



THE LAST WORDS *of* JESUS

A LENTEN PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE



HOPE
CHURCH

Welcome,

Lent is the forty days leading up to Easter. For Christians, it's a season to slow down and remember God's love for the world shown most clearly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Early in Jesus's story, right after his baptism, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days. During that time, Jesus faced temptation and hardship. He prayed, fasted, and stayed closely connected to God the Father, even when things were difficult. This season helped prepare Jesus for the work he was called to do.

Lent invites us on that same kind of journey, not to be perfect, but to be present. It's a chance to walk with Jesus, reflect on our own lives, and create space to connect with God through simple practices like prayer, reflection, and, for some, fasting.

The Bible reminds us that when we draw near to God, He draws near to us. As we move through this Lenten season together—**focusing on Jesus's final words from the cross**—we hope that you will encounter Jesus in a personal way, whether you are new to faith or have been following Him for many years. We pray this journey renews your desire to follow Jesus and deepens your relationship with God.

This guide is made up of short devotions written by partners of Hope Church and is designed to be used alongside each Sunday morning message. There is a devotion for each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of Lent. Along the way, you'll find some writers included reflection questions and prayer prompts meant to help all of us walk more closely with Jesus, one step at a time.

We've also included an optional fasting guide for those who would like to try this spiritual practice. Fasting can look different for different people; it may involve food, entertainment, social media, or something else that tends to fill our attention. At its heart, fasting is about creating space to remember that Jesus gave everything for us and to reconnect with Him in a deeper way.

Wherever you are on your journey, we're grateful you're walking with us.

Sunday, February 22

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

Jesus

Luke 23:34 (NLT)

Jesus' mercy toward his persecutors on the cross calls us to forgive others—even in our pain. The reality is that unless we accept God's forgiveness, we will not forgive others. **Forgiven** people **forgive** people.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Ladell Thomason

For twenty years, my son was caught in a cycle that felt impossible to break. From the time he was sixteen until he was thirty-six, our family dealt with the fallout of choices:

Drug abuse, gang involvement, and the sting of his stealing from his own brothers and sisters. There were runaways, truancy from school, a boys' home, and a lot of sleepless nights. It's the kind of long-term chaos that makes most people want to change the locks and close their hearts for good.

But in the middle of that pain, God shifted the lens. Instead of focusing only on the "Prodigal Son" coming home, He pointed to the words of Jesus during His most painful moment:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

When you apply that to your wayward children, everything changes. It's a reminder that when they are stealing, lying, or running away, they aren't just being "bad"—they are blinded. They don't truly understand the wreckage they are leaving behind because they are prisoners of their own addictions and bad influences.

Why This Perspective Matters:

It lowers the Defense: When you realize someone is spiritually "blind," you stop expecting them to see clearly. It moves you from a place of "How could he do this to me?" to "He has no idea what he's doing to himself."

It Keeps the Porch Light On: By choosing to forgive them—even when they aren't asking for it—you created a safe landing spot. You made sure that whenever they finally "wake up," they won't have to fight through your resentment to get back to the family.

It Mimics God's Heart: God doesn't wait for us to have it all figured out before He offers grace. He offers it while we're still making a mess of things.

Forgiving my son wasn't about letting him off the hook; it was about keeping my heart open so that when he was ready to stop running, home was still a place he belonged.

Is there anyone that you need to forgive in the same way you have been forgiven by Jesus?

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Jill Allen

Jesus is on the cross. Jesus must be feeling shame, wanting to call on angels to his defense. Jesus is talking to God (The Father), advocating on behalf of those mocking and killing him. Even acknowledging their spiritual blindness. He could have condemned them, but he prayed for them.

Remember, not to decide to follow Jesus is to decide. Let us not fall into the enormity that those who mocked and killed Jesus did.

How does what Jesus did change your heart in forgiving those "who knew better"?

Seeing our Savior's characteristics through His grace and forgiveness to those who deserve it least.

Forgiveness isn't about people and their worthiness; it's about Jesus' character.

Prayer:

Our heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus from heaven to earth. Help me remember that He paid the price of redemption. He made it possible for me to be forgiven, to enter God's kingdom, and for everlasting life. I choose to follow you, Jesus. Help me adjust my way of thinking, relationships, commitments, and actions to align with your will for my life. Amen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27

Shannon Horn

And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.

These words are very challenging. Jesus has been beaten, tortured, stripped and humiliated, paraded through the streets carrying the cross, and nailed to it and yet his response is one of compassion for those who have wronged him.

He doesn't call down curses, though he certainly could have. He doesn't demand what is owed. He forgives and requests forgiveness for those who have debased him.

When I read these words, I think, how far, oh Lord, how far do I have to go before I am more like you? I'm so easily offended and annoyed. Drive in the left lane going the speed limit or worse, under, and I do not forgive you, or believe the best, I demand you move and get out of my way. And don't even get me started if I perceive you have “wronged” me. I struggle with my sinful nature. I don't want to forgive you. I want retribution, and I want you to pay for what you did to me. I can't even begin to think about you as a person, as a human, or to pray that God will forgive you as he has forgiven me. I want what is owed; I want you to pay.

But in the stillness and quiet, I hear the invitation, forgive.

Forgive.

Forgive.

70 times 7 forgive. (Matthew 18:21-22)

I hear the invitation again, Follow me into forgiveness. The same God who loves you loves them. My death pays for all their sin too, not just yours. See them the way I see them. Forgive and let your heart be set free from the root of bitterness and resentment. You don't have to reconcile or restore but for the sake of your own heart, forgive.

Will you follow him into the way of forgiveness today?

Sunday, March 1

"I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus

Luke 23:43 (NLT)

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. At first, both mocked him. But as death approached, one thief had a change of heart. Jesus assures him of salvation and promises he will be with Him in heaven that day. You can have assurance of your salvation, not based on your work, but by grace alone, through faith alone.

MONDAY, MARCH 2

Rick McGinniss

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
Romans 8:1**

If ever there was an event in the life of Jesus that illustrates and validates the truth of that statement, it is this one. As he is at death's door, a thief being crucified next to Jesus hears Him say, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

But for what reason? What had he done to deserve such a reward?

It couldn't have been for being a good person or living a good life. His crimes were so severe that he had been literally nailed to a Roman cross and left to die!

And being nailed to that cross, there wasn't much he could do or even promise to do. He couldn't make amends by returning all that he had stolen, and a pledge to clean up his act going forward would have been impossible to fulfill.

If ever a man deserved NOT to hear what Jesus said, it was him. And yet, Jesus did say it. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

So, why would Jesus make such an outrageous promise to such an unworthy man?

Because he owned up to his sinfulness ("we are getting what our deeds deserve," he said to the other thief being crucified with him) and he turned to Jesus in faith, believing that He was who He claimed to be – King, Savior, and Lord.

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

That's it.

If you're like most people, it's hard to believe that freedom from ALL condemnation for ALL our sin past, present, future, known and unknown – really is possible without at least doing something to earn it. But this brief interaction reveals that it is.

As you remember your sin during this season of Lent, also remember and rejoice that your salvation is – as the great Reformer Martin Luther once put it – by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Valeri Lea

In this part of Luke's gospel, we learn Jesus is nailed to a cross and that cross is hoisted up to put Jesus's torment on display. He is positioned between two thieves who are suffering the same punishment.

As Jesus hangs there, one thief mocks Him, but the other thief asks Him to “remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (v. 42) In other words, “take me with you”. Jesus’s response is remarkable: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (v.43)

Wait a second. How can a thief get into Heaven? This guy’s crimes are evidently so egregious that he is crucified. Yet, Christ, the Savior of the world, tells him he gets to go with Him into eternity. Not eventually. Not after he cleans up his act. Not after he rights all his wrongs. Today.

Jesus’s words expose the heart of the gospel. The moment you recognize your sin and turn to Christ to repent; you receive total forgiveness and are put in a right relationship with God. The thief acknowledged who Jesus was, “Do you not fear God?” (v. 40), showed regret for wrongdoing, “receiving our due reward of our deeds” (v. 41), and asked for mercy, “remember me” (v. 42). Jesus immediately forgave him and promised him eternity together.

What Jesus did for the thief, He does for us. Christ’s response is filled with compassion and authority, assuring us of what He offers: mercy, forgiveness, and eternity with Him. One thief mocked Him, and the other acknowledged Him. That is the choice each of us must make to receive what God promises.

In His final hours, Christ reminds us salvation is ours if we only believe He is who He says He is and ask for what He has promised us. Not eventually. Not after you clean up your act. Not after you right all your wrongs. Today. Right n

FRIDAY, MARCH 6

Nic Allen

Have you ever felt completely unworthy to ask for help, but in desperate need of someone to intervene? In this moment, Jesus was hanging on the cross, in agony, surrounded by mockers, doubters, and chaos. Yet while suffering, He paused for one broken man who dared to hope.

The criminal beside Jesus had no résumé of good deeds to offer. There was no time left to fix his mistakes. All he could bring is a simple desperate

request: “Jesus, remember me.” Jesus responded with radical grace: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

This verse reminds us that salvation is not earned by performance but received through trust. The thief had nothing to prove but a heart that was willing to believe. Jesus did not say He would respond “someday” or “if you improve,” but “today.” His grace was immediate. The relationship was restored in an instant.

Many of us carry stories where we felt it was “too late.” Maybe you’ve had a relationship that seemed beyond repair or a season where your faith was fragile. Maybe you’ve whispered a prayer that sounded more like a plea than a declaration. Luke 23:43 assures us that no moment is too late for mercy, and no heart is too far for hope. In Christ, grace is never delayed, and hope is never wasted.

There is also comfort in where Jesus promises the thief will be: “with Me.” Heaven is not just a place we long for; it is the guarantee to be with a Person. The greatest gift is not escape from pain, but the continual presence of Christ.

Take time to reflect

Where in your life do you need to trust God’s grace rather than your effort?
What story of redemption might God still be writing — even now?

Sunday, March 8

“Dear woman, here is your son...Here is your mother.”

Jesus

John 19:26-27 (NLT)

Jesus’ care for His mother shows us what real love looks like. Life’s greatest lesson isn’t making money, retiring, or having fun—it’s learning to love others like Jesus loves us. God put us here to love Him and love others. If we miss that, we miss the point of life. At the cross, Jesus told John to care for Mary as his own mother, and

Mary to care for John as her son. Showing compassion and care, treating others like family, is Jesus' reminder to us from the cross.

MONDAY, MARCH 9

Nick Heiser

On the cross, Jesus endured utter physical pain, humiliated and forsaken by God as he bore the judgment for our sin. Yet, even in all this suffering, he showed compassion and love for his mother, entrusting her care to a faithful friend after he was gone.

But why, John? Why did God record this fact, and what does it mean for us? In his gospel account, John refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” This is not accidental, nor is it a claim to favoritism. Rather, John identifies himself as someone who was relationally very close to and trusted by Jesus. John was present at the cross when others were not. John believed Jesus was God (unlike the brothers of Jesus), and he remained faithful under pressure.

John records this moment to demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled his responsibility as a son, and that John was faithful and obedient, even though it likely came at great personal and financial cost. Faithfulness is often unremarkable in this way. There is no recorded conversation, no emotion, and Mary is given no special role in the church. John simply records what was done.

This passage is not overly spiritualized, but it does demonstrate a characteristic of John worth considering. Who are you caring for? As we move through this Lenten season, consider who you are surrounding yourself with and those you love. How are you caring for those around you, both physically and spiritually? Ask God to lead you to take care of your loved ones as Jesus cared for his mother. Ask God to help you remain faithful when care is required, just as John was. Ask God to surround your family and those you love with people who will care for them and love them in the same way. And finally, remember, you are reading this devotion because people around you care for you. Give thanks today to God for that.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11

Amy Wright

In Jesus' last moments on the cross, bearing witness were his mother, Mary, and his beloved disciple, John.

When Jesus then saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour, the disciple took her into his own household. (John 19: 26-27 NASB)

Behold. As Christ neared his time of death, this powerful word continued to reveal his character. He was concerned about his family. Behold, observe something important and deeply consider the significance.

I am reminded of my daughter's last visit to see her papa before he passed. She was 8 years old at the time. He was on hospice and had not been awake or verbal for over a day. When she arrived to see him, he had a last moment of clarity and said to her "I love you, one, two, three." A sweet sentiment shared because of the bond they had. He passed away a few days later. When we asked her to share her favorite memories, she said he was always willing to play.

I was reminded of just how "busy" I was at the time. My career was my priority. I was rarely interruptible for my family, and most of the time, "too busy" to play.

Behold. I read these words now and hear Jesus telling me, pay attention, listen to what I am telling you. Here is your daughter, to steward for God. As we spend time in reflection about Jesus's last expressions before his death on the cross, how can we love better, more like Jesus would want us to do?

Is there someone that you need to hold in focus? Spend more time acknowledging? Being more interruptible, even when life is busy? At the end of your life, who will be there with you, bearing witness to your journey?

Heavenly Father, we behold, thank you for reminding us to slow down and focus on the blessings of those people you have placed in our lives that are our family. May we remember to love as you have said. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13: 34-35 NIV)

FRIDAY, MARCH 13

Greg Frohna

The courtroom was filled with love. Extended family members and close friends sat shoulder to shoulder on wooden benches, straining to hear the words the judge was speaking to a group of new parents who held their adopted children close. We were some of those parents.

I can't remember verbatim what the judge said, but I do recall the feelings coursing through my body. There were feelings of joy, gratitude, happiness, apprehension, and fear. We had never experienced parenthood before, and here we were committing ourselves to loving and protecting these two precious children for the rest of their lives as if they had come to us biologically. It was a pledge we took enthusiastically and seriously, yet for more than three years, these children lived somewhere else and belonged to someone else. Adoption is always complicated, and while we knew the responsibility (and privilege) we were accepting, being invited to love someone is different than loving them since birth. For my wife, this was probably much easier, but for me, I was learning to love my children increasingly as I got to know them.

I think John loved Mary, the mother of Jesus, already, but he was going to learn to love her differently once Jesus went to his Heavenly Father. He was instructed to love her as Jesus did, as a child does for their mother. For John, love was a choice.

These “last words” of Jesus remind us that love is not only a feeling. Love is a responsibility and a privilege we are invited to choose. As we journey through Lent, is there someone God is asking you, and even challenging you to love? Trust his invitation.

Sunday, March 15

"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Jesus

Matthew 27:46 (NLT)

On the cross, did God really reject or abandon Jesus? Jesus entered the depths of human despair and the mystery of divine silence. We have all felt abandoned, alone, and rejected at times, which makes this question deeply personal. The sin of humanity broke a relationship that Jesus came to restore. The answer to this question leads us to consider faith and our response to the human condition.

MONDAY, MARCH 16

Jetta McGinniss

Ronald Rolheiser, author of the book *Sacred Fire*¹, suggests that every human goes through 3 stages of life - the struggle to get our lives together, the struggle to give our lives away and the struggle to give our deaths away.² The first two stages seem self-explanatory. Our early years and maybe even into our 20's, we are trying to figure out who we are – our strengths, our weaknesses, our preferences, etc. Then in our mid years we begin to give our lives away – contributing to the work force, striving to keep our marriages together, raising children, serving on committees or boards, etc.

But how do we “give our deaths” away? Author Ronald Rolheiser, challenges us to look at the life of Christ.³ Up until His visit to the temple at age 12, Jesus was trying to figure out life on this earth and where he fit in. Then for the next 20 years he started giving his life away – healing the sick, loving the “unlovable,” arguing with the Pharisees, teaching his followers, casting out demons, etc. But from the moment Judas kissed Jesus on the cheek in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus began “giving his death away”. As the soldiers led our Savior away, he did not argue, complain, fight, rebel, beg his disciples to help him, or try to convince the soldiers not to take him. Instead, Jesus did nothing. Everything that Jesus went through from this moment to the time He was hanging on the cross – everything was done **TO** Him and **FOR** Him, not **BY** Him. He was passive, not

active. He was accepting, not fighting. He was meek – not boasting. Jesus did not die an angry, bitter person. Instead, He died with a warm heart, thinking of you and me and the millions of other people through the ages who would not be held accountable for their sins because of what he was going through during those 4 days.

As we live through the stages of our life, we can be a blessing or a curse to those around us. And in the last years on this earth, when being active is a thing of the past, are we going to be a “pathetic old fool, an “embittered” old fool or a “holy old fool”?⁴ The practices we adopt in each season, will greatly influence the next season. Will you live Your life as Jesus did? When the “being productive” stage is over and you may feel that your “God has forsaken you”, may you be inspired to die a “holy old fool” who was a blessing to those around Him at every season.

¹Rolheiser, Ronald, Sacred Fire, Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York

² Ibid page 15

³ Ibid pages 285-295

⁴ Ibid page 297

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

Courtenay Kantanka

Abandonment. For some, it is the worst crime that a person can commit against their loved one—that a parent can commit against their child.

How about a God against his creation? Maybe there’s a time where you have felt abandoned by God. Maybe you feel that way now. If you do, you’re not alone. If you don’t feel this way, you probably know someone who does. Every one of us, at some point, has looked around and asked, “God, where are you in this?”

Jesus’ words on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” reveal that those feelings are very real. There are times when God—his presence and love—feel so distant. Times when evil seems to have laid siege and won.

But if we look a little closer, we can discern something else from these words. “My God,” Jesus says, “my God,” he repeats. “Why?” Even in his darkest, most tortured (literally) place, Jesus had not lost faith. He hangs there—beaten and dying—and entreats God instead of accusing him. Wow.

The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. These passages reveal to us why. May this season of Lent be a time of enduring faith in the midst of a troubling world.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

Mica St. George

When the Soul Grows Quiet

A long night settled over my life—
a darkness that lingered,
heavy and unmoving.

I wandered through loss
with questions wrapped around my heart:
Am I seen?
Do I matter?
How long, Lord?

Hope hung by a fragile thread,
and God felt hidden—
silent behind a veil
I could not lift.

Then a cry rose from Scripture,
long ago uttered by Jesus,
and echoed in my chest:
“My God, my God...
why have You forsaken me?”

Jesus knew this ache—
mockery, loneliness,

the sharp sting of abandonment,
the weight of unbearable pain.
He entered that darkness
so He could meet me in mine.

And somehow,
in this shared camaraderie,
the suffering became a sanctuary—
a quiet place
where surrender softened me,
where love grew deeper,
compassion gentler,
my spirit steadier,
my heart still.
So if you find yourself
in a long time of suffering—
you are not alone.

Take time now to

Pause. Breathe. Pray:

Jesus, I feel...
Jesus, I need...
Jesus, you are...

Even here, in the overwhelming darkness
there is fellowship with Jesus.
Even here, in the heavy and unmoving,
light begins to rise.

And when the morning comes,
light will find you—
soft at first,
then growing warm,

spilling over the edges
of everything that felt broken.

Grace will rise
like a quiet dawn,
and you'll discover
you were held
the whole way through.

Hope is already on His way.

Lord, You are close to the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). You see my pain, my tears, and the weight I carry. I ask that You be my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). Surround me with Your peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and let Your joy be my strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Remind me that nothing can separate me from Your love (Romans 8:38-39). Hold me in Your arms, Lord, and breathe hope into my heart again. Amen

Sunday, March 22

"I am thirsty."

Jesus

John 19:28 (NLT)

Only God can say, *"Today you will be with me in paradise", or "I forgive you"*, but anyone can say, *"I am thirsty."* This fifth saying of Jesus from the cross reminds us of his humanity and helps us understand how to be human in all areas of life.

MONDAY, MARCH 23

Erin Tolin

As Jesus hung on the cross in His final moments, John tells us that He fully understood His mission was coming to its completion. In that moment, He spoke three simple words: *"I am thirsty."* On the surface, it seems like a basic

physical need. Yet those words reveal something significant about both His humanity and His purpose.

Jesus—the One who healed countless people, calmed storms, and fed multitudes—chose to feel the full weight of human experience. Pain, weakness, exhaustion, and even thirst. He stepped into every part of our humanity so that nothing we face would be unknown to Him. He is a Savior who understands.

But His words were not only an expression of physical need—they were a fulfillment of Scripture. Even in suffering, Jesus was completing every prophecy spoken about Him. His thirst marked the final moments of God’s redemptive plan unfolding perfectly. In His weakness, the greatest victory in history was being accomplished.

When You Feel Empty:

We all experience seasons where we feel depleted—emotionally, spiritually, or physically drained. In those moments, it can feel like God is far away.

But the cross reminds us of a powerful truth:

God’s deepest work often happens right where we feel weakest.

If Jesus could fulfill His mission in a moment of thirst, He can certainly meet you in your weariness, your emptiness, and your hard seasons.

A Prayer to Reflect

Jesus, thank You for embracing every part of what it means to be human, even moments of weakness. When I feel empty or weary, remind me that You understand. Fill me again with Your presence and strength and continue to complete Your work in me. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

Kody Gilbert

The dual nature of Jesus as both fully man and fully God (known as the hypostatic union if you are looking for some theology trivia) is something that can be so difficult for us to understand. How can someone as powerful and divine as the

God who created the universe be confined to live the human experience, the same one you and I are subject to here and now?

For me, no moment in scripture captures this as well as the moment in John 19:28. It says in the NLT, 'Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." Depending on the lens through which we see this moment, there are some incredible things to see. On one hand, this moment comes right before the death of Jesus on the cross, a moment of sacrificial love, poured out by God to us. This act completed God's great comeback story, allowing us back into relationship with Him forever! The supernatural, divine power of God is surely on display!

But why the need for verse 28? It seems like all of that could have been accomplished by skipping straight to the "It is finished" in verse 30. It surely isn't an accident that in His final words, Jesus reminds us that while the "big plan" is important, He is human just like us. He had needs, wants, pain, and desire, and real, human love. As important as the big things are, everyday things are just as important.

If you are anything like me, it can feel like sometimes, my problems (or wants, or needs, or desires, or pains) don't reach the "bring to the God of the universe" level. I can unintentionally treat God like His ability to meet me where I am is finite; that if I bring things up to Him too often, eventually I will get a no. That isn't true though! It says in Philippians 4:6, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done." It doesn't say, "just tell God the big things", or "just bring to God what you can't figure out on your own." It says EVERYTHING.

What In your life do you need to bring before God today? Maybe, it is something that has been on your mind for so long, it is starting to feel like it has taken up permanent residence in your brain. Maybe it is something you want so desperately to be able to handle yourself. Maybe you feel like giving it over to God isn't worth His time or would be a burden. Whatever it is, I invite you to spend a moment in prayer, giving that thing over to Him today, and thanking Him

for being willing to be the God of the big picture, and the God of our individual moments.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Darrick Strzelecki

Emmanuel isn't a word that we Christians often associate with Easter. It's a very Christmasy word that means "God with us". However, I think it is an important word to reflect on during this season of Lent as we prepare our hearts for Resurrection Sunday.

Nowhere is the concept brought to life more so than in John's Gospel. John began by telling us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4 CSB) Later in chapter 1, John tells us that "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (v. 14)

Not only was God with us, but God actively chose to become us, stepping down from God's throne and entering the world as a man called Jesus. Jesus experienced everything humans experience: joy, heartbreak, mourning, excitement, and even anger.

John 19:28 reveals to us some of the very last words of Jesus as he was dying on the cross. Jesus was thirsty. This is one of the most relatable human experiences we can draw from the life of Jesus. Think about the last time you finished an afternoon of yardwork on a hot summer day. Picture how you feel after completing one of the most difficult workouts you've done. We all get thirsty. After Jesus had been put through the most brutal day a person can experience, He, too, felt that urge for something to drink.

So not only does Emmanuel mean "God with us", but I think we can also view this as "God became just like us".

Amen.

Sunday, March 29

"It is finished."

Jesus

John 19:30 (NLT)

We all want to finish what we start, yet most of us will die with unfinished business. That is why it is vital to settle what truly matters most. We won't complete everything in this life, but we will spend eternity somewhere—just not here. Jesus finished the assignment he received from his Heavenly Father, which is good news for those who believe.

MONDAY, MARCH 30

Julie Smoldt

We can experience victory in life because Jesus defeated death. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished". With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Throughout my entire life, I have struggled with vivid nightmares, especially when things are changing or I am moving towards something God is leading me to. Waking up with terror with a racing heart as a reaction to something that didn't actually happen is a real mystery. Even now, when I hear of kids struggling with nightmares, I feel the righteous defender rise in me because of the fear they experience. Rest is supposed to be restful, peaceful, and restoring.

At one point, a very wise person shared with me that my nightmares could be spiritual warfare. This was a new concept to me at the time, so I started researching and asking many questions. Is Jesus the only power in this world? What about good vs evil? Why do I struggle to do what's right, yet still mess things up all the time? How does God call us to walk through brokenness?

Jesus' final words were *"it is finished"*. Three words that literally hold all the power in the world. This battle, that we so often ignore, is very real, yet the end is already written. It is finished. Through His death on the cross, to pay for my

sins and yours, and to atone for all the brokenness in this world, Jesus won the battle! With confidence, we can struggle, go through hardship, and face brokenness with great humility, knowing that Jesus is the Victor. It is finished. With Jesus' final breath on the cross, Satan lost his power. In Jesus' name, by the power of His blood, we too can proclaim that "it is finished".

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Price Horn

Video gamers explore and compete in huge, complicated virtual worlds, where they often must deal with NPCs—non-player characters. These computer-directed background characters interact with players according to scripts programmed by the developers. Unlike the main characters controlled by a human player, NPCs can only follow the set rules of the world they inhabit.

In a sense, we are all NPCs in this broken world. By default, we choose to follow the selfish, destructive scripts that sin has programmed into us. In ancient Israel, the blood of animal sacrifices could temporarily cover the stain those choices made, but they couldn't alter human nature. So even as the sacrifices continued, sin still ruled.

But God had a plan to install an update to the world's program—his Son willingly providing himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. And when Jesus declared on the cross that it was finished, he was declaring that from now on things would be different—that we could be different. Jesus rewrote the rules of the world we inhabit, enabling us to interact with God and others not as an NPC controlled by sin, but as a new kind of human: one like Christ, animated and motivated by the love of God.

This doesn't mean that we won't face temptation, or that we won't experience the effects of living in a world corrupted by sin's influence. Sin is still very real. But Christ's victory on the cross means that it no longer rules us. The Spirit that lives within us gives us the strength to reject the restrictive scripts that sin would have us follow. Instead, we now have the power to freely choose to live like the one who sacrificed everything to save us from that sin.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

Kingsley Kantanka

What victory does the follower of Christ have? What has been purchased for those who have put their faith in Jesus?

You may be in a season of hardship where everything seems to be going wrong. Maybe you have experienced: a job loss; loss of a loved one; a broken relationship; a decline in your health; dealing with anxiety, doubt, and depression; struggles with substance abuse; and you may be overwhelmed and feel defeated.

Let Jesus' statement that "it is finished" wash over you this Easter season. Let this be the light that shines in your darkness. On that cross, Jesus accomplished all that His followers need to live abundantly, the kind of life God wanted humans to experience all along (John 10:10)

When Adam and Eve rebelled, sin and death entered the world and brought chaos. But God promised the offspring of Eve would deliver a deadly blow to Satan but not unscathed (Genesis 3:15). Jesus is the promised offspring and His perfect life of obedience purchased righteousness for all who would have faith in Him. His death paid the penalty for sins, and His resurrection is the ultimate victory over sin and death.

Christians have peace with God and can experience an abundant life free from the bondage of sin! This life is not just something to look forward to in eternity; it is also experienced in the here and now through the power of the Holy Spirit, the same power that raised Jesus from death (Romans 8:11).

Reflect on the victory you have in Christ and express gratitude to your Heavenly Father for your adoption into His family. Let the Holy Spirit empower you with grace to face life with confidence in God's love. Lean into community (life groups) with others where you can encourage and be encouraged to live abundantly.

Do not wait for your circumstances to change; worship through them. Jesus didn't wait until after His resurrection to proclaim, "it is finished." He was confident in His Father to accept His sacrifice and bring victory. That is the same confidence all

believers can have in all circumstances, good or bad (Romans 8:37-39). Let us walk in His victory!

Sunday, April 5

“Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!”

Jesus

Luke 23:46 (NLT)

This final act of Jesus is a call to entrust our lives to God. The last words of Jesus hold the key to salvation and how to trust God—even in our darkest moments. Jesus trusted God at the most crucial moments of his earthly calling. Trust and obey God, there is no better way.

MONDAY, APRIL 6

Wendi Frohna

Jesus didn't speak these words from the comfort of his home surrounded by his loved ones, but nailed to a Roman cross, having been beaten and broken, mocked, and abandoned. This declaration isn't a passive resignation that he was giving up, but in his final moments, Jesus declared his absolute trust in his Heavenly Father. It is an act of intentional surrender.

The Message Bible translates the verse this way, “Father, I place my life in your hands.” I like this translation because I need the reminder that Jesus placed his life, not just his spirit in his dying moments, into the hands of his father.

When I was told I would not have a family biologically, my dreams of a family were suddenly shattered. When there was nothing for me to hold on to, I had to surrender my dreams and place my life in His hands to help me get through each day. When God made it clear that adoption was the path for me to have a family, I found myself having to place the lives of my children in His hands. And even though they are now adults, I need regular reminders to place them in His hands, just as I release myself into the hands that never fail. The same hands Jesus trusted in his final breath. The same hands that turned death into resurrection.

Jesus' display of trust is our example. His final prayer should be our daily prayer, "Father, I place my life in your hands" for whatever this day holds.

Today as you reflect on Jesus' example of trust, what part of your life do you need to place in the Father's hands?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

Matt Aviles

Jesus, at the very end of His life, shows us what real trust looks like.

Luke 23:46 says that as He hung on the cross, Jesus cried out, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" Then He breathed His last. I don't think these were words spoken in panic or defeat, but rather they were words of confidence. Even with His final breath, Jesus knew exactly who He was trusting.

Think about the moment. Jesus was in intense pain, publicly shamed, and surrounded by darkness—physically and spiritually. During that pain, He chose to call God Father and released everything—His life, His future, His spirit—into the Father's hands. That kind of trust wasn't easy or comfortable. It was intentional.

Jesus trusted the Father because He knew Him. He knew God's heart, His faithfulness, and His promises. Even when the cross appeared like the end, Jesus believed the Father was still at work. Jesus trusted that death wasn't the final word and that surrendering His life wasn't loss—it was victory.

That same invitation of trust is offered to us. We may not face a literal cross, but we face moments that test our faith: uncertainty, grief, disappointment, fear of the future. Trusting God in those moments doesn't mean pretending everything is okay or having all the answers. It means choosing to place ourselves in God's care anyway.

When life feels out of control, Jesus reminds us that trust is an act of faith. We can pray the same simple, powerful prayer: Father, I place my life in Your

hands. And when we do, we learn what Jesus already knew—God’s hands are safe, steady, and strong enough to hold us through anything, even our darkest moments.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

The Apostle Paul

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith...we rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort, though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer...I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead...I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Philippians 3:1-14 (NLT)

Our prayer for every person who went on this journey with us, that you would experience peace, hope, and love of Jesus.

Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough

What is Fasting?

Fasting is intentionally giving up something we enjoy to focus on God. It's **not primarily for dieting or health**, but to:

- Deepen our spiritual life
 - Humble ourselves
 - Seek God's guidance
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💡 Why Fast?

- 🙏 **Dependence on God:** Less self-reliance, more God-reliance
- ⌚ **Space for God:** Creates time to pray, reflect, and seek His will
- 🎯 **Focus on Priorities:** Helps clarify life's priorities
- 🙌 **Worship & Humility:** Acts of devotion, not showmanship
- 💪 **Physical Benefits:** Detoxification, reducing sugar/caffeine dependence

⚠️ **Note:** Longer or extreme fasts require **medical guidance**.

🥗 Types of Fasts

- Complete food fast
- Partial fast (vegetables only, no meat)
- Skipping 1–2 meals per day
- Limited hours (e.g., sunrise to sunset)
- Fasting from sugar, caffeine, alcohol
- Media/technology fast (social media, music, TV)
- Any personal deprivation that aids focus on God

Unlike intermittent fasting for weight loss, **spiritual fasting is about God, not dieting**. Always check motives through prayer.

Tips for Fasting

- Fast **privately**; avoid boasting (Matthew 6:16-18)
 - Combine fasting with **prayer and discernment**
 - Fasting with others can offer **accountability** or help in important decisions
 - Keep **humility** at the center; fasting is about God, not self-image
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Scripture References

- **Matthew 6:16-18** – Fast in private; God rewards the humble
 - **Acts 13:2** – Fasting precedes God’s guidance for important work
 - **Joel 2:12** – Come to God with fasting, weeping, and mourning
 - **Nehemiah 1:4** – Fasting combined with prayer in times of seeking God
 - **Isaiah 58:5** – True fasting is about humility and obedience, not ritual
 - **Daniel 9:3** – Fasting paired with earnest prayer and repentance
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Resources

- [Renovaré: The Wonderful Freedom of Fasting](#)
 - [Ultimate Daniel Fast Guidelines](#)
 - [C.S. Lewis Institute: The Place of Fasting](#)
 - [CRU: Fasting from Technology](#)
 - [CRU: Fasting Starter Kit](#)
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