beatitude is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, expressing what it looks like to live faithfully as Jesus’ disciple. Over and over again, Jesus explains to his followers that it is not enough to do things outwardly, when our heart is not fully aligned to God’s goodness. Jesus teaches that true faithfulness to the Lord begins with our heart, of which only God can clearly perceive our true loves. For this reason, Jesus warns, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1). The purity of our heart is expressed in our singular devotion to the praise of our Father who is in heaven and not to receive the praise of men here on earth.

The Psalm that seems to have informed this beatitude is the pilgrim liturgy found in Psalm 24. It raises the all-important question in the Bible: “Who shall ascend the Holy Mountain of the LORD?” (v.3). And it provides the answer: “He who has clean hands and a *pure heart*” (v.4). Such a person “will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (v.5). Yet, the only person who has had perfect integrity, who has had clean hands *and* a truly pure heart, is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who has ascended the Holy Mountain on our behalf, receiving all blessing and righteousness from God and providing it to all those who put their trust in him.

All those who follow Jesus, are called and empowered to be pure in heart through the Holy Spirit. And all those who are pure in heart are blessed because they shall see God. To see God is to ascend the Holy Mountain of the LORD in Christ Jesus, to behold him in all his glory, to become like him in his grace, and to be perfectly satisfied in his goodness. Such is the disciple of Jesus Christ who is fully flourishing as a human created in the image of God.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some acts of devotion that you find yourself doing more for the praise of men than the glory of God?
2. Read Matthew 6:1–6. What are some practical ways that you can cultivate a pure heart, in which your life is holistically devoted to the Lord, in thought, word, and deed?
3. How has Jesus Christ enabled us through his death and resurrection to have pure hearts before God? How does the Holy Spirit empower the purity of our heart today?



## **Give Us Clean Hands**

We bow our hearts  
We bend our knees  
Oh, Spirit come make us humble  
We turn our eyes  
From evil things  
Oh, Lord we cast down our idols

So give us clean hands  
And give us pure hearts  
Let us not lift our souls to another  
And give us clean hands  
And give us pure hearts  
Let us not lift our souls to another

Oh, God let us be  
A generation that seeks  
Who seeks Your face, oh, God of Jacob  
Oh, God let us be  
A generation that seeks  
Who seeks Your face, oh, God of Jacob

Just stretch our hands to God and ask Him that  
Give us clean hands  
And give us pure hearts  
Let us not lift our souls to another  
Give us clean hands, oh, God  
And give us pure hearts  
Let us not lift our souls to another

Oh, God of Jacob  
The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
And you are the only one and true God

*Chris Tomlin*



## Thursday | March 25

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 24:3–5**

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

**Time of Confession:** Use this prayer and the space to the left to aid in your confession  
O God, in gracious love you promise to care for the creatures of earth; in steadfast love you keep your promise. But we, who so quickly embrace your covenant, just as quickly betray it; we, from whom you desire worship, too often offer only scorn. For making and then keeping your promise in the greatness of your mercy, we sing your praise, Lord; and for accepting and then spurning your covenant in the greatness of our sin, we ask your forgiveness. *Amen.* (WSB, 565)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 23:1–36**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

**Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us

God, we have sinned and we are sorry. We rebel against you for the rightful place in our hearts to rule. Thank you for the work on the cross. Thank you for the ultimate once and for all atonement for sin. Thank you for the victory over sin that the resurrection grants us. We don’t deserve it. We did not earn it. But you gave it to us while we were yet deeply in sin. Thank you for your gift of salvation. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 1 John 3:2–3**

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.



## Friday | March 26

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 32:10–11**

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O God, our great shepherd, you tenderly gather us as lambs, carrying us with your all-embracing love. Yet, like sheep, we wander from you: following our own ways, ignoring your voice, distrusting your provisions. Forgive our stubborn rebellion, our hardened hearts, our lack of trust. Refresh us once again by your quiet waters of mercy and restore our souls by your redeeming love. Guide our paths, that we might follow you more closely. Through Jesus Christ, our good shepherd, we pray. *Amen.* (WSB, 565)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 24:1–28**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**

Jesus, tie us to things that breed faithfulness and obedience in our hearts. We are people who do not follow well. You lead us, but we go our own way. Tie us to the word, the spirit, to each other. Bind us close to your side, knowing we are truly little children who need their Father to show them where to go. Thank you for being our Father. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 2 Timothy 2:21–22**

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.



## **Saturday | March 27**

*“The Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 105:1–4**

Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. Send out your light, send out your truth, and let them lead us to our home. Take from us the weight of our sin, that room might be made for the spirit of truth. If we prepare a dwelling place, that spirit will abide within us, and the truth will set our spirits free. Then shall we love not only in word or in speech; then shall we love in deed and in truth, and by this know that our service is faithful. O Lord, you desire truth in our inward being; teach us wisdom in our secret heart. *Amen.* (WSB, 562)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 24:29–50**

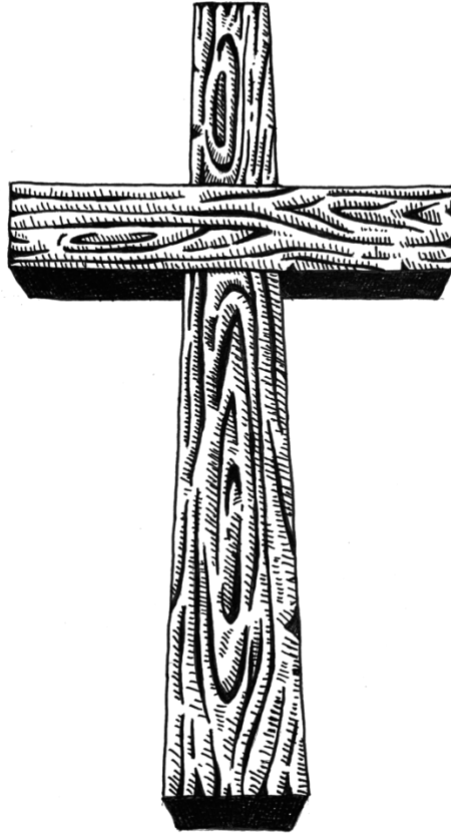
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.**

Jesus we’re not good at assigning glory to the right things. We give our praise and honor to things that don’t deserve it. And we give you only our demands. But you are the **ONLY** one who deserves every breath we take to be poured back in praise to you—the one who made us in the first place. So we pour out our praise to the glory of your kingdom and your power, Lord. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 1 John 1:7**

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.



## **Palm Sunday**

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

# Holy Week

The final week of Jesus' life and ministry has been traditionally called "Holy Week," which marks his entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), the Last Supper with his disciples (Maundy Thursday), his crucifixion (Good Friday), his death (Holy Saturday), and his resurrection (Easter Sunday). In this light, Holy Week, is meant for us to reflect upon Jesus' journey of the cross in order to consider our own participation in his suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The first Sunday of Holy Week is called "Palm Sunday," named after the entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, when his followers welcome him by laying down palm branches and their cloaks, while shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9).

The tragic irony of this initial celebration of Jesus' followers shouting, "Hosanna" is that by the end of the week, the crowd will be shouting, "Crucify him!" As we feel the gravity of this week, let us rightly reflect upon the disposition of our hearts that we may properly receive our King with all loyalty and love.

As it has been the focus throughout this Journey of the Cross, let this Holy Week serve to be a solemn reflection upon the profound truths of the Gospel, in which we are to:

1. Reflect upon the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ
2. Repent of our sin and renew our commitment to follow Christ
3. Remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, let us slow down this week to take in the full weight of the Gospel of Jesus Christ one day at a time.

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<sup>7</sup> *Worship Source Book*, 541.



## **Palm Sunday | March 28**

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 18:6**

In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

### **Time of Thanksgiving:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of thanksgiving

We praise you, O God, for your redemption of the world through Jesus Christ. He entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph and was proclaimed Messiah and King by those who spread garments and branches along his way. Just as we carry these branches, may we follow Christ in the way of the cross, that, dying and rising with him, we may enter into your kingdom, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. *Amen.* (WSB, 583)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12

1. Behold Jesus: What does today's reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God's word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

You've told us to be peacemakers, Jesus, and we confess we often take the opposite role. Forgive us for where we have sown disunity and distrust among the Body of Christ. Forgive us for the ways we have lacked the humility and fought for our own rights and rhythms at all costs. We know that we were bought with a price, that we are not our own anymore. For we have died and our life is hidden in you. Show us how to take the low places today. To rejoice in our identity in you, and forget all the rest. In Jesus' name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** Psalm 117:1–2

Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!



## Monday | March 29

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 27:4–5**

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O King of Glory, we confess that our praise of your majesty has often been faint, our performance as citizens of your kingdom treasonous. For we have surrendered to the enemy by our secret and our known sins. For our treason you died, Lord Jesus. For our restoration, you rose again. Draw us closer to you in this holy week, that our eyes may catch the vision of your tears, and our hearts, the wonder of your grace. By the Holy Spirit’s continuing discipline, let us be loyal and loving servants of the King. Praise be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. (WSB, 586)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 25:1–30**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name**

Jesus, we love you. We love that you are what you are and have always been so. You are holy and we are not. We thank you that in your kindness, you made a way for us to come back to you through your son Jesus. We are not worthy to represent your name, but before the foundations of the world you chose us for yourself, to be not just your servants, but sons and daughters, coheirs with Christ. We don’t deserve anything from you, and yet you gave us everything. Thank you for being our Father. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Romans 8:16–17**

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.





## Beatitudes | Peacemakers

The seventh beatitude is, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (5:9). The term for peace in the Bible does not refer merely to the absence of war, but rather to that which is complete or whole, and thus flourishing. To be one who makes peace means to work actively and diligently to bring about wholeness, health, and reconciliation in relationships. This reconciliation can include the healing of a relationship with one’s own enemies, but it can also refer to the active involvement in helping others achieve restoration in their relationship. Instead of seeking personal retribution for the wrongs done (cf. Matt.5:38–45), the peacemaker seeks to show mercy even to their enemies (Matt. 5:7), while also working to maintaining justice for the oppressed (Matt. 5:6).

To make peace is essential to flourishing as a disciple of Jesus Christ, because it is the very nature and activity of the Kingdom of God—the inbreaking of heaven into earth. The active participation in making peace is to align our lives to the ultimate peacemaker, Jesus Christ, the King over the heavens and the earth. First, Jesus Christ has made peace between God and humanity, reconciling us through his atoning sacrifice on the cross: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him (Col. 1:21–22). Second, Jesus Christ will make peace for the entire cosmos, restoring all things in heaven and on earth, thus making all things whole: “For in [Christ] all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col. 19–20).

As the ultimate peacemaker and reconciler of all things, Jesus Christ demonstrates that he is the true and faithful Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased. For this reason, Jesus tells his followers that the peacemakers flourish because they shall be called sons of God. Through faith in Christ, a disciple enters into the peace that Christ has made between God and humanity on the cross, and through faithfulness to Christ, a disciple anticipates the peace that Christ will make between heaven and earth in the resurrection. Such a person of peace characterizes what it truly means to be called a son of God.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. What are some ways you can seek reconciliation with people with whom there is a strained or even hostile relationship?
2. How can you seek to make peace for others in your family, in your church, or in your community? What are some tangible ways to advocate for others or cultivate unity in the areas where God has placed you?
3. How does the reconciliation Christ has made between you and God inform your inward sense of peace and your outward expression of gratitude? How does the full reconciliation Christ will make between heaven and earth motivate the peace you seek to make today?



## Beatitudes | Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

The eighth beatitude is, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (5:10). Jesus expands upon this beatitude, saying, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:11–12). Jesus’ declaration of the “good life” would have been an absolute shock to the senses to the audience of ancient world as it is to an audience hearing these words today. According to Jesus, to flourish as his faithful disciple is to be persecuted, mistreated, reviled, oppressed. What do we do with this?

First, it is necessary to highlight an important qualifier to those who are persecuted: it must be for righteousness’ sake. To be reviled or mistreated for actions that are evil or foolish is not what Jesus is referring to as being “blessed” (Cf. Peter. 4:13–16). Rather, what Jesus is saying is that the true pursuit of righteousness—the alignment of our life and our loves to the goodness and glory of God—will be met with opposition from the world, from Satan, and even from our old nature (Eph. 2:1–3; Col. 3:5–10). Therefore, to experience persecution because of righteousness, or more specifically, because of Jesus Christ himself (Matt. 5:11) is a confirmation of a flourishing life that is rightly conformed to the love of God.

Second, a disciple who faces persecution for righteousness’ sake and for Christ, demonstrates not only the commitment to God, but also the denial of self, which is a requisite for following Christ: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). The quality of the good life is determined by where we place our ultimate allegiance. If we pledge our loyalty to our self or to the world, we may not face certain persecution, mistreatment, or trials. But if we pledge our loyalty to God, the Bible guarantees it, as Paul states, “For those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

What Jesus puts before us is the good life that is found *only* in him—but it is not without cost. It will indeed cost us everything. However, for those who deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow Jesus, they will receive eternal grace, goodness, and glory with God the Father. They will receive Life Himself: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:25). For those who have counted the cost, theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10).

### Questions for Reflection:

1. How might hardship for the sake of Christ not only strengthen our faith but also empower our witness for Christ?
2. What are ways the church around the world face persecution and hardship today for the sake of Jesus Christ? How can we actively pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters, as we also persevere?
3. How do the sufferings of Christ and how he endured for our sake, motivate and inform our own endurance today?



## Tuesday | March 30

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 31:3–5**

For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O Lord, who on this day entered the rebellious city that later rejected you, we confess that our wills are as rebellious as Jerusalem’s, that our faith is often more show than substance, that our hearts are in need of cleansing. Have mercy on us, Son of David, Savior of our lives. Help us to lay at your feet all that we have and all that we are, trusting you to forgive what is sinful, to heal what is broken, to welcome our praises, and to receive us as your own. *Amen.* (WSB, 586)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 25:31–46**

1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer: Thy Kingdom, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**

Thank you that you gently pry our hands open, taking what is not true treasure and replacing it with what is incorruptible and eternal. We confess our pride and self-sufficiency. We confess that we think we have this under control. But in your mercy you show us a better way. That our sin and twisted ways will find their answers in your holiness. The injustice, the sickness, the homelessness, the deeply sad hopelessness will find their rest in only in you. We cannot fix this. So come Lord Jesus, we’re waiting for you. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Romans 12:14–17**

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.



## Wednesday | March 31

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 46:1–3**

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

Loving God, you rode a donkey and came in peace, humbled yourself and gave yourself for us. We confess our lack of humility. As you entered Jerusalem, the crowds shouted “Hosanna: ‘Save us now!’” On Good Friday they shouted “Crucify!” We confess our praise is often empty. We sing “Hosanna,” but cry “Crucify.” As the crowd laid their palms in front of you, you took no glory for yourself. We confess that we want to be accepted and take the easy way. We do not stay true to your will. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to follow in the way of obedience. *Amen.* (WSB, 586)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 26:1–16**

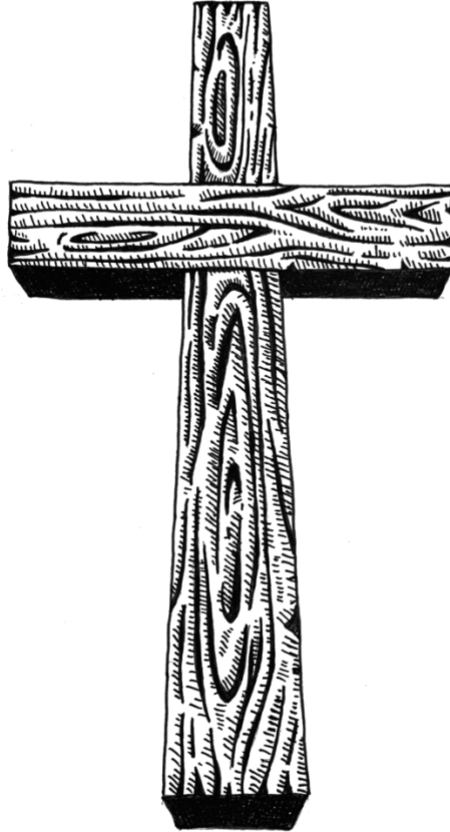
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Praying the Lord’s Prayer:** Give us this day our daily bread

We are your people, God. We need you to remember us as you always have. Will you give us the heart of children who KNOW with certainty that their Father will give them what they need? You know what provision is for us. So we say yes to that. We say yes to whatever you have for us. We’re not good at this, Lord. We don’t trust you like we ought. Help us to see you providing and welcome it exactly how it comes. Build in us grateful, faithful hearts in response to your goodness. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 2 Timothy 3:12**

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.



## Maundy Thursday

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

# Maundy Thursday

Maundy Thursday commemorates Jesus' last night with his disciples in the upper room, where they observe the Passover meal together right before his arrest and crucifixion (Matthew 26:20–35). This day is called “Maundy Thursday” after the “new mandate”<sup>8</sup> Jesus gives to his disciples: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (Jn. 13:34). On this night with his disciples, Jesus performs two significant acts that express the heart of his ministry to his people, demonstrating the love with which he loved his own who were in the world—loving them to the end (Jn. 13:1).

The first act is Jesus washing his disciples' feet (Jn. 13:1–11). The Gospel of John describes this remarkable act of humble service in intricate detail. After arising from supper, “he laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him” (Jn. 13:4–5). Even with the greatest act to ever be accomplished in human history before him, Jesus, the Son of God and Messianic King, was in no rush or hurry, but took his time to demonstrate his steadfast love for his disciples by humbly washing their feet. With such a humble and gracious act to those undeserving, Jesus is teaching his followers that they are to love humbly and graciously to all people.

The second act is Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26–29). The Lord's Supper is a sacrament performed by the Church to commemorate the death of Christ. It is an outward sign of the inward grace of our union with Christ, which signifies all the benefits of the New Covenant applied to his people. As his Church, we eat of the bread and drink of the wine in the Lord's Supper to identify with Christ in his death, to profess the Lordship of Christ in our lives, and to commune with the Body of Christ at the table. All of this is done in remembrance of Christ, who, in the greatest demonstration of love, poured out his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).

Shortly after this meal, while Jesus was praying in the garden to the Father, he was betrayed and abandoned by his friends, unjustly arrested, falsely accused, viciously beaten, shamefully cursed, and led to his execution. All of which was done out of his love for the Father and his love for you.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How does Jesus' washing the disciples' feet demonstrate the proper expression of love? How does it anticipate his work on the cross?
2. What are ways you can demonstrate your love for others in the same way that Jesus expressed his love for the disciples?
3. How has the Lord demonstrated his love for you on the cross? How has the Lord demonstrated his love for you today?

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<sup>8</sup> *Mandatum* is the Latin word for “mandate” or “command.”



## **Maundy Thursday | April 1**

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 109:26–28**

Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love! Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it! Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad!

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

Eternal God, whose covenant with us is never broken: We confess that we have failed to fulfill your will for us. We betray our neighbors, desert our friends, and run in fear when we should be loyal. Though you have bound yourself to us, we have not bound ourselves to you. God, have mercy on us weak and willful people. Lead us once again to your table, and unite us to Christ, who is the bread of life and the vine from which we grow in grace. To Christ be praise forever. *Amen.* (WSB, 598)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 26:17–56**

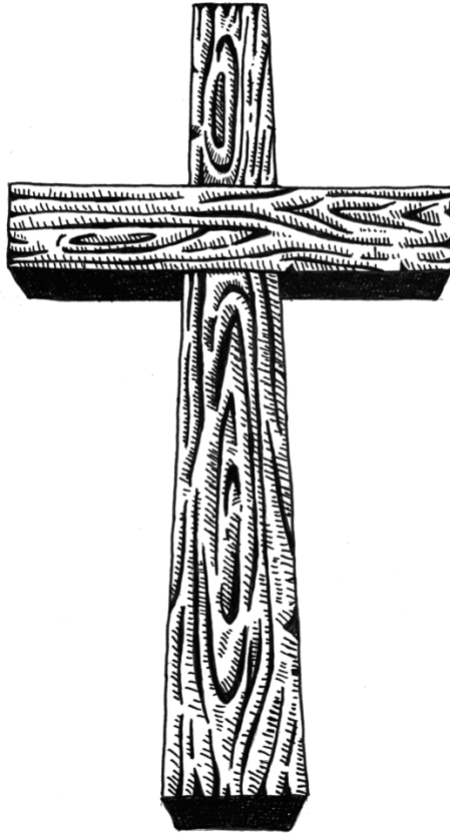
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Father, on this day we celebrate that final feast in the upper room that signaled the sacrifice for atonement of sins once and for all. The last Passover and the first celebration of the Lord’s Supper. You gathered your dearest followers around you, even knowing one would betray you, and you washed their feet as a servant. What kind of God does that? You do, Jesus. You did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or worked towards, and yet you humbled yourself here and even more so at the cross. We love you and praise you. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Philippians 1:28–19**

Do not be frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.



## **Good Friday**

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*



# Good Friday

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” – Isaiah 53:3

“He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.” – Matthew 27:42

This is the truly appalling nature of Christ’s suffering and death, the sheer injustice of it all. Having been betrayed, beaten, ridiculed, and sentenced to death, Jesus is turned over to be crucified. Rejected by the people he came to save, Jesus is released into the hands of their oppressors.

The day that marks this somber occasion is designated good because of what resulted from this unspeakable transgression, namely, the atonement of sin through a blameless and perfect sacrifice. On the cross, Jesus bore the full wrath of God for the sins of humanity. In his death, he endured that which all humanity experiences because of sin: separation from the Father. Read Jesus’ final words from the cross and pause to remember your life before salvation.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Dying a sinner’s death, though he committed no sin, the King of creation became accursed, hung on a tree to bear the full weight of God’s punishment. It was on this tree that God demonstrated his greatest act of love for humanity. By sacrificing his own Son for those who were his enemies, God made it possible for you and me to be reconciled to God. This is the scandal and travesty of the cross: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Shedding his glory, power, and authority to fulfill the will of God, Jesus entered the world and willingly died that we may live. Grieve his death but rejoice in the love and grace of God none could merit.



## Good Friday | April 2

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord:** Psalm 121:1–2

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

### **Time of Confession:** Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession

O Christ, out of your fullness we have all received grace upon grace. You are our eternal hope; you are patient and full of mercy; you are generous to all who call upon you. Save us, Lord. O Christ, fountain of life and holiness, you have taken away our sins. On the cross you were wounded for our transgressions and were bruised for our iniquities. Save us, Lord. O Christ, obedient unto death, source of all comfort, our life and our resurrection, our peace and reconciliation: Save us, Lord. O Christ, Savior of all who trust you, hope of all who die for you, and joy of all the saints: Save us, Lord. Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us. Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us. Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us peace. *Amen.* (WSB, 562–3).

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection:** Matthew 27:1–56

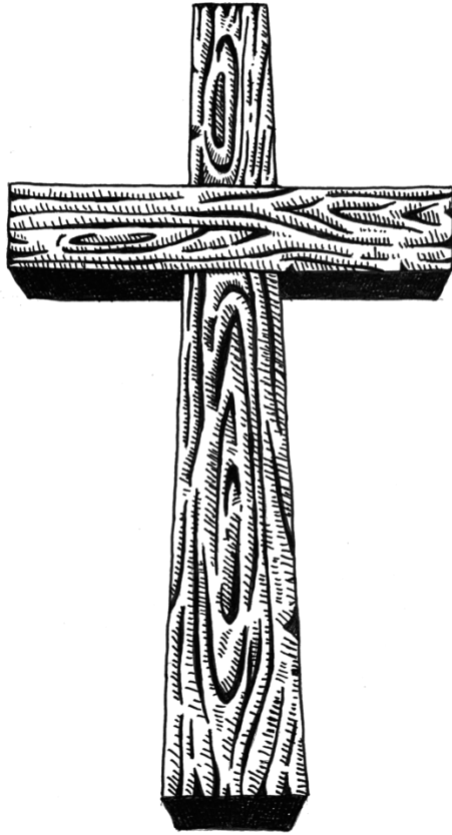
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

While we were still weak, at exactly the right time, you died for the ungodly, Jesus (Romans 5). We are the ungodly, Father and we confess we know full well we did not and do not deserve this salvation you so freely and painfully purchased on our behalf. For the joy set before you, you endured the cross, despising its shame (Hebrews 12:2), and accomplished what you set out to do. Hallelujah! what a Savior! Thank you, Father, for sending your own son to make a way that we could become your sons and daughters. Thank you for loving us beyond our comprehension. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom:** 1 Peter 3:14–15

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.



## **Holy Saturday**

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Book of Common Prayer*

# Holy Saturday

“I believe in Jesus Christ....He descended to the dead.”

*Apostle's Creed*

Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. For it says: “When He ascended on high, He took prisoners into captivity; He gave gifts to people.” But what does “He ascended” mean except that *He descended to the lower parts of the earth?* The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.

*Ephesians 4:7–10*

Today is traditionally called Holy Saturday. For many of us, we may not know quite what to do on the day between when Christ was crucified (Good Friday) and when he was raised from the dead (Easter Sunday). What was Christ doing, if anything, on that Saturday? And if we know, what does that have to do with our lives as Christians?

In Ephesians 4:10, it says that Jesus “descended to *the lower parts of the earth.*” Some take this descent “to lower parts of the earth” as reference to Christ's incarnation, that is, his descent from the heavenly realm to the earth. However, according to the traditional teachings of the Church as articulated in the *Apostle's Creed*, this phrase has been understood to mean that Christ descended into the realm of the dead.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when Christ died, he went to a place where the dead spirits were kept, what the Old Testament calls, *Sheol*. And from there, as the quotation from Ephesians suggests, Jesus led the captives free into the heavenly realm. These captives are the saints of the Old Testament.

Paul's reasoning in Ephesians 4 for the fullness of Christ's ascent into the heavenly realm begins with descent into the realm of the dead. This is what Holy Saturday is all about. Holy Saturday is about Christ's full redemption of the human condition. Our human condition, one marred by our own sin and the sin of our ancestral parents, has made it so that Death hangs over each of us with its desire to extinguish all hope. Salvation is still left incomplete when Christ atones for all the sins of the world on the cross. Humanity's mortal enemy, Death, still remains, holding humanity captive. The full human experience is experienced by Christ when he subjects himself to Death on Holy Saturday, so that he might with his divinity claim victory over our final enemy. This dark day, where Death reigns, is finally broken with the first light of the resurrection on Easter Sunday and continues until Christ has delivered us into the heavens. By subjugating even Death to his Kingship, Christ thus “fills all things” and restores hope to our helpless state (Eph 4:10).

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<sup>9</sup> When the phrase, “lower parts of the earth” occurs in the Greek translation of the Old Testament it typically refers to the realm of the dead. See Numbers 16:30, 33; Psalm 139:8; and Isaiah 14:11 for comparisons. For more on the use of “he descended to the lower parts of the earth,” see, Matthew Y. Emerson, “*He Descended to the Dead*”: *An Evangelical Theology of Holy Saturday* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 39–47.

As we reflect on Christ's descent to the dead this Holy Saturday, we look forward to the remembrance of His eternal victory in the resurrection, so that we may say with Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55–57). Reflect on God's gift, that even on the darkest of days, the light of his victory has dawned.



## **Holy Saturday | April 3**

*“The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take two whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 131:1–2**

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

### **Time of Confession: Use this prayer to aid in your time of confession**

O Christ, by remaining faithful till death, you show us the road to greater love. O Christ, by taking the burden of sin upon yourself, you reveal to us the way of generosity. O Christ, by praying for those who crucified you, you lead us to forgive without counting the cost. O Christ, by opening paradise to the repentant thief, you awaken hope in us. O Christ, come and help our weak faith. O Christ, create a pure heart in us; renew and strengthen our spirit. O Christ, your Word is near; may it live within us and protect us always. *Amen.* (WSB, 570)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 27:57–66**

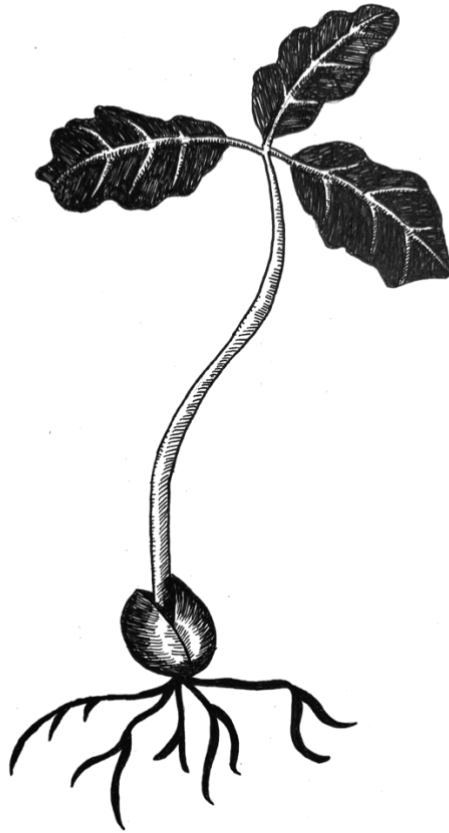
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

Jesus, thank you that your death and resurrection dealt the fatal blow to sin and death’s grip on us. You’ve made a way for us, as you always have, but this time it’s a once and for all way to a new life, a new name, a new purpose, and a new future. We rejoice that though the shadow of death still hangs heavy on the earth, and we feel it, Lord, there is a day coming when the light of your face will dawn once and for all and every tear will be wiped away for good. In the meantime, we’re so grateful that you give us rest and respite and joy even in the midst of the deeply troubling and difficult seasons. Come quickly, Lord Jesus. In Jesus’ name, *Amen.*

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: 1 Peter 4:12–13**

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.



## **Easter Sunday**

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

*Book of Common Prayer*

# Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday marks the greatest day the world has ever known. It is the most glorious day for the Church; the most significant day for all of humanity; the most beautiful day for all of creation. To regard it as any less is to underestimate its gravity for our life today and underappreciate its glory for our life to come. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the sunrise of our existence. Its light has broken into the prevailing darkness, illuminating the new creation that abounds before us in truth, goodness, and beauty. Easter Sunday is the culmination of the entire year, for it is the culmination for all human history—all previous days lead up to its celebration and all subsequent days flow out of it. Let us thus celebrate this day in proportion to what it actually means for our lives.

The resurrection reveals three blessed truths that should orient our heart to celebrate his grace, goodness, and glory:

First, Jesus has defeated death. Paul says that Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). To “abolish” death means that Jesus has defeated it, rendered it useless, taken away its power. Without the defeat of death through Jesus’ resurrection, our faith would be futile and we would still be in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17–18). But because Jesus has conquered death, our faith has meaning and our sins are fully atoned, for Christ Jesus is the victorious king who has successfully ransomed all those who put their trust in him.

Second, Jesus has prepared a full resurrected life for us for eternity. Although there are people throughout Scripture who died and were “brought back to life” (i.e., Lazarus), what happens with Jesus is entirely different. Jesus’ resurrection is an altogether different category. Whereas Lazarus was brought back to life only to die later on, Jesus’ resurrection signifies a new body designed to flourish in the New Heavens and the New Earth. And this new resurrected body is what is in store for all those whose “citizenship is in heaven,” for from it “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20–21). For this reason, Jesus’ resurrection is called the “First Fruits” of the new creation (1 Cor. 15:20), for which we await our becoming fully human like Jesus Christ for all eternity. This is the hope to which we have been called.



Third, Jesus has called us live in light of the resurrection today. The essential hope of followers of Jesus is not merely “go to heaven” when we die. Undoubtedly, to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord at death is a comfort, but it is not our ultimate goal for life. Our true aim is to participate fully in God’s reconciliation of Heaven and Earth, where we may faithfully worship God in perfect fellowship in the final resurrection. What this means for us today is that all that we do here and now in this life *anticipates* what we will do in the life to come. After all of Paul’s reflection on the significance of our resurrection with Christ he gives the Church a most practical exhortation for how we are to live *today*: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (I Cor. 15:58). The resurrection means that *all* labor that is devoted to the Lord, here and now, is meaningful. As N.T. Wright explains,

What you *do* in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—*will last into God’s future*. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether... They are part of what we may call *building for God’s kingdom*.<sup>10</sup>

The reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us hope for our future glory with the Lord just as it gives us meaning for our work unto the Lord today.

But today, as long as it is called “today,” let us rejoice and celebrate and feast, for the Lord is risen.

He is risen indeed.

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<sup>10</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 193.



## **Easter Sunday | April 4**

*“He is not here, for he has risen.”*

*Use this guide of prayer, in whole or in part, as the Lord leads you.*

### **Silence and Stillness**

Take three whole minutes of complete silence and stillness to prepare your heart, soul, and mind to meet with the Lord. Adjust to a posture of surrender and allow yourself to be attentive to his love. Linger there.

### **Call to Worship the Lord: Psalm 23:1–3**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

### **Time of Thanksgiving:** Use this prayer and the space to the left to aid in your thanksgiving

Eternal God, we praise you that your glory has dawned on us and brought us into this day of resurrection. We rejoice that the grave could not hold your Son and that he has conquered death, risen to rule over all powers of this earth. We praise you that he summons us into new life, to follow him with joy and gladness. By your Spirit lift us from doubt and despair and set our feet in Christ’s holy way, that our lives may be signs of his life and that all we have may show forth his love. Praise, glory, and thanksgiving to you, our God, forever and ever. *Amen.* (WSB, 645–46)

### **Scripture Reading and Reflection: Matthew 28:1–20**

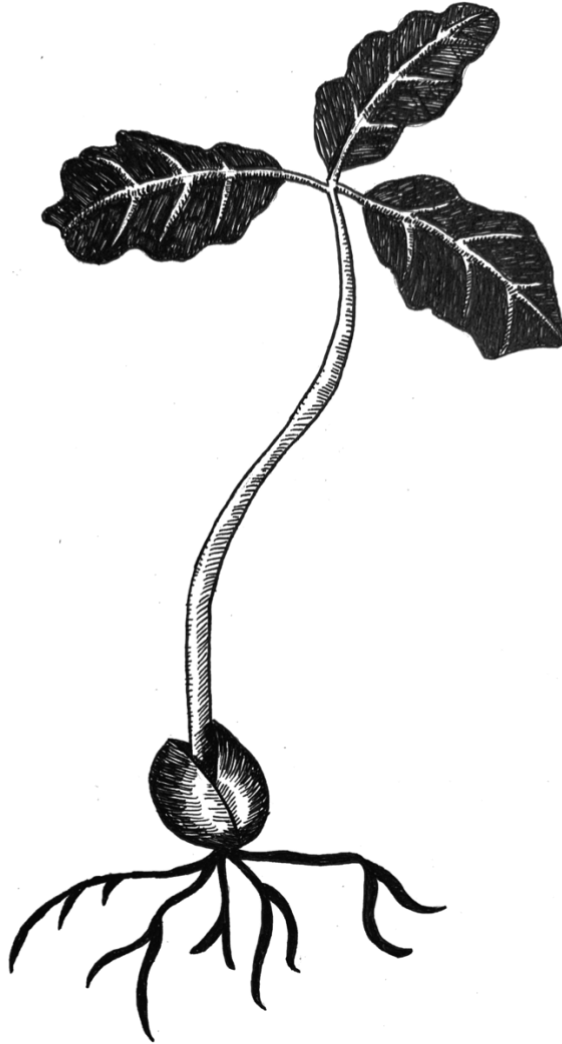
1. Behold Jesus: What does today’s reading tell us about Jesus?
2. Live for Jesus: How should we respond to God’s word today?

### **Prayer of Adoration**

You are the resurrection and the life. Death could not hold you, Jesus. You finished the work that was required to make a way for your creation to come back to the Father and you walked out of that grave victorious. Enthroned. The Servant King who had come to take away the sins of the world and then did exactly what you said you would. The chasm was breached and our way to the Father was secured, once and for all. You are risen, and that changes everything, God. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

### **Commission to Serve the Lord and his Kingdom: Psalm 150:1–2**

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!



Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

Isaiah 26:19

## **Appendix I: Finding our Place in the Story of the Gospel**

Stories are an essential part of who we are as humans. At the most basic level, we are constantly engaged in a wide range of stories, whether it is streaming a tv series online, immersing ourselves in an engrossing novel, or even interacting on social media. Stories, however, are more fundamental in their significance and are more formative in their substance, for they give shape to how we understand the world in which we live, and move, and have our being. It is within the framework of narrative that our beliefs, actions, and desires are given meaning, which in turn reinforces the narrative we are living out day to day. It thus makes sense that we are so drawn to stories, because life itself is an immersive drama in which we take part.

Whether we realize it or not, the world is constantly offering a variety of powerful stories that attempt to sell us a vision of the “good life” in order to form the way we believe, act, and love. For example, the narrative of consumerism tells us that the “good life” is characterized by having more and more possessions, which not only informs our understanding of happiness, but forms the way we live our lives. If we are not careful, we may be living out a story offering cheap happiness, while only giving despair.

But by his grace, God has revealed the true story of our lives through his Word that counteracts the narratives the world has to offer. In Scripture, we are presented with the meta-narrative arc of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration: In the beginning, God created a good world, in which humanity, made in his image, was to represent the gracious reign of the Creator by causing the world to flourish and filling the world with his glory (Creation). Yet, the very creatures who were to represent God’s gracious rule, rebelled against their Creator, wreaking havoc on themselves and on the world (Fall). Because of this rebellion, humanity’s relationship with God, the world, and each other, is broken, leaving all of creation groaning for reconciliation with the Creator. But God in his rich mercy, sent his only Son to live out the story we could not, bringing reconciliation through his life, death, and resurrection (Redemption). Those who place their faith in Jesus Christ and are being formed by this story of the Gospel, faithfully proclaim the glory of God as they wait for the Creator and Redeemer to make all things new (Restoration).

The true story of the Gospel revealed in Scripture is the “good life” offered to us. It is in this grand story in which our individual stories make sense and find their proper place; and inasmuch as we immerse ourselves in this ultimate story, we faithfully bear witness to the author and finisher of our faith. Yet, to immerse ourselves in this story does not mean to merely assent to the basic premises of Scripture (though that is essential), but to fully embody these truths in how we live our lives. We embody these truths in and through the daily habits (such as prayer, reading scripture, witnessing), weekly practices (such as the gathering as the corporate body of Christ to worship), and yearly rhythms (such as observing the seasons of Christmas and Easter). This is why as a church we are committed to these Gospel-shaped rhythms to form us as a people who exist to be a people who enjoy the glory of God, equip the people of God, and extend the love of God. We pray and hope that by God’s grace and for his glory this guide will contribute to the alignment of our hearts, souls, and minds that we may live out the story of the Gospel to the glory of Christ, our King.

## **Appendix 2: Praying the Lord’s Prayer**

In the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus responds with what is known as the “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9–13). In many ways, it is a comprehensive prayer, spanning from the desire to see God’s Kingdom fully manifest to the basic need of our daily provision of bread. For this reason, our church fathers, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin utilized this “prayer of prayers” as a guide for their prayers to God. Following this wise and humble approach, we have provided a basic framework by which you may pray through the Lord’s Prayer.

The following takes each line of the Lord’s Prayer and provides a particular focus along with a key passage to help guide your time in prayer. We have also provided an example prayer for each line.

### **“Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Your Name”**

Focus: Humbly and confidently address God as our Father, recognizing that this relationship is only possible through the atoning work of His Son Jesus Christ. Glorify God by revering His Name above all Names.

Passage to Pray: Ephesians 1:3–6; John 1:9–13; Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:12–17; Proverbs 3:11–12; 1 John 3:1–3; Isaiah 6:1–13; Psalm 97

### **“Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done, On Earth as it is in Heaven”**

Focus: Declare your desire that God’s Kingdom would come, asking that God would manifest his reign in every part of the world and every part of our soul, where we see every type of sin, injustice, and evil. Pray that by his grace God would align our will to His, that we would see the uniting of heaven and earth, and that by the power of the Spirit we would contribute to the coming of his Kingdom.

Passages to Pray: Psalm 145:1–3; Zechariah 14:9; Psalm 93; Matthew 26:36–46; Luke 12:32–34; Colossians 3:1–4; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Revelation 21:1–5a

### **“Give us This Day our Daily Bread”**

Focus: Pray that God would provide all that you need for the day, recognizing your absolute dependence upon Him for all things at all times. Pray also for God’s provision of others, since we are to pray for “our” daily bread.

Passages to Pray: Philippians 4:6–7, 19; Psalm 34; Psalm 104; 1 Peter 5:6–7; Matthew 6:26; Matthew 7:7–11; 1 Timothy 2:1; Ephesians 6:18

## **“Forgive us our Trespasses as we Forgive those who Trespass Against Us”**

Focus: Confess your sins that you have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed; for what you have done and for what you have left undone. In light of God’s forgiveness granted to you because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, offer forgiveness for those who have sinned against you.

Passages to Pray: Psalm 51:1–4; Psalm 103:8–13; 1 John 1:5–10; Daniel 9:16–19; Colossians 3:12–13; Matthew 6:14–15; Ephesians 4:1–2, 31–32

## **“Lead us not into Temptation but Deliver us from Evil”**

Focus: Pray for God’s protection in your life from evil in this world, from the evil within, and from the evil one. Also take time to pray for God’s protection in the lives of others.

Passages to Pray: 1 Corinthians 10:12–13; Psalm 20; Psalm 23; Isaiah 41:10–13; Ephesians 6:10–18; 2 Thessalonians 3:1–5; James 1:12–15

## **“For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power, the Glory, Forever and Ever. Amen”**

Focus: Proclaim, rejoice, and take heart in the truth that the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory belong to God. Glorify God for who He is and for what He does. With your “amen” submit all your requests to God, trusting in His infinite wisdom that He will respond according to His glory and for our ultimate good.

Passages to Pray: 1 Chronicles 29:10b–13; Psalm 27; Job 26:7–14; Isaiah 40:12–17; Ephesians 1:17–21; Romans 11:36; Psalm 106:48; Revelation 7:9–12

ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα·  
αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας,  
ἀμήν.

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