



GLORY

HOLY WEEK:
PRAYER & MEDITATION SPACE

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GRACE CHAPEL

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GLORY: MEDITATIONS FOR LENT 2023

In John's gospel we read that God's glory—the glory the heavens declare, the glory that surrounded the shepherds of Bethlehem, the glory that once filled the tabernacle as a cloud—came and lived among real, ordinary people. More than simply honor or greatness, glory is God's presence; and prior to the coming of Jesus, that glory was either too much for a human to behold, or took an abstract form.

But at Jesus' birth, God's glory—his presence—came to earth to dwell. John and his companions testify that they have seen this glory, looked straight at it, and they're ready to describe it.

John records that Jesus himself often spoke about glory, too—where does it come from, who has it, and why? In the dusty streets of Galilee, in humble villages and unlikely ways, the Son of God taught about glory—in his humility as well as his power.

Use this meditation series to take a closer and deeper look at Jesus living among us, as we say alongside the writer John:

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY.



MEDITATION ONE:
GLORY IN OUR MIDST



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MEDITATION ONE: GLORY IN OUR MIDST



The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. - JOHN 1:14

Your team winning the biggest game. Seeing an incredible artist, live. A hero's bravery in a dangerous situation. The award for a world-changing medical or scientific idea. An experience of glory is something you don't forget.

Glory is a greatness that endures—a story worth telling, an impact that matters.

In the Bible's Old Testament, God's glory was also a byword for his presence. People couldn't see God, but during the Exodus his presence led them as a cloud. His glory filled the tabernacle, and everyone had to wait outside. When God's glory passed by, God hid Moses behind a rock.

But one night outside Bethlehem, God's glory shone around a group of shepherds as angels declared "Glory in the highest!" And in the nearby town a baby's cry announced that God's glory had come down low—that the Word of God, who has been with God since the beginning of all things (John 1:1), who helped create the world itself, had become a human—had come to live on earth. And his name would be called Emmanuel: *God with us*.

For one, brief, human lifetime, Jesus Christ walked among ordinary people, and one of them was named John. John wrote a book about it, so that people who hadn't been there might believe that Jesus was God's son, and by believing,

have life (John 20:30-31). In chapter 1, John declares: *we have seen his glory*. We looked straight at it. We watched it, day in and day out. And John wants to describe it—for us.

Jesus' glory manifested in dramatic and humble ways. He walked on water, but he also spent a lot of time on dusty roads. He taught, and he fielded criticism. He healed sickness, but he and his disciples weren't spared life's frustrations and inequities.

Is everyday life glorious? Maybe it can be—if Jesus is with us. Throughout Lent, this series of meditations will look at the glory John saw, and the glory Jesus himself described, to find a deeper understanding of the presence of God with us.

Today: What comes to mind when you think about "glory"? Is it something you dream of for yourself? Is it something you associate with other people? If you think about God, what do you picture? Can you think of a time when you've experienced glory? What made that moment glorious?

To describe God's glory is to know about God himself—just as Jesus teaches about himself through the I AM statements in the book of John. (You can learn more about these in Grace Chapel's Lent teaching series.)

Read John 1:1-18. Ask God to open your eyes to his glory in everyday life.

MEDITATION TWO:
THE GLORY OF KNOWING WHO YOU ARE



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There are two Johns in the book of John—the author, and John the Baptist. John the Baptist attracted attention as his following grew, to the point where the Jews in Jerusalem sent a delegation of priests to investigate the rumors (John 1:19-23).

“Who are you?” they asked. And John replied: “I am not the Christ.”

They asked again: “Who, then? Are you Elijah?”

And John replied: “I am not.” After John further answered “no” to the question of if he was the Prophet, his visitors became exasperated.

“Who are you?” they demanded. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us! What do you say about yourself?”

John had answered all their questions in the negative. His visitors complained that he hadn’t given any information—but it seems like John thought he had. He had given a very critical piece of information: *I’m not him.*

Whether they know it or not, his guests are looking for Jesus. And John says: *I’m not your Messiah. But I know him.*

Six chapters later, Jesus is teaching in the temple, and his audience marvels that he seems so learned, despite lacking the proper earthly credentials. In response, Jesus talks about glory.

“The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory,” Jesus says (John 7:18). “But the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true.”

John finally identifies himself as a voice—“the voice of one crying in the wilderness”—a messenger, rather than the message itself. John’s authority comes from knowing on whose behalf he speaks, whom he represents. When we can remember the same, we gain credibility from outside ourselves, and we remember to whom glory really belongs.

Ultimately, the people in our life are looking for Jesus. **When we remember whom we represent, we stay true to our identity.** We know the liberating truth of who we are, and who we’re not.

On whose authority do you speak? Whose glory do you desire—in your workplace, in your home, in your school or church?

Today: Say out loud to yourself: “I’m not him.” How does that feel? Is it a relief; is it confusing; is it frustrating? When we know who God is, we also know who we are. Ask God to make you more grounded in your identity. Think or pray about your identity before also saying out loud, like John: “I can be a voice.”

MEDITATION THREE:
GLORY IN THE HARD THINGS



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You might be familiar with the story of Lazarus—because of its ending. But its beginning could be a chapter from our own lives: a family, connected to each other and to Jesus by love. Sickness. Fear. Worry, and prayer.

Now a certain man was ill. In chapter 11 of John’s gospel, the man is named Lazarus. His two sisters send word to Jesus, their friend: “Lord, the one you love is ill.”

When Jesus hears it, he says: “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

But Lazarus dies. Jesus seems to delay. And by the time he makes his way to town, Lazarus is in a tomb. The dead man’s family greets Jesus with mixed emotions.

Martha runs to him and cries: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Mary rises from her grief, she says the same thing. *You could have changed this.* Deeply moved, Jesus grieves alongside them—causing onlookers to whisper: *If he opened the eyes of a blind man, couldn’t he have done something here?*

Jesus hears and feels it all—the pain, the grumbling, the frustration and doubt.

“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” Jesus says. “Lazarus, come out.” And, as you probably know, Lazarus does.

The story of Lazarus is amazing—but it’s also difficult to understand. The ending doesn’t seem to match our endings. Jesus seems to know the whole thing from the beginning and claims that Lazarus’ sickness is for the glory of God. Is that the kind of glory we want in our life?

Where do hardship and glory intersect? Does one magnify the other? Are we willing to allow difficulty in our lives to be a place for God’s glory to shine?

When their brother died, Mary and Martha needed a light in their darkness. Their questions and their pain were part of the experience of glory that unfolded in Bethany that day. In a dramatic yet simple way, the Lazarus story reminds us that life is hard—and that Jesus cares. It reminds us to keep believing that we will see his glory, though perhaps not in the time or way we imagined.

Through their tears, the people see a miracle—a miracle that causes many to believe. Jesus’ words prove true. God’s glory shows up in such a powerful way that for a man named Lazarus, death itself is undone. And like the similarities, the implications of Lazarus’ story extend far beyond one family.

Today: Where do you see glory in the story of Lazarus? What encouragement do you take from it, and what do you find hard to understand? Think of a dark situation in your life, or the life of someone you love. Ask God to help you see this situation with his eyes. Pray that you will see something new—that you will see his glory.

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MEDITATION FOUR:

THE GLORY THAT COMES FROM MEN



MEDITATION FOUR: THE GLORY THAT COMES FROM MEN



Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. - JOHN 12:42-43

If you think Jesus is a divisive figure today, you have a good glimpse into how he was perceived as his ministry progressed during his time on earth. The things he was doing and saying were impossible to ignore, and everyone had an opinion.

But John gives us a startling insight in chapter 12 of his book: many people believed in Jesus but wouldn't publicly admit it. Or maybe this isn't surprising—but the reason John gives should have us all doing a gut check. These were real people who believed in Jesus, but loved human glory more than God's glory.

John is telling us that there are situations that have the symptoms of glory: Status (in this case, status in the synagogue). Wealth. Comfort. A massive following on social media. Beauty. Powerful friends. Influence.

But this glossy, seductive appearance of glory isn't the kind of glory Jesus modeled. He had followers. He had influence—more influence than anyone understood! Yet he avoided using any of that to gain worldly currency for himself. He continually pointed to his Father as the only source of genuine, lasting glory.

In his letter to the Philippians (2:5-7), Paul wrote about this aspect of Jesus' character:

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant..."

In the kingdom of God, glory can look like humility. It can look like obedience, like serving others—it can even look like suffering. It can sound like passing the praise to the Father rather than accepting it for ourselves. In a have-it-all world, this is a reminder we need.

What kind of glory do you love?

Today: Lent is traditionally a season for reflection. Slow down for long enough to ask yourself what you really want in life. It's a big question! But it's worth asking if the things that come to mind are symptoms—accessories—of glory, or things like glory and joy themselves. Are the things we crave the things that come from God, or things that come from men?

MEDITATION FIVE: HOW TO GIVE GLORY

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him: "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." - JOHN 9:24-26

When Jesus gives a blind man sight on the Sabbath, he sparks a heated controversy. The newly-sighted man is called before both his neighbors and the Pharisees to explain what happened; and after his parents give a nervous "don't-ask-us" answer, the man is summoned a second time. "He will speak for himself," the parents say in verse 21. And the man does.

While everyone around him debates the legitimacy of his healing, and the morality of the person who performed it, the man whose sight is restored is fixed on one thing: what he knows. "I went and washed and received my sight," he says. "I was blind, and now I see."

The Pharisees instruct him to give glory to God by discrediting Jesus—something that isn't possible; Jesus and his Father are inseparable. Confounding his audience, the man *does* give glory to God—by sticking to what he knows is true.

When we don't know everything, we give glory to God by honestly sharing what God has done for us.

The man boldly continues to challenge the religious leaders and their flawed arguments, until they insult him one final time and send him on his way. Hearing of the exchange, Jesus seeks the man out, and asks him: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"



He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. - JOHN 9:36-38

In the first words of John chapter 9, Jesus sees the blind man. By the end of the chapter, the man has seen Jesus. And it's the religious elite who are left asking, "Are we blind also?"

Today: What is the one thing that you know? What is the most true, clear statement about the difference Jesus has made in your life? When we speak those words, we give glory to God—regardless of our imperfect understanding, and regardless of the intent of others.

Do you ever hear a little bit of Pharisee in your heart? Have you caught yourself feeling judgmental about something God did for someone else? Bring those thoughts to Jesus, too, and ask him to give you a bigger vision for what he's doing.

When we give God the glory he is due, we keep our spiritual vision clear.

MEDITATION SIX: IN THE LIGHT OF GLORY



The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting: "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the king of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him. - JOHN 12:42-43

Have you ever been to a huge music festival, especially in the pre-smartphone era? Picture crowds of people descending on a town—excited, curious, ready for something to happen. Without technology, the only way to find your friends is with your eyes; the only way to spread news is by talking. The only way to have the experience is to be there.

This is the buzz in the run-up to Passover in Jerusalem. It's a significant event any year, but this year there's something in the air. A man named Lazarus has been raised from his tomb—and the man who did the miracle is on his way to the Holy City. Jesus' disciples are caught up in the moment, in the crowd, in a sequence of events they don't understand. Things are happening fast, and there's no pause button now.

From Palm Sunday onward, Jesus' disciples are swept along by the wave: It rises high, as Jesus is recognized and praised as king. It crashes dramatically as their fellowship fractures at the Last Supper, leading to Jesus' arrest, torture, and death. And then, just when everything seems to be at the lowest, emptiest, most confusing point—Jesus returns, in glory.

And in the light of that glory—Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit—**things make sense**. Pieces fall into place; the disciples realize that God's plan had been playing out before their eyes, but they couldn't see what it meant. Until glory.

Sometimes we're all caught up in the waves, in the crowd, in events we can't understand. Our brightest days can be followed by dark disappointment. When that happens to you, remember Palm Sunday, and picture yourself among the disciples. God's plan is unfolding all around us—and his glory will ultimately illuminate it.

Today: Can you look back on your life and see God's hand in events that didn't make sense as you lived them? Are you experiencing disappointment or frustration in a situation you can't control or understand?

Remember these words from the passage above: "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt."

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GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION: GLORY WITHOUT END



GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION: GLORY WITHOUT END



"Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ...I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." - JOHN 12:12-16

If you have a Bible where the words of Jesus appear in color, Jesus literally lights up John 14-17. In his last night on earth Jesus speaks and prays urgently, culminating in what is known as the "high priestly prayer."

In this prayer, and in the actions that follow it, Jesus takes on the role of the Jerusalem priest who each year on the day of atonement would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the nation.

In Jesus' prayer, we hear the themes of glory and eternity intertwined, almost in a circular way. Jesus has glorified the Father; the Father will glorify him. But although the glory will manifest in new, earth-shaking ways, that glory has never been absent. Jesus has never been without it. Glory has been his since before there was time, and it will be his forever.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. HEBREWS 13:8

He is the same. This is true on Good Friday, Resurrection Sunday, and any other day. Jesus on Good Friday is Jesus on Easter morning. He is unchanging—and so even as we recall the grief and violence of Jesus' death, as we are aware of the

sin in our world that causes grief and violence now, we can exhale. We can be secure, because *it is finished*.

On Good Friday we mourn everything that is broken. We mourn the things we have personally broken—with sinful actions, words, and thoughts. We mourn the ways humanity has collectively broken God's beautiful creation. We mourn the broken body of Jesus.

But we remember that even in death, Jesus displayed his glory.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said: "Truly this man was the Son of God." - MARK 15:37-39

Today: Keep Jesus in your mind today. If it helps, bring to your mind a picture of Jesus on the cross, maybe a representation you've seen in a church or museum or film. Say to yourself: Truly, this man was the Son of God.

Perhaps you're familiar with these words from a liturgical prayer: Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.

**THIS IS GLORY WITHOUT END.
AMEN.**

MEDITATION SEVEN:

THE GLORY OF LOVE



MEDITATION SEVEN: THE GLORY OF LOVE



"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one..... Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." - JOHN 17:20-24

Love drives glory.

Because of love, the Father glorifies the Son; because of love, the Son glorifies the Father. Jesus prays that his followers will understand how much *they* are loved by the Father—and because of love, he gives his glory to them.

Jesus' prayer is for us—anyone, anywhere who believes the message of Jesus' disciples, followers, and friends, handed down through the generations on a journey that began when Mary Magdalene's feet ran from the tomb on Easter morning, carrying the message: *I have seen the Lord*.

We are called to oneness with anyone, anywhere in the world today who is celebrating and believing that message—because Jesus' resurrection rises above everything else, and because our love for one another tells the world that we belong to him (John 13:34-35).

Jesus' love led him to the cross, to the grave, and back again, each step magnifying his glory. His unwavering love offers us confidence not only in the face of death, but to face our lives. His glory inspires us to work together, and to love one another.

Easter morning celebrates Jesus' glory and his love—as inseparable as he and his Father. Happy Easter: He is risen! We are loved, and we are invited to be with Jesus where he is—forever.

During Lent we've spent time in the book of John, and this is how it ends:

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. - JOHN 21:25

Today, walk away from the tomb, and add to the stories of Jesus' glory in our world.

