

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds that are illuminated with warm orange and pink light. The top of the image transitions into a deep blue. At the very bottom, the dark silhouettes of snow-capped mountains are visible against the horizon.

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2025

**This Easter Season at
NOVA Community Church**

Worship Service Every Sunday

9:30 a.m.

NovaKids and Nursery available

Maundy Thursday Lord's Supper

Thursday, April 17th – 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday Event

Friday, April 18th – 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Easter Sunday Service

Sunday, April 20th – 10:00 a.m.

For more information visit novachurch.org.

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INTRODUCTION

The word of God is alive and active. It is sharper than any sword that has two edges. It cuts deep enough to separate soul from spirit. It can separate bones from joints. It judges the thoughts and purposes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 NIRV

The people of NOVA Community Church present to you a devotional with 40 readings for the 2025 Lenten Season.

What is the Lenten Season? The word “Lent” comes from the Old English word “lengten,” which simply means “spring” – a season in which the daylight lengthens and new life comes forth. It’s a time we think of the victory of the light and life of Jesus over the darkness and death of sin.

For most Southern California people - our days are active, exciting, and full. Because we tend to be preoccupied and busy people, we need the active and living word of God to renew and give purpose to our life.

During this Lenten season, let’s pause, slow down and find a quiet place. It’s a good idea to have your Bible ready to read through the scriptures and the devotional, to reflect on the questions, and pray. By engaging in this daily practice, you are cultivating your heart and mind to grow closer to our Lord and Savior.

This devotional is also a non-threatening and accessible tool to invite others to join you on this 40-day journey of spiritual renewal that culminates with Easter, the celebration of the resurrection. Consider sharing this one-of-a-kind NOVA devotional with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and anyone else the Holy Spirit leads you to.

To God be the glory!

Dean Mayeda
Lead Pastor

A photograph of a narrow slot canyon. The walls are composed of layered, reddish-brown rock, showing distinct horizontal and diagonal textures. The floor is covered in small, light-colored gravel. The lighting is warm, creating a sense of depth and highlighting the rugged surfaces of the rock.

PREPARATION

Photo by David Smith

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

by Adam Duchin

Read 1 Peter 3:14-15

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

1 Peter 3:14-15

Hope Prepares

I don't know about you, but my personality is such that I don't like being caught off guard. I like to be prepared. As I was thinking about this idea of preparation for our Lenten devotional, I was drawn to a verse that I think speaks into our lives as followers of Jesus.

1 Peter 3:15 is a very well-known Bible verse. Most of us that are familiar with it have probably heard it used in relation to apologetics, or defending our faith. That's the being prepared to give an answer part. While this idea is definitely something mentioned in this verse, the context of the surrounding passage informs us that Peter is writing about a different aspect of our Christian life – hope. This is the part about giving the reason for the hope that you have.

One of the themes of the book of First Peter involves persecution. Peter's readers were Christians living lives that were different from those around them, due to their faith in Jesus Christ and their choice to follow after God's ways. This choice to live differently eventually led to opposition and persecution. This persecution was not necessarily organized, or from the government, but more likely took the form of mob violence, coming from those around them. Peter was writing to encourage his readers in the face of this oppression, to continue their faithfulness to Jesus.

It is in this context that he writes about hope – more specifically, giving an answer for the hope that you have. Peter instructs them to endure with patience, respond with a blessing, and be ready to explain the reason for their unusual response.

Maybe the greatest threat to being able to endure suffering is the same for us today as it was then – fear. This fear shows up in a

variety of ways: fear of losing family or friends, a job or career, your health, or even your life. But the aspect of faith that Peter encourages his readers with is the same aspect of our faith that encourages us today – hope.

Peter makes his point with a rhetorical question in verse 13: Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? He then answers his own question in verse 14: But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”

There is no amount of harm that anyone can do to us that will take away our inheritance—not even death. It is because of this that Peter says no one can harm us. Since God is for us and will bless us, there is no reason to fear man, or be troubled by the difficult circumstances we face.

This is a truth that we need to hold on to, have constantly on our minds and hearts, and never let go of. As Christians, we will most likely suffer in this world. Jesus even tells us that in this world we will have trouble. But his thought continues – “Take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b). We need to know that any suffering we experience here is only minor and temporary compared to the eternal inheritance that awaits us.

Can you imagine how emboldened Christians would be if we believed what Peter is saying? Our inheritance is eternal! Nothing can take away God’s love for us! When we know that there is nothing anyone can do to separate us from our inheritance, fear is replaced with hope.

It is this hope that frees us and empowers us to endure with patience, respond with a blessing, and be ready to explain the reason for our unusual response to anyone who asks us about it. It is this hope that we have in Jesus that prepares us for whatever life may throw at us.

I know this isn’t easy. I don’t think Peter calls us to a more comfortable life. Yet he calls us to have hope. True, genuine, life-changing hope! The kind of hope that comes from a life of putting Jesus first. The kind of hope that keeps you always prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you about it. May you live today in the hope that Jesus provides. And may each day of hope in Jesus prepare you more and more for the next.

REFLECT

How would your life, conduct and words be different if you really did not fear anything because you knew that the worst that can happen cannot happen—that you cannot lose God’s love for you?

DISCUSS

What stops you effectively sharing the hope that you have when you are asked to give your reasons for it? What can you do to better prepare yourself?

PRAY

Father, thank you for this reminder from your word about being prepared. Thank you also for the hope that you provide to us through Jesus. Help me to continue to learn what it means to be living out of the hope that only comes from you. Help me also to be ready to explain this foundational, life-changing hope to others. In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

BIO

Adam is a husband and father to three uniquely wonderful children, and also serves as an Associate Pastor at Nova Community Church. He loves music, Dr Pepper, his family, and Jesus, although not in that order!

Thursday, March 6, 2025

by Christian Lissner

Read James 4:1-10

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners,
and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

James 4:7-8

Submit to God

When you hear the word submission, what comes to mind? I was a huge fan of wrestling when I was younger. I remember wrestlers would try to “submit” their opponents by using moves like an armbar, leg lock, or chokehold. If the opponent couldn’t take the pain anymore, they would tap out and signify that they have given up. As the youngest of three brothers, watching and imitating the wrestling moves we saw on TV was a fun and sometimes painful pastime.

In James 4:7, we’re told to submit to God. To be submissive is a biblical word that means this: To be or become inclined or willing to submit to orders or wishes of others or showing such inclination (Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament). In other words, when we are submissive to God we are being subordinate and obedient to him.

Due to our sinful nature, submitting to God is not our natural inclination. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.” Falling into temptation and sin is much more appealing than resisting it. We tend to take the easy way out rather than doing what is hard and necessary. Submitting to God doesn’t necessarily mean that he’s going to put us in a chokehold, but we can put ourselves in negative situations when we don’t submit to his Word and will for our life.

This Lenten season, I encourage you to throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles (Hebrews 12:1). Instead of turning to the things of this world, your fleshly desires, or the temptations that the enemy throws at you, draw near to God instead. God drew near to us by sending his only begotten Son Jesus to this earth to live the perfect life, die for our sins, and defeat sin and death through his miraculous resurrection. We all have a pivotal choice to make. Let's all submit to God and place our complete trust in him.

REFLECT

Listen to the worship song "Trust in God" by Elevation Worship. This song talks about how Jesus perfectly submitted to his Father. Are you submitting to the Lord in all areas of your life?

DISCUSS

Which professional wrestlers or fighters do you admire the most?

PRAY

Jesus, thank you for the example you gave us by humbly submitting to your Father. Thank you for saying in Luke 22:42, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Please help us be better servants of you that submit to your Word and will for our lives. Protect us from the enemy's schemes and equip us with your armor so that we can stand our ground (Ephesians 6:13). In your name we pray. Amen.

BIO

Christian is the Pastoral Resident at NOVA Community Church. He's married to Kat and they have a son named Levi. Some of his favorite hobbies are playing the trumpet and piano and supporting the Clippers.

Friday, March 7, 2025

by Ron Graff

Read Psalm 27:1, 14

The one thing I want from God, the thing I seek most of all, is...living in his presence every day of my life, delighting in his incomparable perfections and glory.

Psalm 27:14 (Living Bible)

The One Thing

This verse is believed to be written by King David during a time of significant hardship, likely either when he was fleeing from King Saul's persecution in the wilderness or later when he was fleeing from his rebellious son Absalom.

If God offered to give you whatever you asked for, what would it be? What is the one thing that means most to you? What would you choose? Student loans or mortgage paid off, marry a certain person, feel secure in retirement, healing, wisdom? What is the one thing you would ask for? What choice gives you your greatest sense of security?

For King David, the one thing he desired more than anything else is God Himself; to see his beauty and his glory; to live in his presence constantly. He expressed this in Psalm 63:1: "O God I earnestly seek you; my soul thirsts for you." He knows that life is empty and dry when God is not near. Testimonies abound even to this day how true that is.

As we come into this Lenten season to prepare our hearts to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, I invite you to join me in fervent praying that the wonder, meaning and beauty of Jesus' resurrection might powerfully impact us not only that day but every day. My soul thirsts for you, Jesus. I want it all and I know that you do too.

REFLECT

Is your desire the same as David's? Is your heart hungry and thirsty for more of God? Prepare to be filled.

"One thing I desire....." (Psalm 27:4)

DISCUSS

Verse 8 says, "Your face Lord, I will seek." Verse 14 says, "Wait for the Lord." What is the relationship of "seeking" and "waiting" for God?

PRAY

"You Lord are my light and my salvation, the stronghold of my life."
"You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures evermore." "You are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you." So, open my eyes Lord, I want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch him and say that I love Him. Open my ears, Lord, and help me to listen. Open my eyes Lord, I want to see Jesus.

(Psalm 27:1; 16:2, 11; 63:1; Chorus author: Robert Marcus Cull).

Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. All I want is to know Christ and the power that raised him to life," (Philippians 3:8, 10, CEV).

BIO

Ron Graff is a great grandfather, retired, and active as an associate pastor at Nova Community Church. He has had the joy of dedicating three great granddaughters and baptizing four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He and his wife Millie love family times; especially doting on the grand and great grandchildren.

Saturday, March 8, 2025

by Garrett Koch

Read Psalm 139:23-24

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Psalm 139:23-24

Search Me

As you go through the next 6 weeks of devotional writings you will inevitably feel many different emotions. Some writings may cause you to rejoice! Others may lead you to deep reflection. Others may lead you into a solemn place.

At the end of Psalm 139, David does something very vulnerable. He asks God to search his innermost being to see if there is anything offensive. In other words, he asks God to convict him of anything that needs convicting, to reveal any ways that he falls short.

Imagine with me what that must be like, to have your innermost being on full display – how vulnerable and naked that feeling must be. To have the best, but also worst parts of your heart completely exposed. We often spend our lives trying to only show the best parts of ourselves, so much so that we may not want to even acknowledge those parts of ourselves that we are not proud of.

David's prayer runs counter to this thinking. He asks God to search him and search him fully. To know his anxieties, his failures, his pain. But he asks God to do so so that he can then be led into a better way of living – God's way.

You see, having our innermost being on display like David prays for may sound incredibly scary, but it really isn't because of the one who searches us. The reality is that God already knew David fully before he asked God to search him, and the same is true for you.

And no matter what He finds in there, He loves you fully and unconditionally.

As you go through these next 6 weeks of devotionals, one of the emotions that you may encounter is conviction. If so, I encourage you not to fight it, but instead welcome it. It's just the Holy Spirit inviting you to live according to God's ways – "the way everlasting."

And so as we enter the Lenten season, maybe we should take a moment and reflect David's prayer. That God would search us and draw out anything that needs addressing. And we can do so confidently knowing that whatever He finds, it does not change His great love and forgiveness for us.

REFLECT

Do you resist the feeling of conviction whenever it arises? Why or why not?

DISCUSS

What is a blind spot about yourself that God has recently revealed to you? Maybe he did so through a trusted friend or loved one.

PRAY

Father, we know that you know us fully. And somehow you love us all the same. Thank you for this. Throughout this Lenten season, would you reveal those things in our heart that are not in line with your character and shape us to be more like you. Amen.

BIO

Garrett serves as Director of Local Missions at Nova Community Church. He enjoys preparing and eating meals with his wife Lexi, and cheering on his favorite teams.

CREATION

Photo by Natalie Pitman

Monday, March 10, 2025

by Donna D'Amico

Read Genesis 1:1-5

*Then God said, "Let there be light!"
So there was light. God saw the light was good.
Genesis 1:3-4*

From Darkness To Light

When traveling in Ireland, we took a trip to a location outside Dublin called Bru na Boinne. Here, you'll find two 5,000 year old passage tombs. It's not known who the builders were, but scientists believe the tombs to be 500 years older than the pyramids at Giza.

We went inside, noting a stone window above the entrance called the roofbox. We were able to go inside several rooms as we followed a narrow path through the burial mound. At one point we entered a larger room, where bones and ashes had been placed. It was in this larger room where the guide warned us he was about to turn out the dim lights. We were plunged into complete darkness. You truly could not see your hand in front of your face. That little bit of sunlight that entered through the roofbox was gone! We had been descending without even realizing it. The guide then demonstrated what occurs at the winter solstice. He flipped a switch, and a faint glimmer of light gradually gained in strength. It lightened up the entire chamber where we stood for 17 minutes! Then, the light slowly faded away, marking the passing of another year.

"In the beginning God..." Few words carry so much meaning. Out of nothing at all, while absolute darkness covered the deep water, the Spirit of God hovered. The Author of life itself spoke, and there was light! The Author Creator saw that what He created was good. He separated the light from the darkness and named it *day*. The darkness, He named *night*. So there was evening and morning; the very first day.

The same Creator God who gave the earth its light wants to bless us with His light. He created man in His image, always intending to have a loving relationship with His creation. He did this of his own free will. In that way we are also made in His likeness, with the free will to choose His love, or go our own way. As we all know, the beauty and order that God spoke into being would not continue forever. Our sin would destroy what once was. But, our God would again bring light into a very dark world.

Over the centuries, there were plenty of episodes of darkness: rebellious, stiff-necked people, evil kings, false prophets, and even the exile to a foreign land. One desperately dark period followed another. However, God had a plan that would totally pierce that darkness with incredible light!

One night, a bright star appeared that heralded a Light that would never be extinguished. Scripture says that our Creator, the source of life, was the light for all humanity. That light still shines, and the darkness has never overcome it (John 1:4-5). God, the Father, inhabits the light. Jesus called himself the Light of the World (John 8:12). He said whoever followed Him would not walk in darkness, but would have the light of life.

The Creator invites us to turn our chaotic “nothingness” over to Him. His light is transforming! It lasts forever. He has the words of life and light, and will put that light into our lives, if we let Him. Let there be light!

REFLECT

Have you opened your heart to the Light of the world? This Lenten season and Easter celebration is the perfect time to walk away from the darkness and into God’s redeeming light.

DISCUSS

What has kept you from walking in the light at different points in your life? Are you feeling alone and confused by the circumstances or struggles surrounding you?

PRAYER

Holy God, this world is filled with chaos and darkness. So many are wandering, looking for things that satisfy, but leave us lost. I pray you would open my eyes to see your light, so I might follow where you lead me. I want to walk in your light.

BIO

Donna loves to sing, travel, and attends Bible Study Fellowship weekly.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

by Laurie Griffin

Read Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:7-10

Creation Speaks

Everything has a purpose. Everything.... Every creature, every blade of grass, every wisp of cloud -- everything has a purpose. God has not made anything without a purpose. What is that purpose? To point everyone to Himself. He wants to be known. Romans 1:19-20 tells us, *“What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”* Everywhere we look, we see evidence of his handiwork; of His existence. Psalm 19:1 tells us even *“the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”* Who of us is not in awe of a dazzling sunset or a star-filled night sky? We intrinsically know that there is something, or someone, out there greater than ourselves. That is what creation was intended to reveal to us.

Have you ever had the chance to go on vacation somewhere really beautiful? Perhaps, it was Yosemite, or a tropical island. Did you feel a sense of peace as you admired the grandeur and magnificence of the natural world? Many would call that “getting in touch with nature”. In reality, as God’s people, we are not getting in touch with creation. We are drawing near to our Creator! That sense of peace we feel when we are immersed in His creation is the fragrance of His peace, the radiance of His glory, and the offer of His love!

Of course, I can't always take a vacation to a marvelous location. Life just gets busy and is full of distractions. However, I can choose to find beauty and peace in God's creation all around me. It may be a quiet walk on the beach, or noticing a beautiful flower on a stroll around the neighborhood. My favorite thing is when I find one, lone flower growing in an unusual place, like in a crack in the concrete. Yet, it perseveres. It continues to grow. It reaches toward the sun because that is what it was designed to do. Every creature, every plant, does exactly what it was designed to do. As science catches up with the Bible, we discover that every plant, every creature, affects everything around it. None are expendable. Each plays a part in the complex community that is God's creation!

The same goes for you and for me. We were made for a purpose. Each of us has a role to play. We have different personalities, strengths, talents, and passions – but, only one purpose: to glorify God and live in relationship with Him. *“For we are God’s handiwork; created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10).* Many wonder, “What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose?” Humans are the only ones who have the freedom to choose whether to do what we were created to do, or go our own way. When we go our own way, we often feel lost, disconnected, and hopeless. We need to lean into the God who has always loved us! When we draw near to our Creator, He reveals His plan and His purpose for us one step at a time. Like putting together a masterpiece puzzle, one piece at a time, we rarely know how all the pieces will fit together. Let's put our trust in the One who sees the final picture – after all, He's the One who painted it! He always knows what He is doing. He never makes mistakes. He uses all things for our good and His glory!

REFLECT

When was the last time you were in awe of God's handiwork in creation? Did you consider His eternal power and divine nature? What was He revealing to you about Himself?

DISCUSS

What are your strong personality traits? What are your strengths? What are you passionate about? Where do you excel? How is God leading you to use what He has given you to reveal Himself to others?

PRAY

Father God, thank You for your creation. Every animal tells a story. The skies proclaim your majesty. Help us to take time to notice the beauty of your creation around us. Thank you that you have not left us in the dark and have given us everything we need to understand who you are and who you made us to be. We are your masterpiece. May your glory shine in us and through us, and may we represent you well to the lost and confused around us.

BIO

Laurie Griffin: Wife of Morgan, and dog mom to two sweet pups! Part-time teacher's aide and dog-sitter. Loves scrapbooking, watercolor painting, camping, and volunteering at summer camps

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

by Jim Ackermann

Read Colossians 1:1-18

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Colossians 1:15-20

It's About Jesus

It is important for me to remember my past life, but also to no longer dwell on it. Accusing myself and re-living past failures actually denies the power of God's new creation: His Life within my heart. In 2008, God rescued me, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Let's back up a couple decades, well before 2008. I attended church off and on for many years, but I was what one pastor called a *"casual Christian."* I rarely thought about *following* Jesus, probably because I wasn't even *listening*! I later learned that this is a dangerous place to be. God wants us to take Him seriously, making Jesus the top priority in our lives.

I started listening to Jesus and following that path when I recommitted my life to God in 2008. But, I didn't just turn an "about – face" and ask God for help one Sunday morning. No, that's not my style! That would be way too easy! I made sure it didn't happen overnight. I chose to avoid God and even openly rebelled against His authority as my Creator. I succumbed to the common temptations of this world, living in darkness, and ignoring God for extended periods of time. I did it my way, and the results were disastrous! The results were not punishment, but simply consequences for poor decisions and willful sin. Instead of pursuing my relationship with the Creator of my life, I struggled with

alcoholism for years. I lost my marriage, experienced bankruptcy, foreclosure, relapse-drinking, and troubles at work, as well.

However, God pursued me and covered me with undeserved favor. (*That's grace!*) He did all this, and we *both* knew I didn't deserve it! (*Nobody does!*) I realized He loved *me*, and that got my full attention! My life had fallen apart, and I needed to surrender. I asked Jesus to become my center, and now I follow Him as best I can. Since then, my life has changed completely. Outsiders will say, "Jim found God!" Yet, even though they may be intending to make fun of me, *it is true!* Thus, it is not offensive to me.

In this passage from Colossians, Paul explains the ultimate authority that Jesus has over all creation - authority freely given to him by the Father. It's ALL about Jesus, for without Him, we would not have the ability to be with God the Father. God hates sin and cannot tolerate it. He is a just God, so sin must be reconciled. He gave us His Son, as the ultimate sacrifice, to pay for our sins, once and for all, past, present and future. Prior to that, sins could only be covered – a temporary relief - but not resolved. We are extremely important to God, and that alone is amazing. He is an awesome God and is very worthy of our worship and praise!

Through study, prayer, fellowship and teaching, I have grown in my understanding of who God is and what my role is as a follower of Jesus. My life is blessed far beyond what I could have ever imagined. It is important for me to remember the total authority of Jesus, and what He did for you and me. The Father gave all authority over creation to Jesus, our Savior. His blood covers all our sins - past, present, and future. Oh, yes, it *is* true that *this* Jim found God. But, after all God has accomplished in pursuit of guys like me, it seems that the more accurate statement must be, "God found Jim!"

REFLECT

The often-quoted verse, John 3:16, describes God's love for us:

"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Think about how awesome it is that the God who created everything knows you personally, has adopted you into His family (permanently and irrevocably), and allows us to communicate directly because of the blood of Jesus. Before we were even conceived, God knew we would be His children!

DISCUSS

The fact that God created everything: our world, millions of galaxies, and us, is obvious to us. Such an intricate design declares that there must be a Designer. How in the world do people think otherwise? Why?

PRAY

Lord, help me to focus more and more on you, and less on myself. Guide me to shine your light in all aspects of my life. Teach me to love others as much as you love me. In your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

BIO

Jim is retired law enforcement. He enjoys being a goofy grandfather. His hobbies are performing gospel / comedy magic, and roasting coffee. Jim and his wife, Laura, are celebrating fifteen years of marriage this year.

Thursday, March 13, 2025

by Justin Hester

Read Psalm 139:13-16

¹³ *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

Psalm 139:13-16

Fearfully Made

Before graduation, everyone at West High School needs to have taken at least one art class. However, going into the summer after junior year, I had not yet done so. I ended up enrolling in ceramics as the deadline approached. At first, of course, I had no experience shaping clay. But over time, I improved tremendously. After receiving project instructions, I envisioned what I wanted to create and molded that clay into what I had in mind. Upon finishing these projects, I was extremely eager to share what I had created with my own hands, being immensely proud of my work!

In many ways, God is comparable to that of a sculptor, a potter, or an artisan. Before anything was made, the Creator of the entire universe had you in mind! He created and molded you into the person you are today. He envisioned you before you were even formed, and every detail about you was intentional and filled with love! Psalm 139: 13-16 reminds us that we humans are not the result of a series of randomly occurring accidents. Neither are we God's "afterthoughts," brought into the world without His care or left here with no purpose. Instead, we are God's masterful work of art, carefully crafted in His hands! Just as I took pleasure in creating my art, your Father in Heaven is pleased a million times over each day because He made you!

It's easy for one to look in the mirror and notice their flaws, to compare themselves to others, or to feel like we don't measure up. But God sees us in a different light. When He looks at you, He sees

His handiwork, His purpose, and His perfect design! You were made fearfully and wonderfully, which means you were lovingly created with both awe and intention. Nothing about you is a mistake!

REFLECT

Do you see yourself the way God sees you?

In what ways can you praise God for how He has uniquely made you?

DISCUSS

How does knowing you are intentionally created change the way you view yourself and others?

PRAYER

Dear heavenly father, I praise you for loving us with all your heart. I have so much gratitude for you have formed me with your own hands. Thank you that I can express myself to the world, and not be hidden away. Let all of us be confident in who we are, knowing that our creation was intentional and with love. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

BIO

Justin Hester is a senior in high school, who enjoys his work within STEM when not getting touches on the soccer pitch. Therefore he wants to try and major in mechanical engineering once entering college.

Friday, March 14, 2025

by John Welch

Read Psalm 8

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalm 8

Majestic

The first time I saw the band of light known as the Milky Way was as a preteen on a family road trip driving across southern Wyoming on a moonless night. What makes up that streak are a collection of stars too numerous to count. Astronomers estimate that there are approximately 200 billion trillion stars in the universe, based on their estimates of 100 billion stars in our own Milky Way galaxy multiplied by the 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe. As we know, it takes getting away from city lights, streetlights, and even moonlight for us to see this part of God's creation. The spectacle I was seeing that night in Wyoming would have been common for King David as he wrote this Psalm. The Old Testament shepherds, nomads and farmers would have been reminded daily of the vastness of creation and our own smallness. Why did God create a universe with so many stars? For His own enjoyment (and ours) and because He could.

God's workmanship is also evident in our moon. No other planet has a moon so relatively large. It controls our tides, stabilizes the earth's rotation so that climates are predictable and seasonal agriculture is possible, enabled early navigation, and provides a dependable nightlight. What I find most interesting is that when viewed, it is about the same size as the sun. It is 400 times smaller than the sun

but is 400 times closer to the earth than the sun is. This makes eclipses possible. What are the characteristics of a God who would think to place a moon of this diameter at this location so that we could marvel at these rare events? King David found the fitting word in the first and last verses: “majestic.”

While the psalmist reminds us of how small we are compared to the breadth and depth of the creation, the God who knows each of these stars by name, location, size, and chemical composition, knows us individually just as intimately. Made in His image, He crowns us with glory and honor that even the angels do not comprehend (I Peter 1:12). He elevates us into His creation story by giving us dominion to rule and control the flow of the plants and animals. God must think we are something special, and He reminds us that we are. He does this in His Word, in His blessings, care and love, and His creation. To me, this is the constant reminder, akin to what the Old Testament shepherds gazed at every night, that it is a privilege to serve a great God, a loving God, and a majestic God.

REFLECT

Reflect on the fact that a God who created all things devotes all of His time and care on all of your worries, concerns, and troubles because He loves you that much.

DISCUSS

What parts of the creation speaks to you of God’s power and majesty (e.g., mountains, beaches, animal life)? Consider the detail and intricacies of God’s handiwork in what you named. What does that reveal to you about God?

PRAY

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

BIO

John Welch enjoys road trips, national parks, maps and geography, and classical literature. He grew up in Washington State on the Canadian border, just south of Vancouver.

Saturday, March 15, 2025

by Bob Giampaoli

Read John 1:1-5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that

life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

John 1:1-5 (NIV)

"The Textbook of Life"

I'm a retired aerospace engineer enjoying a second career as a high school science teacher at a Christian school. My school principal was hesitant to hire me because he had doubts that an engineer/scientist could also be a born-again, bible-believing creationist! Could a man of science possibly reconcile the apparent contradictions of creation vs. evolution? Big Bang vs. Genesis 1 and 2? Old Earth vs New Earth? Bottom line: He wanted assurance that I believed the Bible was the inerrant, inspired, non-contradicting, 100% truth, and The Word of God.

I must admit, as a young adult I struggled with some of these challenging ideas. Were the seven days of creation recorded in Genesis 1 literal 24-hour days? How could there be light on day 1 when the Sun and Moon are created on day 4? How do I reconcile that man is created last in the Genesis 1 account, but the first of all living things in Genesis 2? What do I do with fossils and dinosaurs and Neanderthal man? It appears my principal had valid concerns about my faith and beliefs. Maybe you, too, struggle with some of these ideas.

Though I do not have impregnable answers today to all my questions, let me assure you, through conversation, research, study, meditation, and prayer, God has revealed Himself and His truth to me in a way that provides a *"...peace that surpasses all understanding..."* (Philippians 4:7). God, through the work of Jesus,

has granted me “...*the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him...*” (Ephesians 1:17). And, in particular, the writings of the apostle John have been of immense help in my journey of discovery.

God is Everything and we are His beloved creation. John helps us to see the *purpose* and *relevance* of the creation story. Look again at the passage and discover these truths:

- * God existed before creation was initiated (He is eternal).
- * He created all things out of nothing (He is omnipotent).
- * God is a triune being from the beginning – Father, Son (“The Word”), and Spirit (“...*and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters...*” Genesis 1:2).
- * He created all things out of nothing (He is omnipotent).
- * Life originates from Him alone. (“...*Let us make man in our image...*” Genesis 1:26).
- * His life and light are placed within us. (“...*in God, there is no darkness at all...*” 1 John 1:5)
- * The devil, ruler of darkness, is conquered by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (“...*now the ruler of this world shall be cast out ... when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself...*” John 12:31-33).

In John’s first letter to the church, he again begins with the bold declaration that we can have true life in fellowship with our eternal, creator Father through the power of Jesus’ work on the cross. John gives us confidence in this truth because he “... *saw with his own eyes and touched with his own hands ...*” (1 John 1:4). This is the hope we bring to this Easter season. I have experienced God personally. Though I have not seen Him with my eyes, nor touched Him with my hands, I know Him in my heart. He created me and I am His. (Song of Solomon 2:16).

So, I encourage you to grapple with the theories of science and test them against the truth of God’s Word. But, I implore you to recognize as I did, that God’s Word is an invitation to know our heavenly Father. The Bible is not a science text, it is the text of Life! May the Risen Lord fill you with life and light this Easter!

REFLECT

Read the poetic creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. Then read the introductions to the Gospel of John and the first letter of John. Meditate on the words. Ask God for understanding of His truth. See how the creation story is an invitation to know God personally today!

DISCUSS

How has God revealed himself to you as you observe and contemplate His creation? What is your response when something you read in the Bible causes you confusion? What actions do you take to resolve your confusion?

PRAY

Father, I do not fully understand the origins of this world, but I know you are my creator. Jesus, draw me close to you as I accept the saving grace of the cross. Spirit, fill me and lead me to be a light in my community. Amen.

BIO

Bob Giampaoli is the husband of Alesia. Bob has been a member of Nova since its inception. He enjoys looking through his many telescopes and considering the origins of the cosmos in the context of his Christian faith.



FALL

Photo by David Smith

Monday, March 17, 2025

by Samara Pitman

Read Genesis 3:1-7

"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Genesis 3:5-6

The Truth About Temptation

When I was a year old, my mom caught me playing with the volume controls on the television, something she had repeatedly told me not to do. When my parents asked me why I did that, my sassy self replied "Mommy say no-no, Daddy say no-no." My mom asked, "Then why did you do it?" My answer? "Want it." That was all. No good reason, no explanation. I did it because I simply wanted to.

Now this may seem like a silly little story of baby Samara, possibly told at family gatherings and with laughs around the dinner table. But I believe it is the perfect example of how our messed-up world full of messed-up humans came to be. God gave Adam and Eve all they could have ever wanted and more, they were living a perfect life in his presence. God's only rule for them was to not eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. So, just like any child when their parents say not to do something, they were all the more tempted to do it. And Satan led them on, just as he does with us. He told them that God was lying to them, convincing them not to put their trust in him. He convinces them to eat the fruit, breaking the only rule God had ever given them. This act, however small it may seem to the average human, kept us away from God forever.

Early in my life, I always blamed our separation from God on Adam and Eve. I thought, "Oh, if they hadn't eaten that fruit, everything would still be perfect." But that is far from true, because Satan knows just how to get to us. Regardless of who it was, as humans, we

would have still messed it all up. Satan knows our flaws and insecurities. But instead of loving us despite them, as God does, he uses them to our disadvantage. He manipulates every lie we've ever told ourselves to make them true to us. Satan tells us we must conform to the world around us. He tells us that we aren't loved. He tells us that God doesn't care about us. These lies he makes out to be true lead us into sin. They cause us to do unholy, worldly things because we believe we need to be like the rest of the world. They cause us to be separated from God, the one who created us and loves us more than we could ever imagine.

Every lie, every temptation Satan has ever given you is false. And God says it, right in His word. You think you aren't loved? In John 3:16, it says that God sent his only Son to *die* for us. If you're a parent, think how much you love your child. God loved us so much more than that, he sent his child to die a horrible death because of his amazing *love* for us, however messed-up we are. Yet, we still believe these lies. We still give in to these meaningless sins. And of course, no one is and will ever be perfect. But instead of giving into the lies of Satan, we should listen to the truth of God and believe in His great love for us. A love so great that he would send his only Son for us.

REFLECT

What is a lie Satan often tells you? What does God say about it in the Bible?

DISCUSS

What is something sinful you are tempted to do in your life? What steps can you take to move away from that temptation and move closer to God?

PRAY

Father God, thank you for loving us despite our sins. Please help us to be more like you in all ways. Help us to move away from

temptations and closer to you. Please help us see the truth of who we are through your eyes. Help us to understand the depth of your love for us. Thank you for loving us even though we don't deserve it.

BIO

Samara Pitman is a middle school student who is also a competitive dancer. When she isn't dancing, she enjoys watching movies, shopping, and hanging out with friends.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

by Cherry Lissner

Read Genesis 6:5-11

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens

Genesis 6:5-8

Noah's Ark

The cover of my grandson's "Baby's First Bible Stories" depicts Noah's Ark. Illustrated in pastel colors with Noah and several of his animal friends looking happy inside the floating ark and in the background is the rainbow.

But this is far from the dark and somber scene described in the Bible during the days of Noah. God declared that he regretted having made human beings on the earth and His heart was deeply troubled. He saw the wickedness and corruption of man and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.

God, being holy and just, said that He will wipe from the face of the earth the human race he created and with them all the animals on the ground and in the air. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), but He is not indifferent to man's rebellion. God will not tolerate sin indefinitely, and when His judgment comes, it is total and complete.

Indeed, the judgment of God is just but His mercy is more, which means that His mercy and compassion far outweigh that judgment. He found favor through a man named Noah. He was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. He was obedient to God and he did everything God commanded.

The story of Noah highlights God's mercy even in the midst of judgment. The ark that God commanded Noah to build in order to keep him, his family, and the animals protected during the flood is the refuge that was promised because they remained faithful to God in the midst of a wicked generation.

We still live in a fallen and corrupt world just like in Noah's time. But God, in His great love and mercy, sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins (John 3:16). God's justice was satisfied through Jesus' death so that His mercy is extended to humanity. His judgment and His mercy go hand in hand.

His Word says that He will give us new mercies every morning (Lamentations 3:23). That's how faithful our God is. And when trials and tribulations come at us like a flood, we have Jesus as our sole refuge who can protect us and help us navigate through the storms of life. Our family can attest to the goodness of our Savior when we were faced with a devastating loss. He never left us nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8). In fact, His grace and mercy abounded during that time of our lives and we came out stronger in our faith, restored in our relationships, and more united in love as a family.

Through Noah, humanity was not wiped off from the face of the earth. And through Jesus Christ, eternal salvation was promised to those who believe. God in His mercy, kindness, and love saved Noah and his family. And He offers the same to us as we put our faith in His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

REFLECT

Which other biblical characters remind you of God's mercy and faithfulness? Take some time to meditate on the heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11 and find commonalities between their stories.

DISCUSS

How do you balance the fact that God is both just and merciful?

PRAY

Lord, we thank you for Noah's life. Thank you for your Word that reminds us of countless faithful people who followed you even in the midst of chaos and disorder. Please forgive us when we fall short and help us draw near to you. Amen.

BIO

Cherry Lissner is a retired grandmother. She loves to sing in the NOVA Choir and participate in the Women's Mission Fellowship. She and her husband have 3 boys and love to travel whenever they get the opportunity.

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

by Chelsea Cook

Read Psalm 51:1-9

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.

Psalm 51:1-2

A Cry for Mercy and Renewal

In the quiet moments of our lives, when we reflect on our actions and the state of our hearts, we may find ourselves echoing the words of David in Psalm 51. This psalm is a raw and honest confession, a cry for mercy from a heart burdened by sin. David's plea is not just for forgiveness, but for a transformation that only God can provide.

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."
(Psalm 51:1)*

David begins by appealing to God's character—His unfailing love and great compassion. He knows that forgiveness is not something he can earn; it is a gift from a gracious God. In our lives, we too must rely on God's mercy, trusting that His love is greater than our failures.

*"Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."
(Psalm 51:2)*

The imagery of washing and cleansing speaks to a deep desire for purity. Sin leaves a stain on our souls, but God offers a cleansing that reaches the depths of our being. When we confess our sins, we invite God to wash us clean, to restore us to the purity He desires for us.

*"For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me."
(Psalm 51:3)*

Acknowledging our sins is a crucial step in the process of repentance. David does not hide from his wrongdoing; instead, he confronts it head-on. In doing so, he models for us the importance of being honest with ourselves and with God. It is only by facing our sins that we can truly seek forgiveness.

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

David's request goes beyond forgiveness; he longs for a new heart and a renewed spirit. This transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to live in alignment with God's will. As we seek God's forgiveness, let us also ask for His transformative power to renew our hearts and spirits.

REFLECT

Take a moment to reflect on your life. Are there areas where you need to seek God's mercy? Are there sins that you need to confess and bring before the Lord? Remember that God's love is unfailing and His compassion is great. He is ready to forgive and renew you.

DISCUSS

What does it mean to rely on God's unfailing love and great compassion when seeking forgiveness?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I come before You with a humble heart, seeking Your mercy and forgiveness. Wash me clean and renew my spirit. Create in me a pure heart that desires to follow You. Thank You for Your unfailing love and compassion. Amen.

BIO

Hi, I'm Chelsea from Torrance, CA. I'm grateful to be married to my wonderful husband Jeff for 15 years and to be a mom to our amazing kids. I cherish my family and my faith, and I find joy in reading, talking real estate, and welcoming friends into our home. It's the simple moments that truly make life special for me.

Thursday, March 20, 2025

by Conor Edwards

Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

Nehemiah 1:7

The Fallen Condition

When I heard the news of the disastrous LA fires that destroyed thousands of homes and displaced hundreds of thousands of people, I felt like Nehemiah in a sense. I was heartbroken and led to pray and support those affected by the fires, praying for my brothers and sisters in Christ and those who are distant spiritually from Him. Yet as I reflected on this passage, I realized that there was a distinct difference in my posture when I prayed. I was praying for the safety and provision for the LA county locals. I was looking at the fallen condition of burned-down houses, lost businesses, and memories and possessions turned to ash, leaving people to pick up the pieces if they still existed. Nehemiah's heart broke for God's chosen people displaced by exile, the walls of Jerusalem broken down and the gates destroyed by fire. The people were in great trouble and shame. But Nehemiah's prayer looked different than mine. He not only saw the fallen condition of Jerusalem and its people, but saw the fallen condition of their hearts!

After Nehemiah mourned, he fasted and prayed to God. He praises Him for being a great and awesome God, promise keeper, the God with steadfast love for those who keep his commandments. But, Nehemiah also remembers the fallen condition of him and his people. In verse 6, he urges God to hear his prayers as he confesses the sins of the people of Israel, including him and his family. How did they sin against God? In verse 7, he exclaims that they have acted corruptly against God himself and failed to keep the commandments

that God commanded to Moses. As a result, God kept his promise and scattered the Israelites among the peoples. Nehemiah also called God to remember His promise of the restoration of the promised land and prosperity for his people, if the Israelites repented. It is by God's great power and strong hand that His chosen people have been redeemed (verse 10).

Apart from God, our fallen condition remains intact. Our sin separates us from a holy God. But just as Nehemiah remembers God's promise of restoration, I remember his promise of restoration through Jesus. Romans 10:9-10 says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. The beauty of this is that it's not just for the Israelites, but for ALL people! Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." God continues to be faithful to keep his covenant with his people. We live in a fallen world, and although natural disasters like fires can devastate and scatter people, God made a way to bring us back to him! May we continue to pray for those around us who have been scattered spiritually because of sin, and may we remind ourselves of God's covenant of restoring all people back to Him.

REFLECT

When disaster strikes, are you quick to pray for the hearts of people? Reflect on your reaction to a recent news event, either locally or globally.

DISCUSS

In what ways does Nehemiah's prayer change the way you pray for your family, friends, or strangers?

PRAY

Father God, I praise you that you are faithful and you keep your promises. Because of our sinful, fallen condition, people are

separated from you, a holy and perfect God. Yet you continued to keep your promise and sent Jesus to die on the cross, rose from the dead and defeated sin and death. Through faith in Jesus and repentance of sin, you bring us back into fellowship with you. So many people around us do not know this promise or refuse to believe it is true. I pray that you would soften hearts, that you would hear our prayers, and that your power would restore sinful hearts. May Nova Community Church be a community of prayer leaders, praying on behalf of those around us who need the love and restoration only found in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

BIO

Conor Edwards is on staff with CRU in UC Davis. He loves to play the drums.

Friday, March 21, 2025

by Jackson Reeves

Read Matthew 15:15-20

"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them"

Matthew 15:17-20

From the Inside Out

It was in May of 2024 that I saw the announcement: I was chosen for student leadership in my school's marching band and I was going to become a section leader for next year's season. I was ecstatic. Throughout the past three years of my time in band, I had constantly been thinking about applying for this position, and always kept developing ideas and scenarios in my head about what I would do as a leader. I thought about how I would teach, act, the things I would say, and the like. More than anything, as someone who loves marching band and takes great enjoyment in participating in it, I wanted to show others how much fun it can be to work hard. By the end of it, I had developed a very vivid picture in my mind of how things would look and how the season would go with me as a section leader.

After I applied for the position my sophomore year and got denied, I tried my best and worked hard across many seasons, and looked at every possibility to show my passion and initiative for band. I applied in February of 2024, hoping from the bottom of my heart that I would be granted leadership, and going back-and-forth in my head about whether or not I was going to be selected. Once I learned that I would be, I was beyond excited. Thinking once again about the picture I had built up in my head, I thought I had everything figured out and pre-planned. I felt well-equipped to deal with anything thrown at me, and was extremely looking forward to

putting this plan of mine into action for my final marching season as a section leader.

At the start of the season, however, I was informed that there were going to be a lot of new changes. We hired new staff to assist in coaching, there were a lot of scheduling changes for our rehearsals, and most of all, we completely changed a lot of our marching basics—basics that I had spent the past three years learning and perfecting to ensure I could teach it flawlessly. Needless to say, the picture of me as a leader that I had been building in my mind for the past three years was gone in an instant. Trying to coach the new members of my section proved to be very, very difficult. They didn't get the hang of things as well as I had expected them to and I couldn't teach them as well as I had hoped to. It proved to be one of the hardest tasks I've ever had to accomplish. I faced countless difficulties throughout the season, and for every rehearsal, in my mind I felt like I was failing as a leader. I asked myself: "Am I doing things wrong? Am I unworthy of this position? Am I defiling my trusted title as a student leader?"

In today's Scripture, Jesus talks to his disciples about how, exactly, a man becomes impure. Back in those times, many followed the teachings of the Pharisees, who believed that someone's righteousness came from their actions. For example, Jesus mentions hand-washing in the verse, and how eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man, referring to the Pharisees' belief that people should always partake in the ritual of washing their hands before eating, lest they become impure and dirty. Jesus rejects these teachings, saying that nothing coming from outside could ever cause a man to be defiled. In reality, Jesus explains that it is the opposite. Righteousness comes from the inside, not the outside. As he says in the book of Mark, "Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 'For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as

deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man,” (Mark 7:17-23).

Was I a bad leader because I could not do everything perfectly, and because I could not live up to the standards I had set for myself over the past few years? Like Jesus said, nothing coming from the outside could ever make someone impure. Christianity is not about performing rituals to please God and earn your righteousness, contrary to what the Pharisees believed, and contrary to what I believed about my own image as a leader. Even if I could not do everything perfectly as a leader, what I had over everything else was my ambition to assist others.

I applied for the position in the first place because I wanted to help other people gain the same passion I developed for marching band. I wanted to be the spark that ignited their own initiative. Imagine if I had applied for the position simply because I just wanted respect from others, and to be in a position of power. This is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus is warning us about that makes us impure. Our own hearts. Jesus has warned time and time again of performing good actions with hollow hearts. If I became a leader only to gain satisfaction from having power over others, I would have been defiling the position that I was entrusted with. When our hearts prompt us to do these sorts of things, we become impure and defiled.

Throughout the season, I rethought my image as a leader, and decided to take things as they come. I would just try to help my students as best I could, be with them every step of the way, and assist in whatever was necessary. Though I still made plenty of mistakes, I used those as an opportunity to learn and grow, and strive to not make those same mistakes again. I took satisfaction not in knowing that I had power over others, but in knowing that my actions were helping and guiding others on their journey in marching band. Even though I could not do everything perfectly all the time, my intentions were sincere, and I took my title as a section leader with utmost respect.

Remember that nothing that comes from outside can ever cause your defilement. As Psalm 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it".

REFLECT

How can you ask God to keep your heart and intentions pure? How can you remember that it is not external actions that count for your righteousness?

DISCUSS

When was the last time your heart prompted you to do something out of sin?

PRAY

Dear God, thank you for guarding our hearts. Help us to flourish in your righteousness. Embolden us and make us unafraid of what may come from outside, and help us to remember that it is what is in our hearts that counts.

BIO

Jackson Reeves is a high school student who is involved in music programs at his school. He enjoys taking long walks around his neighborhood.

Saturday, March 22, 2025

by Loki Efaw

Read Romans 3:9-11

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are under the power of sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

Romans 3:9-11

Navigating Your Salvation Journey

The Lent process parallels our salvation journey. A journey with a beginning, an end, and an eternal ending with our heavenly Savior. Some key aspects of the salvation journey are hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as your savior, repentance, confessing your faith in Christ, being baptized, and sanctification.

I compare this journey to traveling. Some people start their journey without a goal, plan, or a defined destination. A more committed traveler will have a destination, plans, expectations, and successful completion. However, traveling to the destination seldom goes smoothly. Oftentimes, obstacles are encountered and other factors interrupt your journey.

While navigating our salvation journey, we can easily fall astray. "There is no one righteous, not even one." What can we do to stay on track as we navigate our salvation journey?

Personal Humility – Recognizing that we're not exempt from the effects of sin helps prevent self-righteousness. Understanding our ongoing need for grace shapes how we treat others. This awareness should lead to regular self-examination and repentance.

Relationships with Others – Knowing that everyone struggles with sin promotes empathy. It helps us avoid judging others harshly and encourages us to extend to others the same grace we have received. This shapes how we handle conflict and forgiveness in daily life.

Personal Humility – Sharing the gospel with love and truth helps us approach outreach with humility rather than superiority. It enables authentic conversations about struggles and solutions.

Daily Spiritual Growth – Motivates ongoing dependence on Christ rather than self-reliance. This encourages regular Bible study and prayer. It helps us recognize and resist temptation. It promotes gratitude for God's grace.

Church and Community Life – Fosters authentic community where people can be real about their struggles. It encourages mutual support and accountability and it promotes unity despite differences.

Decision Making – Helps us recognize our need for wisdom beyond ourselves. It encourages us to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. It shapes ethical choices in work, social, family, and personal life, helps you handle guilt and shame biblically, and provides a framework for processing failures.

These are 6 aspects you can use to guide you in navigating your salvation journey.

REFLECT

I learned in my personal on-going salvation journey that daily reflection on the 6 aspects listed above, I am blessed by The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides me inspiration, a positive attitude, scriptures to reflect on, people to care and fellowship with, and opportunities to witness. Which of these 6 aspects can you focus on this week?

DISCUSS

Take the opportunity to pray before your every morning and evening meal, or meal breaks. Include your humbleness before God, seek his forgiveness, and pray about some of these points. Then at

the end of the week, have a separate prayer reflecting on how God has blessed you and thank him and The Holy Spirit in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Share your personal reflection on the week to others.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, grant me a humble heart that recognizes Your greatness and my dependence on You. Help me to see myself truthfully—acknowledging both the gifts You've given me and my many imperfections. Teach me to love others as You have loved me—with patience, forgiveness, and selfless concern. May I see Your image in everyone I meet today and respond with kindness and grace. Guide my spiritual journey, Lord. Draw me closer to You through Scripture and prayer as you lead me with your Holy Spirit. Transform my character daily to reflect more of Jesus's teachings. Strengthen Nova Community Church with unity and purpose. Use me as an instrument of encouragement, service, and peace among my brothers and sisters in Christ. I surrender my pride, my plans, and my preferences to You. May You be done in me and through me this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

BIO

Loki Efaw is a long-term Christian, past leader of youth groups, and traveler with his wife to numerous countries to support and visit missionaries. He currently leads a small group at Nova.

WILDERNESS

A photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there are several large, rounded, reddish-brown boulders scattered across a sandy, light-colored ground. The boulders are of various sizes and shapes, some appearing smooth and others more jagged. In the background, there are more boulders and a dark, rocky ridge or cliff line. The sky is a deep blue, filled with large, white, puffy clouds that are scattered across the upper two-thirds of the image. The clouds have soft, billowy edges and are illuminated from above, creating a sense of depth and volume. The overall scene is a vast, open, and somewhat desolate wilderness.

Photo by David Smith

Monday, March 24, 2025

by Joshua Sanders

Read Joshua 5:6

The children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness...

Joshua 5:6

All Is Well in the Wild

Forty is a significant number in Scripture. Forty days and nights of rain upon the world in the time of Noah. Forty days of fasting for Jesus before his temptation. Forty years of desert dwelling before Moses receives his call. Forty years of Philistine oppression. Forty days of Goliath's taunts before God gives the victory. Forty years on the throne for both David and Solomon. And of course, forty years wandering in the wilderness before the people of God enter the Promised Land.

In the Bible, wilderness times are always periods of testing. Will God's people trust Him, take Him at His word, believe His goodness, and receive His grace? It's the same for us today. Will we trust His provision and His sovereignty? *There's* a churchy word even Christians don't often hear much anymore. In simple terms, "sovereignty" means supreme authority. It carries the idea that God calls the shots, that His people can place their confidence in Him despite their circumstances. We should be able to trust His timing. God is enough. We don't need anything else.

That's the real challenge, though, isn't it, and the mark of true faith. Do we desire God, or simply wish for Him to take care of our troubles? Do we really want Him? In his book *Prodigal God*, Tim Keller surprises readers by pointing out that *both* brothers in Jesus's parable about the wayward son were merely after their father's "stuff," and didn't desire the father himself. The younger one, the prodigal, wanted material blessings from his father, and then went off and squandered it all. The older brother thought he could earn his father's favor and his right to those same material blessings

through his hard work. Both merely wanted their father's things. Are we any different? We want the blessings of God, for Him to make us comfortable, fight our battles, clear our paths of annoying people. We want cozy, cushy, carefree lives. It's interesting to note that this is a new thing among Christians. It used to be that God's people expected hardship, because Jesus promises it.

When we've come to desire God Himself, however, and treasure His presence, circumstances won't affect us as they usually do. I often think of Peter walking on the water in Matthew 14. He begins to sink when he sees the wind and the waves. Was Peter ever in any real danger, though? Of course not, since Jesus was right beside him. Do we have the faith to look to Jesus despite our circumstances, and realize that all is well in the wilderness simply because God is there beside us?

Just a few verses after our Scripture for today, a curious thing occurs. Joshua, the general of Israel's army, encounters a mysterious unnamed warrior standing with drawn sword, just outside Jericho on the edge of the Promised Land. When Joshua asks whose side he's on, the strange visitor says, "Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come." Joshua realizes that he's standing in the angelic presence of the one who leads God's heavenly army to take charge of the battle soon to be fought. The lesson is that the Israelites need to learn their place. They must fight *God's* battle, and take orders from Him, rather than assume He's there at their beck and call. What about us? Do we really know our place, or do we simply want God to do what we want Him to do? Wilderness experiences can be times to learn to truly want what God wants for us: lives lived desiring *Him*, and the confidence that He is enough.

REFLECT

When I'm dealing with difficult times, do I rest in the assurance that God is good and can be trusted, or do I simply want Him to solve my problems?

DISCUSS

Upon what life experiences can you look back and see that God was at work, even though at the time it was difficult to understand how any good could come of what you were dealing with? Share those times together, and give God thanks and praise for knowing better than you did what was best and right.

PRAY

Dear Father, Your word says that even faith is a gift from You, not something we bring to the table, and so we ask You to give it to us. Help us to believe what You've promised, that you'll never leave or forsake us, and that You are all we need. Give us more and more of that faith, we pray.

BIO

Joshua Sanders has taught English in Torrance for almost three decades, and helps lead worship through music at Nova. He's proud of his two kids, and crazy about his wife.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

by Lauri Chipeco

Read Deuteronomy 8:1-18

*Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with
manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach
you
that people do not live by bread alone, rather we live by every word that
comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

Deuteronomy 8:3 (NLT)

The Latest and Greatest

I do not enjoy cooking. Daily, I dread the thought of “What am I going to cook for dinner tonight?” Thank goodness, this is pretty much the only meal I prepare these days. My husband and children consider me a good cook because most meals I cook come out tasting delicious. This is mostly because I follow someone else’s recipe. I was once told that you should always taste your dish before serving so you can season it to taste. For me, I can’t even tell you what flavor I’m trying to achieve! Pretty much the only seasoning I use is Lawry’s garlic salt. (No, this devotional is not sponsored!) No lie, I do enjoy seeing the delight on my family’s faces & hearing the praises I get after dinner. But the process from beginning to end is a chore. To this day, I look for any tools that will make my life easier.

First, it started with the rice cooker. I grew up where my grandfather made rice from a pot. I never mastered this nor the finger-method. My mom gave us a rice cooker as a wedding gift, producing a perfect pot each time! We also received a microwave and a toaster oven. These are still my OGs. As our family grew, I needed to expand my repertoire. Next came the slow cooker, which allowed me to start the meal in the morning, watch my babies throughout the day, and dinner will be ready at night. That was then, but now I’m afraid to leave that appliance on while I’m at work all day! A couple of years ago, I upgraded my very basic 2-speed blender to the Ninja blender, only to make shaved ice for halo halo! Since then, I have also

acquired a bread maker (never used), a panini grill (only to make grilled cheese sammies), an immersion blender (for that potato leek soup recipe), a mini food processor (too mini), an Instant Pot (ironically, too time consuming for me), an air fryer (never opened) and 2 indoor smokeless grills, for that one time we had Korean BBQ at home just to save money! Recently, I upgraded our old toaster oven to an '11-in-1' combo air fryer, which we only use to primarily toast our bread! To be honest, I've only used these appliances once or twice since their acquisition. Have these improved my joy for cooking? No...it only complicated my life with what to make in which appliance! Tragically, I'm not a baker either, because I DO love desserts!

Like me, many people think that life is based on satisfying our appetites (no pun intended) - if they can earn enough money to dress in designer clothes, go on exotic extravagant vacations, eat at fancy restaurants where all the stars go, etc. They think they are "living the good life." For me, it was getting the latest and greatest appliances. But such things do not satisfy our deepest longings. People end up being dissatisfied and empty, or in my case, in storage. It is easy to get so caught up collecting and managing our lives that we forget to thank God for all his provisions and promises. In verse 10 we read, "When you have eaten your fill, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you." This was a reminder to the Israelites not to forget God when their needs and wants were satisfied. That is why this is traditionally cited as a reason to say grace before or after our meals. So let our prayers serve as a constant reminder of our Lord's goodness and faithfulness to us all. Let us be humbled to not live by bread alone, but rather, live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord (v. 3).

REFLECT

How often do we take God for granted? We seldom take notice when our cars are running smoothly, that we have clothes on our backs, a roof over our heads, or when our appliances turn on each time we plug them in. What has been working well for you or giving you

good service? Remember to thank God for these quiet blessings and His faithfulness.

DISCUSS

When do you remember God the most? During the good and plentiful times or during the wilderness times when you felt lost and lonely?

PRAY

Father God, thank you for all your provisions in our lives. Just as you provided for the Irealities for 40 years in the desert, where their clothes did not wear out, their feet did not blister or swell, and they did not go hungry. Help us to obey your commands by walking in your ways. Help us to remember you in our time of need and especially not to forget you in our time of plenty. We give you all our praise and thanksgiving. In your name we pray, Amen.

BIO

Lauri is the wife of Raul, who is the #1 fan of her cooking; mother of Wesley and Tami, who are way better cooks than she'll ever be; and is now a grandma! She has served in Nursery and Colina de Luz Orphanage ministries for over 35 years. Aside from cooking, she enjoys going to concerts, plays and amusement parks.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

by Jeff Cook

Read Psalm 119:1-16 (NIV)

"Blessed are those who are blameless in their ways, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—they do no wrong but follow his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.

I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me."

Psalm 119:1-8

Finding God's Presence In Struggle

Have you ever found yourself in a wilderness? Not one that's defined by dry, barren landscapes or wild terrain, and not the one we travel to because of its beauty and wonder, but one of the soul. The wilderness isn't just a season of your life; it's a place of tension where you feel both lost and found at the same time. As you walk through this spiritual wilderness, the weight of struggle and confusion often feels unbearable. Yet, it's in these moments, in these lonely stretches, that God's Word becomes a lifeline.

In Psalm 119:1-16, the psalmist speaks of the blessedness of those who walk in God's ways, those who earnestly seek Him and follow His commands. There is a sense of peace that comes from obedience. But honestly, there are days when I feel far from that ideal. The wilderness often seems like the place where distractions and doubts grow louder, and obedience feels harder.

But even here, God's Word speaks into my wilderness.

When I think about the psalmist's desire to keep God's law, to be steadfast in following His decrees, I am reminded that the wilderness isn't an obstacle to spiritual growth, but a catalyst for it. Just as the Israelites wandered in the desert to learn about God's provision, I, too, am learning in this wilderness. The verses from this psalm

remind me that in the midst of the struggle, I am invited to seek God with all my heart and trust His guidance.

When I face the wilderness, whether it's the pain of loss, a period of waiting, or a challenge that seems overwhelming, God's Word remains a steady anchor. It is in the wilderness where I begin to realize how much I need God's direction, His statutes, His precepts. Without them, I would be lost, wandering without purpose.

And so, I hold on to His Word. I will meditate on it when my spirit feels faint and will praise Him even when I cannot see the way forward. Psalm 119 teaches me that obedience is not about perfection but about a heart that desires to align with God, a heart that is willing to walk in His ways even when the wilderness feels long and difficult.

I'm learning that the wilderness doesn't have to be a place of despair. It can become a place of deep transformation when I allow God's Word to lead me, when I trust that He is near, even when I cannot feel His presence in the moment.

REFLECT

How do you respond when you find yourself in the wilderness of life? Do you seek God's Word to guide you? In what ways have you experienced God's presence in difficult seasons?

DISCUSS

What would it look like for you to praise God and seek Him wholeheartedly in your wilderness?

PRAY

Lord, thank You for Your Word, which is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. In this wilderness I walk, I pray that Your presence would be evident to me. Teach me to trust You fully and to seek Your guidance in every moment. Even when the path seems unclear,

help me to praise You, knowing that Your Word holds all the wisdom I need. May I walk in Your ways and find blessing, even here in the wilderness.

BIO

Jeff is a devoted husband and father of two, working in public safety technology. He shares a strong bond with his wife, and together they cherish the joy of raising their kids and traveling as a family through this wonderful world God has made.

Thursday, March 27, 2025

by David Gellner

Read Hebrews 11:32-40

³² “ And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—
³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Hebrews 11:32-40

Wilderness

This life and this world can often be challenging. I often turn on the news just to find myself hopelessly worrying about the doom I see portrayed. Everything from Climate to War, Ideology to Extremism, Economics to Poverty, Politics to Policy. It is easy to get lost in this despair. Yet through it all I am able to consistently rely on my faith that God is in control. This brings a peace to me as I walk through this Wilderness of life. I am not walking alone but I am walking with God. I know God is good and he is in control even when things seem so out of control. I see examples of great people in this Hebrews passage who walked through their own trials, and it reminds me to focus on how I can be a light in the storm.

Recently I spent a few days in the hospital with some abdominal issues. I didn't know what was wrong with me or if I'd get better.

This experience drilled home the idea that my time is limited on earth and I shouldn't waste it worrying about things that God is in control of. I should spend my time being a light to others by doing what God has in store for me.

The wilderness is often seen as a place of hardship, uncertainty, and testing. It is where faith is refined and dependence on God deepens. Hebrews 11 recounts the lives of those who walked through their own wildernesses - facing battles, persecution, suffering, and even death - yet they held on to faith. They believed in God's promises, though they did not see them fulfilled in their lifetime.

Lent invites us into the wilderness of our own hearts. It is a season of stripping away comforts, confronting doubts, and learning to trust in God's unseen plans. Like the faithful ones in Hebrews 11, we may not always see immediate answers to our prayers or relief from our struggles, but we are called to walk forward in faith, knowing that God's greater story is unfolding.

Jesus, too, entered the wilderness - tempted, weary, yet unwavering in trust. As we journey through this Lenten season, may we embrace the wilderness, not as a place of despair, but as a sacred space where faith is strengthened and hope is renewed.

REFLECT

What does it mean for you to walk by faith, not by sight, in this season?

DISCUSS

How can you trust in God's promises, even when they feel distant?

PRAY

Lord, in the wilderness of life, help me to trust You. Strengthen my faith when I cannot see the way forward. Remind me that You are always working for something greater than I can imagine. Amen.

BIO

David is a Husband and a Father of two wonderful kids. His occupation is an Analyst working on a Government contract. He is the Nova Financial Secretary. He spends much of his free time coaching his kids' soccer teams and refereeing games.

THEME: **WILDERNESS**

Friday, March 28, 2025

by Elizabeth Beissel

Read Matthew 4:4-11

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4

Foundation

Growing up in church, like I did, can make it so easy to breeze through passages like this one, to overlook the small things when you've heard or read it so many times - to dilute it. This scripture talks about how Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness after fasting for forty days and forty nights. I don't know about you, but I would be pretty hangry and my mind would be incoherent if I was in that situation. I don't think I would have a strong enough foundation to fight that temptation. Jesus was able to beat temptation by having a firm foundation in the Lord. He filled himself up with the word of God and a personal relationship with God.

Temptations are everywhere in this world, and I think we have diluted the influence of small things. When we dilute these temptations, we don't see the problem with it until maybe it's gone too far. Maybe it's watching shows with violence or bad language. Maybe it's listening to music with negative language or content. Maybe it's eating too much or drinking too much alcohol. Whatever is filling up our time and energy becomes our foundation.

I spent many years filling myself up with pretty much only Taylor Swift's music. I was a complete Swiftie. I would spend my time learning all the lyrics, following her on social media and looking for her "easter eggs." I finally realized I was spending WAY too much time learning about Taylor instead of learning and having a relationship with God. So, I changed what music I listen to. I started

listening to amazing Christian artists like Brandon Lake, Brooke Ligertwood, Forrest Frank. I chose to fill myself up with God's truth and goodness and it changed my heart, changed my foundation.

Since my foundation in the Lord is stronger, I can more readily recognize the temptations around me and choose to resist them. The Bible tells us how we can resist temptation in many scriptures. Matthew 26:41 says, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." These verses remind us that we need to submit ourselves to God, pray to Him, and He will give us the strength to resist temptation.

REFLECT

What are you filling yourself up with? What are you spending your time and energy on? What is one small change you can make so that your foundation in God is stronger?

DISCUSS

Have you been listening to any Christian music lately? Ask someone for recommendations.

PRAY

God, thank you for loving us enough to send Jesus to this earth to live a perfect life so that we can be saved from our sins. Holy Spirit take over our lives so we can fight temptations when they come our way. Give us hearts that want to seek you and ears that are willing to hear you. Help us grow closer to you everyday. In Jesus' name, Amen.

BIO

Elizabeth Beissel is a Nanny for twins, a Wife who loves to cook, and a huge baseball fan.

Saturday, March 29, 2025

by Natalie Pltman

Read Hebrews 3:7-12

*See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart
that turns away from the living God.*

Hebrews 3:12

The Hardened Heart

Our society has a habit of telling people to “do what feels good” or “you have a “right” to feel this way.” We have become convinced that we are entitled to circumstances and desires we are not guaranteed. As a result, we are dissatisfied and forgetful in the blessings that we have received, intent on always seeking after more. The “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality - whether focused on material belongings, status, promotions, or anything else - only distracts us from the gifts and goodness of God.

Throughout 40 years of wandering the desert, we see the Israelites go through multiple cycles of complaining, doubting God, rebelling, and then repenting and asking for forgiveness. I have caught myself at times scoffing at how silly the Israelites seem for their anger and entitlement with God. Shouldn't they realize how many times God has saved them? Shouldn't they see the ways in which He has provided for them? And then I realize: I do the exact same things in my own life. I'm no different than the Israelites thousands of years ago. Maybe I don't outright question God in the same ways that are recounted in the Old Testament, but my actions may say otherwise.

In our Southern California beach city, I don't often think of the term “wilderness.” The closest thing that comes to mind is the desert between here and Arizona, which is not a place I want to drive through frequently, let alone wander for 40 years, even with today's modern conveniences. So, when I take a step back and try to imagine the Israelites' situation - no stable home, hot sand, the same food every day, and limited water - I'm not sure I would have behaved any

differently. *40 years* of that? I'm pretty certain I'd be complaining, too.

Sometimes, when I have found myself dissatisfied in my own circumstances and my prayers for change have been answered with a "no" or "not yet," my pride settles in, and I have this childish reaction of wanting to say, "Mine!" and hold onto my discontent, not talk to God about my disappointments and frustrations or truly seek to understand what He wants from me. In doing this, I harden my heart to God and don't allow myself to see what He's done and continues to do in my life. I am unable to hear from Him.

While we will likely never be in a desert in the same way the Israelites were, we are no more immune to hardening our hearts and losing sight of the goodness of God in our lives. We must keep our ears tuned to His voice, so that we do not have "a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (v. 12).

REFLECT

In what ways have I hardened my heart toward God? How can I be intentional to remember what He has done in me and for me?

DISCUSS

The next verse in this passage, Hebrews 3:13, says, "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." How can you encourage others this week?

PRAY

Father, forgive me for the times that I have hardened my heart toward You. Help me to see and understand the ways You have provided and cared for me and to remember Your faithfulness throughout my life. Forgive my pride when I think I know better than You and Your ways.

BIO

Natalie Pitman is a South Bay native whose happiest place on earth is Yosemite. She is an avid sports fan and enjoys traveling, reading, and spending time with family and friends.

REDEMPTION

A close-up photograph of a small, bright yellow flower with five petals, growing from a pile of dry, tangled twigs and branches. The flower is the central focus, standing out against the dark, textured background of the dead wood. The lighting is soft, highlighting the delicate structure of the flower and the intricate patterns of the surrounding twigs.

Photo by Bev Baigent

Monday, March 31, 2025

by Phyllis Jew

Read Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you-the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you-every living creature on earth establish my covenant with you: Never again will life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

Genesis 9:8-13

Promises and Redemption

We promise lots of things to ourselves and our family and friends. Hopefully we follow through with those things that we have promised. I was a library aide at my kid's school when they were younger and I would have contests with the kids. If they would read so many pages or even a whole book they would win a prize. Most of the time the kids would do this just because they enjoyed it but also because they got to redeem a prize at the end of the contest. Sometimes they didn't meet the goal just because they didn't want to try and lost out on getting that prize. We as adults need to remember to keep our eyes on the prize of eternal life with our Lord.

In these verses God made a covenant with Noah and all other living creatures that there will never be a flood that will destroy the earth. He set the rainbow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant between him and the earth. He created the rainbow for us to be reminded of his promise he made back then between God and all living creatures of every kind so that we can remember that he is fulfilling his promise to us.

Considering how our earth is today it is hard to see that promise when we are having fatal fires, earthquakes, rains and wars where people and animals are losing everything. But the rainbow is a sign

of divine good will toward the creation even though we experience hardship as well.

There is a better redeeming promise for all who believe in God's Son. God sent his Son into this crazy, disobedient, rebellious, deadly world to bring life abundant and eternal.

REFLECT

Every day, all over the earth, rainbows testify about God's faithfulness to his covenant, because God sees them too, and remembers his promise.

DISCUSS

When was the last time you saw a rainbow and thought about God's promise to us? Next time you see one remember what God promised us.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Let us pray that we can continually believe in your promises even though we are going through many tough times in our world today.

BIO

Phyllis Jew is an Office Administrator for a Property Mgmt. Co. She serves in many areas at Nova and loves to read.

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

by Dennis Fevergeon

Read Exodus 6:6-8

*I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,
I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an
outstretched arm with great Judgements.*

Exodus 6:6

An Old Word in Need of a Fresh Understanding

Kids love going to Chuck E. Cheese! Parents often don't share that same enthusiasm. I vividly remember taking my daughters to Chuck E. Cheese for their birthday parties. They couldn't wait to win all the tickets they could and then "Redeem" them for some prizes. If you are over 60 years old you may remember collecting S&H Green stamps or Blue Chip stamps, filling up books of those stamps and taking them to the "Redemption" store for a toaster or other appliance.

The core of the concept of redemption is to set someone free from evil or bondage. God delivered the Hebrews from the heavy yoke of Egyptian slavery.

Verse 8 tells us that God will be faithful to deliver the Hebrews and give them the land that He promised Abraham. God faithfully delivered on His word.

While the word Redemption means to free someone from evil or bondage, its highest or fullest meaning is to deliver someone from bondage with the payment of a price. A ransom price. We better understand the concept of Redemption when we see that Jesus is the ransom that was paid for our deliverance. Mark 10:45 tells us that Christ's death was a ransom for many.

I Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 say that we have been bought with a price. Paul tells us that we have been bought with a price so that we can glorify God in all that we say and do.

In Romans 6 and 7 Paul tells us that before believing in Christ, we were under the bondage and Power of Sin. Political or Physical bondage is horrible but the ultimate bondage is spiritual bondage to sin.

We can be freed from the Penalty of sin (spiritual death) and we can be delivered from the power of sin in our lives.

The Hebrews were slaves of Egypt and God freed them from this bondage. In a similar way we are no longer slaves of sin and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life no longer under the bondage of sin's power. Out of gratitude to God for what he has done for me; I want to live in a manner that is pleasing to him.

II Corinthians 5:21 tells us that He made Him who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The Ransom price for our Redemption was the blood of Jesus.

I remember watching Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ. When the movie was over, I just sat in my seat and became overwhelmed by the pain and suffering that Jesus went through for me. I was speechless and better understood the cost of the Ransom that was paid for my Redemption.

REFLECT

This Lenten season I want to be reminded of the great cost of God's redemption for all who believe in Him. And I want to be so very thankful that God demonstrated His great love toward me.

DISCUSS

What insights have you gleaned from these scriptures and how do they apply to your life?

Are you Redeemed? And by what basis are you Redeemed? (Hint: Remember our recent preaching series: Jesus plus nothing)

PRAY

Our heavenly Father, my heart is so moved that because of your great love for me, you chose to Redeem me. You have Redeemed me from the Penalty of sin, the Power of sin in my life and have prepared a place for me in heaven. How can I thank you enough? As an act of gratitude and obedience help me to live a life that is pleasing to you in all that I say and do.

BIO

Dennis Fevergeon volunteers with Reignite Hope helping at-risk students learn how to weld and know the love of Jesus. Dennis enjoys four wheeling and restoring cars.

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

by Ken Demshki

Read Psalm 130

*Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.
If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord,
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

Psalm 130

Redemption from the Depths of Sin

As with all Scripture, context matters. Psalm 130 is one of the passages written by King David, leader of God's people. King David is deeply troubled by both being trusted to lead God's people and falling so very short of expectations due to sin. In this case the sin of infidelity. King David fears that the distance he has created between himself and God is so great that he is not sure if God even hears him. King David does note that God must not keep a record of our sins because then there would be no forgiveness or a path to return to God - in other words, redemption.

In our lives we often find ourselves disappointed by human leaders that fall short of their desired station of leadership or being a role model. Some openly admit to the error of their ways, change course, and ask for forgiveness from those that they have affected. Can you think of a leader (it can be a celebrity or sports figure) that has openly shared how they have failed and asked for forgiveness from those they hurt? Can you think of a leader that betrayed the public trust and when confronted did not change or ask for forgiveness?

We know, as King David knew, our relationship with God is strained by our sins because of the distance it creates between God and the

people he loves. It is a distance completely created by us, the sinners. Thankfully God gives us a way for the relationship to be repaired. God deeply desires that we own our sin, learn from our sin, reconcile with those we may have hurt, and come close to Him and His abundant love.

We may never commit a sin to the level of King David or have the responsibility to be a leader for thousands, yet sins, big and small, distort our relationship with God. Fortunately God generously provides a path to Redemption.

REFLECT

Is there a sin, even what would appear to be a minor, that needs to be dealt with as you are redeemed by God? We know that when we sin in a way that it hurts others we are inclined to resolve the issue urgently. But how about sins that only hurt our personal relationship with God? Maybe an addiction? Do we seek Redemption for these sins with equal urgency?

DISCUSS

How do you feel that you receive Redemption and Restoration for your relationship with God?

PRAY

Father God, you know us. We are sinners. You give us so much yet we stray. Thank you for allowing us to own our sins, learn from our sins, reconcile with those we may have hurt through sin, and once again come close to You. Thank You for the gift of Redemption.

BIO

Ken Demshki is a husband, father of two and grandfather of three. In retirement, Ken enjoys having time to explore the great gift of artwork and the outdoors, particularly on Big Bear Lake.

THEME: REDEMPTION

Thursday, April 3, 2025

by Susan Welch

Read Colossians 1:10-14

*For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves,
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Colossians 1:13-14

Have Faith

Wow! These verses outline so many great gifts God gives all believers:

As children of God we will inherit His kingdom and live with Him forever.

We are rescued from Satan's power over us and no longer have to live in the darkness that the worldly life entails.

We are free from the judgement that we would have had to face for all our sins and can be forgiven. We do not have to worry about being condemned for them and living with all the guilt and shame.

We are free from living with all the lonely and dark clouds of hopelessness to instead walk in freedom, love, forgiveness, and have the true power of a good God walking with us, helping us, wanting the best for us, and being a perfect father.

What amazing gifts!

I became a Christian at a really young age. At that time there were a lot of movies and people talking about how when they became Christians they felt a power surge or warmth come over them and just a wonderful blast of electric feelings. However, I didn't FEEL that when I became a Christian, causing me to doubt the realness of my Christianity. Every altar call I saw (and there were quite a few in my childhood) made me want to go forward because I just didn't

think I was truly saved when I didn't have the same bubbly feelings as many others.

Then one day my dad explained faith to me and how we shouldn't rely on feelings. We need to believe what the Bible says about prayer and ask God to forgive our sins and that He will forgive them; ask Jesus to come into our life and live with us forever and He will; ask Him to help us grow close in our walk with God and believe and trust in what He says. Feelings can lie to us but knowledge of the Bible and faith in what God says in his Word doesn't lie.

Satan wants us to believe we aren't good enough and wants us to feel hopeless and left out. He wants us to remain in a dark place and not know the Truth. God desires the opposite for us. God wants us to come out of darkness and come into the light to be forgiven and walk with Him, let Him hold you in his strong and powerful hands, to help you through this life and then take you into eternity to live in heaven with Him forever. Believe in this! Have faith! Have redemption!

REFLECT

Every relationship that flourishes and deepens needs to have time spent sharing with each other. God wants a relationship with us and to help us grow and mature in our faith. In order to do this we need to develop a two-way communication with God by reading and studying His Word to help us discover who He is and how He wants us to live and what pleases Him. Pray and tell Him how wonderful He is and what is on your heart and how you need Him to help you with all life's trials and heartaches.

DISCUSS

Do you spend enough time reading the Bible and growing your faith so that you can grow in your relationship and walk with God? Do you pray and talk to God throughout your day?

PRAY

Lord, help my Christian walk to not rely on fleeting emotions or feelings, but rather to develop a faith and confidence based on the

promises in God's Word and a growing relationship with Jesus. Thank you for forgiving my sins and coming into my heart and making me your child.

BIO

Susan Welch has been attending Nova Community Church for over 37 years. She met and married her husband, John, at this church. They have four adult kids and one baby grandson. She loves to sew, read, play games and go for walks in nature. She was raised in Canada but now enjoys the warmth of sunny California.

Friday, April 4, 2025

by Cheree Whorley

Read Romans 3:21-28

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Romans 3:21-28

I Am Redeemed

How did your body physically react to reading Paul's words? Did a big smile form on your face? Did your lungs take a deep sigh of relief? Did you shout out, "AMEN!"? Or simply bow your head to thank Jesus quietly in your mind? These verses call for a reaction of some kind, whether it's exaltation, humility, or gratitude.

Prior to verse 21, Paul states this truth: we become aware of our sin, stain, and brokenness by looking at the law, which we can never fulfill through our own will. We'll never be good enough because the law saves no one. It's a harsh reality that we cannot escape. However, right at the moment our head drops in defeat, God's word provides hope with a BIG BUT! Paul stops us in our tracks of self loathing to proclaim the best news yet: Jesus Christ redeems us! We are no longer slaves to a set of standards we cannot meet. WE ARE REDEEMED. (There is that sigh of relief again.)

Growing up, the only place I heard the word redeemed used was while playing sports. For example, when I was playing basketball and

made a careless pass to my teammate in the key to which the ball was stolen, my coach would encourage me to “redeem myself” by making a defensive stop at the other end of the court. Or when I was playing shortstop and a ground ball got through the infield because I didn’t put my glove all the way to the ground, I could “redeem myself” by getting that runner out through a double play. The world wants to believe that we have the power to overcome any human weakness or mistake, but it’s not true. We can never truly redeem ourselves because we have sinned, and only one who has never sinned can take away our sin. Jesus + nothing.

My youth group often sang a song called “I’ve Been Redeemed.” The lyrics still resonate in my heart and mind today to point me to the one who does all of the redemption work for me:

“I’ve been redeemed,
Washed and cleaned,
I’ve been redeemed.
He lifts me up,
Fills my cup,
He lifts me up.
Sing alleluia,
Sing alleluia,
Christ is Lord.
We have new life,
Healed our strife,
We have new life.”

These words remind us that we are sacrificially loved and taken care of by our Maker and Savior, therefore, we have endless reasons to praise and worship Jesus . He did ALL of the work to free us from being servants to the law and substituted our identity to heir and heiress. We can confidently claim that we are children of God, unashamed of our humanness, faults, and weaknesses because Jesus fills every void. He redeems me and you. We get to live a life of receiving and not grasping, inheriting and not possessing, praising and not seizing. David writes it beautifully in Psalm 16:5-6: “Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The

boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places, surely I have delightful inheritance.” Amen! God did all of the work through His Son Jesus, and by faith in Him we are His children, generously provided cups overflowing with grace, mercy, redemption and love. He gives us security, life, and an eternal inheritance. All praise and glory to God!

REFLECT

Reread the passage again. Faith in Jesus Christ is the channel through which our salvation comes to us and becomes ours, but it is not a good work. Faith is receiving what God offers. Have you accepted what God offers you? Do you say yes to the ways God wants to meet with you and love you on a daily basis?

DISCUSS

Is being redeemed part of your current identity? Why or why not? What would it look like if it was?

PRAY

Jesus, thank you for reminding us that you laid down your life so that we could live the best one: one with you. Thank you for freeing us from trying to earn salvation. Thank you for showing us the best way to live each day: loving you and loving others. We can only do this because you came to earth to show us what love is and how to love those you place in our lives. Please help us to remember the gift of redemption, this identity you clothe us with. Please help us to see others as redeemed brothers and sisters and pray for those who have not placed their trust in you. Love you too. Amen.

BIO

Cheree Whorley is a Torrance native who has been a Warrior, Spartan, and is currently a Saxon. She loves being a Nova family member, going on walks with friends, delighting in God’s beautiful creation, and being an auntie to two fun and silly kids.

Saturday, April 5, 2025

by Wilkin Lee

Read 1 Peter 1:17-21

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Peter 1:18-19

Take Redemption for Granted

Recently I was watching the movie Apollo 13. One of the scenes was Marliyn Lovell, the wife of Jim Lovell, getting upset about the media coverage her husband received before the accident happened in space. An estimated 53.5 million households in America watched the landing of the moon during the Apollo 11 mission for 2 straight weeks. However, less than 1 year later on the Apollo 13 mission, most people had lost their excitement about the lunar mission. It was 2 days later when the oxygen tank valve malfunction rejuvenated viewers. At the end, about 40 million households watched Apollo 13 return to earth.

In today's passage from 1 Peter, I was reminded about the true cost of redemption. The only thing that is sufficient is the precious blood of Christ. Nothing else can satisfy the wages of sin except for God's own sinless sacrifice. The world claims that if we are moral and do good works, then we can be redeemed from sin. However, hollow philosophies based on human tradition (Col 2:8) and good works (Eph. 2:8) are insufficient. Peter reminded us that nothing in this world can be a substitute for the blood of Christ, especially acts that stem from human effort.

For most of us, this is nothing new. However, I wonder if we have gotten used to living a life that has been redeemed by Christ in a similar manner to America's attitude toward the Apollo mission. We have the freedom to go to church and have regular fellowship with

other believers. We pray to God for the joys and trials we currently experience. We lift up our future to God and work through the path He lays down for each of us. At times, we forget that our access to God will not be possible without Christ's sacrifice, which is used in exchange for freedom from sin and our reunification with God.

I am privileged to be able to go to Mexico every year either with Hands of Mercy or distribute Christmas gifts in Colina de Luz; two ministries from Nova Community Church. Every single visit, I am reminded of how privileged my life is and remember that God has provided far beyond the provision needed such as food, shelter, and clothing. This is something easy to forget because it is so easy for us to get these provisions. Similarly, do we get used to life with salvation and forget the cost and the privilege which the redemptive work of Christ has given us?

As ambassadors of Christ, God has given us the task to inform humanity that redemption can only be found through faith in Christ alone. Let us seek out opportunities to share this with those who are seeking redemption from sin.

REFLECT

Can you recall or imagine a time that you were living without the redemptive work of Christ? How different was your life without him? Be reminded that nothing else can be a substitute for the redemptive work of Christ.

DISCUSS

Peter mentioned in verse 17 that we need to “live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear” What does it mean to live in reverent fear?

PRAY

Dear God, I know at times I have taken salvation and our relationship for granted. I thank you for reminding me it is only

through Christ's blood that we have a restored relationship. I ask that I will be a light helping others to realize that redemption from sin can only come by faith alone in You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

BIO

Wilkin Lee is a husband and a father of three school age kids working as a high school science teacher. Outside of work, he enjoys traveling, watching sports, and playing board games.

RESTORATION

A full-page photograph of a beach at sunset. The sky is filled with vibrant orange, pink, and blue clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the ocean. Waves are breaking onto a sandy beach in the foreground. In the distance, a long pier extends into the water. The overall mood is serene and beautiful.

Photo by Natalie Pitman

Monday, April 7, 2025

by Jenn Hoffmeyer

Read John 16:22

So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

John 16:22

Good As New

Early in my marriage, my mother-in-law, knowing my love of music, gave me a pair of sterling silver treble clef earrings. I wore them often, especially when singing in choir or on the worship team at church. But over time, the earrings became darker and darker and I stopped wearing them. I didn't know what happened to make them so ugly and dirty-looking; I just thought they were ruined. Years later, I ended up being enlightened by a friend that my earrings were not ruined after all – they had simply become tarnished. After a quick Google search, I discovered an easy method for cleaning them. I gathered the supplies, followed the instructions, and in a matter of minutes the tarnish was completely gone and my earrings were as good as new – fully restored to their original beauty. I'm so glad I didn't throw them out! I have since used that technique many times to restore my dirty jewelry to its original state.

Ever since Adam & Eve's fall in the garden, life has been tarnished, making it harder, darker, and a lot uglier than God intended. Sin corrupts all aspects of creation and the cleansing solution was not something easy like combining common household staples. Jesus knew the solution cost would be steep, both to him and to those closest to him. In John 16, just hours before his arrest, Jesus warns his disciples that "...in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me" (vs 16). They are confused, so he expands, "...Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (vs 22). Jesus knew he would be crucified and separated from them for a few

days, so he gave them permission to be sad and grieve. But he also knew he would be resurrected and that they would experience immense, unchanging joy.

Jesus' words to his disciples also apply to us today. Our lives are tarnished by pain, loss, fear, and all forms of brokenness. We have genuine reasons to be sad and it is appropriate to grieve. But we also know we are not without hope: we *will* see him again. A day is coming when Jesus will return to the earth and when he does, no one will be able to take that joy away ever again. This second coming will not be merely a reunion or a temporary cleaning – it will be full and permanent restoration.

I love the vision C. S. Lewis creates in his book “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”. The creatures of Narnia pass down a prophecy regarding what will happen when the great lion Aslan (who represents Jesus) returns to Narnia. The prophecy says, “Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight; at the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more; when he bares his teeth, winter meets its death; and when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.” In other words, Aslan would put everything right, defeat the White Witch and her curse of winter, and restore Narnia to the way it was at its inception. If you prefer biblical evidence that this will be the case for us, check out Revelation 21. John shares his vision of the end: God will bring about a new heaven and a new earth, where He will live with his people and make everything new. All the wrongs made right, all sorrow gone, sin and death put to death, and all of God's creation left to enjoy Him and each other forever. Full and total restoration. Life how it was always meant to be. As good as new.

We have so much to look forward to. I'm thankful that Jesus gives us permission to grieve over the trouble, hurts, losses and brokenness we experience here and now, but I eagerly await the day when all things will be restored to their original, intended beauty and purpose. Through Jesus' sacrificial blood, we have been cleansed and unlike my jewelry, which will continue to tarnish no matter how many times I clean it, we are already permanently righteous and pure

before God. But let us anticipate with joy the Great Day when Jesus will return and complete his full, final restoration. All things will be made new, nothing will tarnish ever again, and our joy will go on for all eternity. Praise the Lord!

REFLECT

Are there any disappointments or hurts in my life that I need to lament over and grieve? Or have I become so overcome by grief and sadness that I have lost the joy Jesus promised? What aspect of “full restoration” appeals to you the most?

DISCUSS

When was the last time you felt filled with joy? How long did it last and what or who got in the way or stopped you from feeling joyful?

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you are so good to us. Thank you for giving us permission to grieve when we face the brokenness and pain in our lives. Thank you also for the joy you give us in the promise of your return. Help us to grasp the scope of the restoration you have planned for us and the earth. You truly are an amazing God!

BIO

Jenn Hoffmeyer is a wife and mom to 2 kids. She is a self-proclaimed math nerd who snacks on dark chocolate, loves to sing, and feels closest to God climbing on rocks in the Sierra Nevadas.

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

by Audrey Sanders

Read Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

"If You Died Today, Would You Go to Heaven or Hell?"

Do you like my title?

Did it wake you up?

I bet you didn't think you'd be questioning your salvation before even finishing your morning cup of coffee today.

We all see phrases like this on bumper stickers, billboards, or the cardboard signs held by obnoxious "Christians" at the farmer's market who are trying to ruin everyone's day. Stuff like this makes me angry and annoyed – does it *really* help anyone? Or is it just furthering the stereotype that Christians are judgemental and mean?

Like most modern Christians, if I'm being honest, the idea of evangelizing scares me. Whenever I hear a sermon about evangelism, I can't help but think of those billboards. Yes, I know I should share my faith, but I don't want people to think that I'm one of *them*. I don't want to bring the mood down by talking about the afterlife and death. Who wants to talk about the end times?

Today's passage richly describes the end of time when God rights every wrong and removes sin from our world for good. Once and for all, the gap that exists between God and humanity will be healed. It seems that the author, John can barely contain his joy and awe as he poetically describes God's kingdom like a bride awaiting her groom on their wedding day. As they stand facing one another, all the trials they faced, every difficult situation seems to melt away. All the couple can think about is their magnificent future together.

There have been times in my life, even recently, when I long for the One on the throne to declare "I am making everything new!". I spent so much of my childhood afraid of death and life after death, but I feel now that I can confidently say that Jesus can come back today if he wants. I know there's nothing in this world that can satisfy my desires like his love.

And yet...

I know that I should feel a sense of urgency. Jesus is coming to make everything new, to create a kingdom without brokenness and sadness, but only a few will enter that kingdom (Matthew 7:13-14). The passage directly before today's, Revelation 20:15, reminds us the reality of sin and separation from God:

"Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."

Ugh... that's not the uplifting message about God's restoration that you wanted to read this morning. But Easter is a time to remember *why* we have so much to be grateful for in Christ's redemption.

There are people in my life, people who I love who still don't know Jesus. People who, if God's kingdom were to come today, would spend eternity separated from Him. There, it won't be "no more death or mourning or crying", but an eternal death and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42).

Fortunately, we have time to share the Good News before Jesus returns. While, "no one knows the day or hour" (Matthew 24:36), we also know that Jesus says that the Gospel will be preached to ALL peoples before the end comes (Matthew 24:14).

Evangelism doesn't have to look like asking people if they know that they're going to Hell. I learned going to a public high school that living out your faith is extremely impactful as well. My peers in high school knew I was a Christian. They knew I was president of Young Life, that I didn't cuss, that I believed that homosexuality was a sin and abortion was fundamentally wrong. But they also knew that I didn't try to shove my ideas down their throats. They knew I would stand up for my faith when others told lies about Christianity, but I wouldn't act like they weren't worthy of my respect because we had different values.

And they noticed that something was different about me. At the end of the year, so many people wrote in my yearbook that they were proud that I stuck to my guns, that I was kind and caring but didn't compromise my faith. Even though they didn't hold the same beliefs as me, they could respect my convictions. And I pray that that respect will grow into curiosity, and that curiosity into interest in exploring what made me different.

Easter is a time of great celebration for Christians, as we recognize the work Jesus did on the cross and the work that he continues to do as the Kingdom draws near. May the joy we reflect during this season be apparent to all and aid in leading others to know our great Bridegroom!

REFLECT

Do you tend to think about Heaven with eager expectation or unease? How does the way you think about Jesus returning impact how you interact with nonbelievers?

DISCUSS

Does the idea of sharing your faith scare you? How can you and a friend keep each other accountable for stepping out of your comfort zone in these next few weeks?

PRAYER

Dear Lord, during this season I'm filled with both a longing for you to come make this world new, but also sorrow because so many of my friends and family still don't know your love. Give me courage and conviction to share your good news in both evangelism and just the way that I live my life.

BIO

Audrey Sanders is a first year college student, studying Bible and Theology with a plan to pursue a Master's Degree in Bible Exposition. Audrey has been attending Nova Community Church since she was four days old and in her free time loves listening to jazz music, writing poetry, and thrifting vintage clothing.

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

by Dan Hall

Read Mark 8:22-25

And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. (ESV)

Mark 8:22-25

Clearly Seeing Jesus

While this was the only miracle Jesus performed in two stages, it represents truth for today. Most of us don't instantly see Jesus and place our faith in Him – our restoration takes place over a series of events over periods of time. Jesus knows we're like the disciples – and are slow to learn and believe until the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, ears, and hearts to see Him clearly and respond to Him with our lives.

As a gospel writer, Mark carefully selected events to include in his account so we would see Jesus clearly. Our passage provides a glimpse of his disciples trying to grasp Jesus' identity, and is part of a larger string of events Mark used to illustrate this. Like links in a chain, from Mk 7:31-37 where Jesus heals a deaf and mute man, followed by feeding the 4000 in Mk 8:1-10, followed by Jesus and the disciples traveling to Bethsaida by boat – where Jesus warns them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod but instead the disciples worry over the fact that they forgot to bring bread! (Mk 8:14-21). *And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?" (Mark 8:17-18).*

By these central questions, Jesus is working to show his true self to the disciples, but they do not clearly see. Mark highlights their lack of understanding by placing on either side of Jesus' questions the healing of a deaf mute and then closes with the clarity of the multi-step restoration of sight to a blind man. The clarity of these miracles serve as messianic "bookends" around the human confusion of the disciples.

While in engineering school at Cal State Long Beach, I slowly noticed that I needed to sit closer to the front of the room to see the professor's scribbles on the board. I began to have trouble making sense of the notes I took because I was not seeing clearly. Later that year, I got my eyes checked and due to nearsightedness I needed glasses to correct my vision. I will not forget the day that I picked up my new glasses and drove home – looking south a couple of miles to Palos Verdes I could see individual trees instead of blobs of green. Everything was extremely sharp and clear in a way I had never experienced before, and it was nothing short of amazing.

About the same time in my life I learned about Jesus – except the corrective lenses I needed were not special glasses but the gospel accounts of Luke and John.

Growing up in a secular home, I never knew God. By the time I was in the 4th grade, God's grace acted through the heart of a neighbor who asked my mom if she could take my sister and I to Sunday School. For one year I attended Sunday School and learned many of the typical Old Testament stories about Creation, Noah, and Moses. As a result, I wanted to have my own Bible – so I saved all the S&H Green Stamps my mom and grandma could provide and I redeemed them to get a Bible with color illustrations and a zippered leather cover that contained all the stories I had learned about. Then just after the astronauts landed and walked on the moon we moved from Redondo Beach to New Jersey for my dad's job and I never went back to church.

Later on as a junior at CSULB, I was burning out from endless school, work, and life – it seemed like leaving it all and driving a big

rig truck would be a better life. That spring, a group of students recreated Jesus' crucifixion on campus, and a Christian rock band played lyrics pointing to Jesus, along with a message that intrigued and challenged my eyes, ears, and heart. I went home one night and found my Bible from years before and began to read the gospels of John and Luke as the speaker had encouraged. I wanted to understand who Jesus was and His relationship to God. I eagerly read until later that year, I acknowledged Jesus as Lord and was baptized. Looking back on these events it is all too clear that Jesus and the Holy Spirit had opened my ears, eyes, and heart but it took years for everything to finally coalesce into faith in Christ.

REFLECT

Was your journey to faith in Christ a single event, or was it in multiple steps like Jesus' restoration of sight to the blind man? Knowing this, how can we best serve others on the same journey?

DISCUSS

Everything Jesus did was intentional, so why would he intentionally restore the blind man's sight in two steps rather than one? Was it in multiple steps for the benefit of the disciples, the blind man, or both?

PRAY

Thank you Jesus for your patient endurance with our slow to understand hearts. Please give us the ability to see you more clearly as we travel our lives with you, and help us to assist others on their journey of faith to you with the wisdom you provide through the Holy Spirit.

BIO

Dan Hall is married to Lori, and is a retired mechanical engineer, grandfather, woodworker, car enthusiast, and cyclist. Most days he can be seen walking their two golden retrievers or working in his shop.

Thursday, April 10, 2025

by Kat Lissner

Read Galatians 5:16-6:1

So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Galatians 5:16-25; 6:1

Red Flags

Having spent several years serving with middle school and high school kids here at Nova and at previous churches, I've begun to pick up on the student's jargon. To this day, I'm still figuring out what certain words mean. Do you know what "rizz" or "bussin" mean? I'm sure if you ask a middle schooler to explain it to you, they will cringe at the mere fact you tried to say it. However, there is one phrase that is easy enough to follow. The phrase is "red flag", and it is usually used in the context of dating. When a girl or boy is getting to know someone that they want to date, they start looking for red flags. A red flag is never a good sign. It usually means that you should reconsider dating this person because they have characteristics that are negative and harmful. I witness a lot of this kind of talk in the youth room, and it warms my heart when I hear conversations among friends. They look out for one another and call out red flags because they don't want to see their friends get hurt. They genuinely care for each other.

Our heavenly Father does the same for us because He loves us and cares so deeply for us. In this passage, the apostle Paul, through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly identifies the red flags that are evident in a person's life when they are living in the flesh. What are these red flags? Galatians 5:19 says "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft..." This is what our sinful nature craves and desires to do. There is a constant war going on within us. But in our battle against the flesh, our God does not leave us defenseless. He gives us the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the trinity, the Helper who Jesus promised would be with us in John 14:15-17. When we accept Jesus in our lives, the Holy Spirit makes His home in our hearts and helps us to be more like Jesus. Imagine the Holy Spirit as a best friend who lovingly calls us out when they know we are about to make the wrong decision.

Let's face it, it is difficult to resist sin. If it was easy, we would all be perfect. We wouldn't need to depend on God. We would lean on our own understanding, we would be relying on our own strength and forget our need for a Savior. It can be tempting to believe that when we live by the Spirit, we are missing out on all the fun that worldly people enjoy. But the truth is, worldly happiness is fleeting. A dear friend of mine once told me, "Don't think about all the things you have to give up in order to follow Christ, instead, focus on all the wonderful things you are gaining as a child of God." The Lord reveals to us in this passage that there is more to be gained than lost when we walk by the Spirit. In vv. 22-23, it says that we gain the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. What a gift to be able to love people more, to have joy amid uncertainty, and to experience the goodness of God. This is what sets us apart as God's children. We live in a world full of sin, brokenness, and "red flags". But God is calling us to be the salt and light of the Earth, to be transformed daily into the likeness of Jesus.

REFLECT

There is a spiritual war happening between our sinful desires and what the Spirit of God is calling us to do. But through Christ, we are more than conquerors. Isaiah 62:10 says “Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations.” In the Old Testament, raising a banner was a sign of victory. The one who raises the banner represents the one who has conquered and is in control. I believe God desires for all of us to experience this type of victory, freedom and restoration. This can only be done when we are willing to repent, give up our old ways, and live a life that is led by the Spirit.

DISCUSS

Are there currently any “red flags” in your life that you need to surrender to God? This can be any habits or sinful desires you struggle with that hinder you from living in the Spirit.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, you are so kind, loving, and patient. Your mercies are new every morning. Thank you for sending us your Spirit to help us overcome the strongholds in our lives. We confess that we fall short every single day and we need you to empower us to follow your lead. We ask that you show us how we can live a life that is led by the Spirit so we can continue to grow in our faith and bear good fruit. We love you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

BIO

Hello, my name is Kat. I am a mom to Levi, a very active and curious 10-month-old boy. I am married to my wonderful husband, Christian. I am currently in a master's program for occupational therapy and in my free time, I love to be out in nature at the beach or at the park.

Friday, April 11, 2025

by Willem Sanders

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Springtime

Even though we live in California, the haven of minimal weather, I think that everyone's excited for spring to come! The sun starts to peek out of cloud-covered mornings, colorful flowers pop up from the ground once more, and it feels nice to be able to admire God's creation again. In fact, in a fond memory from my early childhood, the beauty of springtime played a huge part in it. My Grandma would take me and my sister to this hillside for a photoshoot. The hillside was absolutely covered in purple spring flowers. We would do this for many years, until the hill stopped producing its massive amount of flowers.

To me, this passage feels like a kind of spiritual springtime. With Christ's sacrifice, we are made new. We can bask in the light of God's love and beauty. While we were once stuck in the wintry death of sin, by the redemption and reconciliation through Christ, we're brought into a new life, like a spiritual springtime.

Andrew, one of our Worship Leaders, has led us in a song on Sunday mornings called "Catch Me Singing." The song refers to God as a gardener, tending to us, his creation. God works the soil, and he grows us like plants in a garden. One line that is repeated multiple times is, "You're gonna catch me singing when the springtime comes." There's this sense of joy that comes with the Lord's springtime. We are able to sing and dance in the wonder of his creation when Spring finally happens.

The Apostle Paul writes how “the old is gone and the new has come,” and to add to this analogy of springtime, I think there is a universal experience we call spring cleaning. It’s a time of reset and renewal, getting rid of old and outdated things in your life, deep cleaning your house and life, which is exactly what God does when you are reconciled to him. Your life is cleaned from the sin you once lived in. Like the old hymn says, “He washed me white as snow.” Our past lives have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and we can live a new, clean life in Christ.

In his great love for us, God made it his mission to be reconciled with his children once more. Through him we are renewed and made clean in his love and mercy. Through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, we can live in the Springtime of the Lord.

REFLECT

How have you seen your life cleansed by Christ? Almost like spring cleaning.

DISCUSS

Have you ever experienced a spiritual spring or winter? What were each of those times like?

PRAY

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing me out of darkness and into your light. Thank you for reconciling me to be with you again. I ask you to work in my life and cleanse it daily. Help me to rejoice in your springtime and recognize all that you’ve done in my life. Help me to be open to your changes and accept the cleansing you’ve done in my past, and what you will do in my future. I ask that you will continually cleanse me and make me new. Thank you Lord. Amen.

BIO

Willem Sanders is a high school junior, who enjoys playing the drums for his school jazz band and helping at multiple churches to lead worship.

Saturday, April 12, 2025

by Shannon Pitman

Read Psalm 71:20

Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.

Psalm 71:20

Guaranteed

We live in a world full of empty guarantees. Just flip on the TV or drive down any freeway and you'll see them everywhere. "If you buy whatever it is we're selling you'll be happier, healthier, skinnier, or more of whatever it is you're hoping to be more of." Sometimes these guarantees even go as far as promising your money back if they don't deliver. As we journey through life, however, Benjamin Franklin's old assurance that "in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes" seems to ring more and more true.

In the gospel of John, Jesus gives us another guarantee, stating that "in this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33b). Although this is not the kind of guarantee most of us are hoping for, I think all of us can agree that we see the reality of trouble throughout our lives and our world. The longer we live, the more we see the trouble, pain and brokenness that we've been guaranteed: bodies break, relationships fail, disasters strike, and we feel the weight of the many and varied troubles of life. The same was true in the life of the psalmist thousands of years ago. Psalm 71 speaks of a long journey of faith, from youth to old age and the continued faithfulness of God, even in the midst of bitter troubles.

Praise be to God that troubles, death, and taxes are NOT the only guarantees for the Christ follower. Despite living long before the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the psalmist had faith in the guarantee of restoration stating, "You will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up." How much more should we, as Christ followers, rest on this guarantee. After

Jesus shares his guarantee of trouble in John 16:33, he immediately tells his followers to, “Take heart! I have overcome the world!” (John 16:33b).

Our God is in the business of restoration. We often speak of the day when he will “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5), when Christ returns and the heavens and Earth will be restored to glory and perfection for all eternity. There is certainly much hope to be had in that final restoration, but as we seek to follow Christ in our daily lives, we can see his restoration infiltrate our troubles in the here and now. He is the God that restores our relationships, that heals our pains, and that can be our source of confidence even as we walk through the guaranteed troubles of life. Most importantly, He is constantly working to restore our most important relationship, the one with God himself. We don’t have to wait for Christ’s return to begin to experience His restoration. It’s available now, and it’s guaranteed.

REFLECT

How much does the guarantee of trouble resonate with me in my current life circumstances? What about the guarantee of restoration? What habits of mind or action might support me in shifting my focus from my troubles to God’s promised restoration?

DISCUSS

What in your life feels like it is “guaranteed”?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for being a God who promises restoration in the midst of trouble. Please help me to see the ways that you are working towards restoring the parts of my life that feel disrupted by trouble, and, even more than that, the way you are restoring my relationship with you. Help me to hold fast to the words of Jesus when he says, “Take heart! I have overcome the world!”

BIO

Shannon Pitman is an elementary educator, wife, and mother of two wonderful daughters. She enjoys dancing, watching her favorite sitcoms, and spending time with her family.

EASTER WEEK

Photo by Bev Baigent

Monday, April 14, 2025

by Rebecca Hester

Read Luke 19:33-40

"As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They replied, 'The Lord needs it.' They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you,' he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'"

Luke 19:33-40 NIV

Easter Week

Have you ever been to a concert of your favorite band or artist? The moment they step onto the stage, the entire crowd erupts with excitement. People jump up, cheer, sing at the top of their lungs, and wave their hands in the air. There's an electric energy in the atmosphere—because everyone is united in admiration and celebration of someone they love.

Now, imagine standing in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, enters the city. People throw their cloaks on the road, wave palm branches, and shout praises:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

It was a moment of joy and anticipation, just like a concert where the crowd eagerly awaits their favorite artist. But not everyone was happy. The Pharisees saw this public display of praise as dangerous and told Jesus to quiet the people.

Jesus' response is profound: "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

What does that mean? It means Jesus is so worthy of praise that even if people refused to worship, creation itself would testify to His greatness. The truth of who He is cannot be silenced.

REFLECT

As we begin Easter week, this passage invites us to reflect on our own response to Jesus. Are we like the excited crowd, unafraid to celebrate our King? Or are we like the Pharisees, hesitant, skeptical, or even trying to suppress worship?

Imagine attending a concert but refusing to cheer, standing silently while everyone else sings. It would feel unnatural, right? In the same way, our worship of Jesus should be a natural outpouring of love and gratitude. If we don't praise Him, even the rocks will take our place.

The people who welcomed Jesus with joy on Palm Sunday were the same ones who, just days later, turned against Him. Their faith was based on circumstances. What about us? Do we praise Jesus only when life is good, or do we remain faithful even in difficulty?

Jesus said that if people stayed silent, the stones would cry out. What does that say about His power and worthiness? What are some ways you can express your love and worship for Jesus this week—through words, actions, or acts of kindness?

DISCUSS

The crowd in Jerusalem shifted from celebration to rejection. How can you remain firm in your faith, even when it's difficult? Worship is more than singing—it's how we live. How can your life be a testimony to Jesus this Easter week?

PRAY

Dear Heavenly, You are worthy of all our praise! Forgive us for the times we have stayed silent when we should have lifted our voices for

You. Help us to celebrate You with joy, just like we would at a concert or celebration. Let our lives be a testimony to Your greatness, and may we never let the world silence our worship. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Rebecca Hester is a dedicated teacher with a passion for fitness. She enjoys energizing workouts, long strolls on the beach with her loving husband and their adorable pug, and cheering on her two talented, athletic kids as they play soccer.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

by Rebecca Reeves

Read Matthew 21:12-17

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those who were selling doves. "It is written," He said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer', but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

Matthew 21: 12-13

Keep Nova Weird

"Come on, everyone else is doing it!" Every person has likely heard this at some point. Personally, I remember hearing it quite often. I was a rule-follower, which felt like it was not a common thing to be. When I heard this phrase growing up, it was often followed up with "It's not a big deal, why are you being weird about this?" Most times, I stood firm in my conviction that I needed to do the right thing and would refuse to give in. But, if I'm honest, there were some times when the rules felt so arbitrary that it was easy to justify breaking them. And it was all the easier with the encouragement from my friends, who never seemed tortured by the decision the way that I was. Among them, the socially acceptable thing was to view the rules as fluid, negotiable, or just plain unimportant. "A rule is a rule worth breaking!" "Your curfew doesn't technically exist if your parents aren't even in town to enforce it. There's no chance they'll find out!"

We all know how it goes; this is what everyone is doing/thinking/believing, and if you don't, you're the weird one. We're loudly encouraged to get in line, follow the crowd and just accept the way that society has decided that things will be. Those that hesitate to immediately accept this? They're weird. Those that voice concerns that things may not be heading in the right direction? Haters. Those that actively work on fixing the problems that arise because of this, or care for those who suffer for it? The worst of the worst.

Jesus didn't hesitate. He didn't just voice concerns. He immediately took action. When He came into the temple and saw that what was meant to be a house of prayer had been turned into a place of business and commerce, He put a stop to it. And He did so in spectacular fashion, sending the tables flying! He didn't care that it had become socially acceptable for the temple courts to be used in this way; He could not stand for the corruption and exploitation that was happening there. Those that had come to use the courts for their intended purpose were being prevented from drawing closer to God, and instead were being taken advantage of.

Jesus quickly set about returning the courts to what they were meant to be, and He didn't stop at turning over tables. His next course of action was to allow the blind and lame into the temple, where they were not allowed, and heal them. If the religious leaders weren't upset enough, Jesus certainly had their attention now! He knew that He would upset them by being that weird guy who goes against what was accepted and expected, but He did it anyway.

Even as adults we feel the tug-of-war between what is socially acceptable and what God wants us to do. It's so easy to just do the thing everyone expects us to do, especially when it's viewed as weird not to. But God was never concerned with what society thinks, and neither should we be. During this Holy Week, let us ask God to help us turn over our own tables that are preventing us from being able to draw closer to Him. Let us ask Him for courage not to care what others think of us, and to help us embrace being the weird ones.

REFLECT

What tables in your life are preventing you from drawing closer to God? Are you worried that people would think you were weird if you overturn them?

DISCUSS

What were some rules your parents had for you that seemed arbitrary at the time?

PRAY

Lord, help us not to be concerned with appearances or worried about what the world thinks of us. Help us to obey you, and right our hearts when we don't want to.

BIO

Rebecca Reeves is a wife and mother who does her best thinking and praying when she's sitting at her sewing machine.

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

By Susan Chang

Read Luke 22:1-6

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers

of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.

They were delighted and agreed to give him money...

Luke 22:1-5

Nobody Loves Me Like You Do

This was a hard passage for me to read and dwell on. And I suspect that when I read this passage in the past that I just read over it quickly and moved on to the next passage.

I don't like to dwell on the topic of betrayal. I ask myself if I have ever betrayed Jesus. Sometimes I'm afraid of identifying as a Christian in certain situations because we live in a culture that's hostile to Christians, especially in certain parts of Los Angeles County. Is that considered betraying Jesus?

It's hard for me to think of Judas turning on Jesus. Judas must have known that the chief priests wanted to kill Jesus, and so for him to seek them out and agree to deliver Jesus to them is incomprehensible to me. But then it says that Satan entered Judas. I guess that makes anything possible...

Then I think of many years ago when I felt betrayed by a family member. I went to this person for support during a difficult time, and this person essentially turned me away. She made it clear that she was not on my side. Her actions confirmed long-held beliefs of mine that I was not valuable or important to her. It broke my heart.

It took me many years to forgive this person and to release any expectations I had of her.

But Judas's betrayal of Jesus was worse than the betrayal that I suffered. Judas's betrayal led to Jesus's torture and death. I don't know if Judas was mainly motivated by money or if there were other reasons that he turned on Jesus.

Jesus knew beforehand that Judas was going to betray him, and yet He still selected and included him as one of His twelve closest disciples that He lived with and did ministry with. I wonder if knowing that Judas was going to betray Him caused Jesus much heartache before and after the deed was done.

Jesus, who was God, submitted Himself as a man to let sinful men betray, torture and kill Him. I cannot imagine the amount of humility and self-control that Jesus must have had to endure all that. But John 3:16 said that Jesus endured all this because He so loved the world that He didn't want anyone to perish but to have eternal life, so He sacrificed Himself to pay for our sins.

Thank You, Jesus, for Your ultimate sacrifice to pay for my sins. No one loves me like You do. May I remember this as I prepare my heart for Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

REFLECT

Who do you love the most? And what would you be willing to sacrifice for this person?

DISCUSS

How do you know that someone loves you?

PRAY

Lord God, no one loves me like You do. Jesus willingly endured betrayal, torture, and death on my behalf. May I trust and obey You

more. You certainly deserve my devotion and allegiance more than anyone else.

BIO

Susan Chang is a wife and mother of a teenager, and she works part time as an office assistant and a bookkeeper.

Thursday, April 17, 2025

by Dale Mooney

Read Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

MATTHEW 26:36-39

How Shall I Pray?

My prayer life has had its ups and downs over the years. If I'm honest there have been long prayer deserts mixed with seasons of mindless memorized prayers and self-serving prayers. A common guide to prayer is PRAY, which as an acronym stands for praise, repent, ask, and yield. Typically, I would briefly touch praise, maybe skip over repent, hit ask hard, then skip over yield. I was recently hospitalized and of course I had a few nights when sleep eluded me. The surprising blessing was that I spent hours praying, much of the time "listening" to what God wanted from me. What did he want? He wanted me to confess my sins, all of them, including those that I refused to acknowledge, and recognize that my attempts to justify myself were just a reflection of my sins, and to repent. Previously I would ask for things that would benefit me, maybe for others to change their behavior to match my expectations or desires. What he taught me in those sleepless nights was that instead I needed to ask God to change me and finally to yield to His will. The other thing he taught me was that He wanted an intimate relationship with me, that I would be open and honest with Him in all things, and that prayer didn't necessarily require me to put my thoughts into words. Refer to Romans 8:26.

What did Jesus pray for in the Garden of Gethsemane? Initially He asked that the cup be taken from him, followed by "not as I will, but as You will." This is a remarkable example of ask but yield. How can we emulate Jesus in our prayers? On our own power we can't. The

miracle of Easter is that Jesus has taken our sins from us and paid the price for our sins, making us blameless before God that we will be welcomed into Heaven. Furthermore, knowing that on our own we cannot win the struggle against temptation and sin, God has given us a counselor, the Holy Spirit inside us, that enables us to resist temptation. For me, a key element of my prayers now is to ask for the Holy Spirit to remain strong inside me, enabling me to resist the allure of sin. But I can never let my guard down, as the devil is like a lion, ravenous for my soul, clever and relentless with his lies and lures. (See 1 Peter 5:8).

REFLECT

What does God want of us? He wants an open, honest and intimate relationship with each of us, where we share everything in our hearts. He desires this so intensely that he sent his only son, Jesus, to experience our human condition including temptation, show us how to live a sin free life, and to take all sin upon Himself and receive the punishment that we deserve so that we can become children of God and receive the gift of everlasting life. (See Romans 6:23).

DISCUSS

How then shall we pray? Shall we pray for the well-being and healing of others? Shall we pray for prosperity? Shall we pray for our own hearts to be changed? Shall we pray that God's will be done?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I thank You for helping me to recognize my own shortcomings and need to change, to better reflect Jesus in my life. I thank You for the priceless gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, through whom all of us sinners can be reconciled to You and become members of the Family of God.

BIO

Dale Mooney is a retired engineer, a husband, a father, and a grandfather. He enjoys spending time with his wife, children, and grandchildren, traveling and bicycling. Recently he has developed a more intense and fruitful prayer life with God.

THEME: EASTER WEEK

Friday, April 18, 2025

by Mark Hoffmeyer

Read Psalm 22:1-18

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the cries of my anguish. ... Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

Psalm 22:1, 16-18

Driven to Prayer

I hate to admit it but I pray more on weekdays than I do on the weekend. Some of it is due to habit and routine (I've realized as I've gotten older that I'm very much a creature of habit and like my routines). However, if I'm being honest it is the stress of work along with sending my wife and kids out into the world during the week that drives me to recognize my need for God. The weekends feel less stressful and safer so I don't have as much need for God and therefore don't pray as much.

The patriarch David wrote Psalm 22 and describes when he was going through a great trial. He recognized his need for God and cried out during this desperate time. Despite feeling abandoned by God (verses 1-2), he trusted and placed his hope in God to rescue him.

Psalm 22 is recognized as a messianic psalm foreshadowing the coming Messiah who would rescue the Jewish people. Despite being written a thousand years before Jesus Christ was born, David describes the suffering that Jesus would endure leading to his crucifixion. For example:

v7: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads." (Matthew 27:39,44; Mark 15:29)

v18: "They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." (Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:24)

As a Hebrew, Jesus would have studied this psalm and even cried out the first verse in the midst of his suffering on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). In the process of describing his own situation, David described what Jesus would endure when he took on the sins of the world so that we can be forgiven.

God's plan of salvation for us included the pain and suffering of Christ on our behalf. Jesus didn't need to be drawn through suffering to God since He and the Father are one. However, both King David and we can be driven closer to God and trust in Him through our pain and suffering. Sin cannot remain in the presence of God, so God turned away from Jesus on the cross when Jesus took on the sin of the world so that we could be forgiven. God abandoned Jesus so that He would never have to abandon us.

As Christians we are not promised a life free from pain and suffering. But in the midst of pain and suffering we can recognize our need for God and place our hope and trust in him. Just as Jesus had victory over pain, suffering, and death we can share in Christ's victory with hope and confidence. I cannot say I enjoy the stress and challenges of life but I've grown to see them as opportunities to recognize that I need God and can cry out to Him. This helps me to grow in my faith and have hope and trust in the Lord. I'm grateful "...because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3). Even though I pray more during the stress and "weekdays" of life, I strive to recognize my need for God even during the "weekends" and praise him. His grace is sufficient and I don't need to live in guilt or shame for not praying as much on the weekends.

REFLECT

What drives you to know that you need the Lord? Maybe it is a specific temporary situation or maybe it is a chronic life condition.

DISCUSS

Share the hope that you had and how things turned out in a situation that drove you to trust in Jesus that can be used to encourage others.

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the pain and suffering you endured so that we can be forgiven and live in victory. Help us to see our situations as opportunities to recognize our need for you and to know you are our hope and salvation. Help us to trust in You.

BIO

Mark Hoffmeyer is a husband, father, and engineer. He grew up in the midwest and now lives with his amazing wife and two great kids in Torrance, CA.

Saturday, April 19, 2025

by Charlotte Newkirk

Read Luke 23:50-56

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body.

Luke 23:50-52

Faith in Action

At first glance, this is an easy passage to race past.

SPOIL ALERT: We know what happens next, right?

But Joseph of Arimathea didn't know the future. Who is this Joseph, and why is he mentioned only for this one act, in all four gospels, and nowhere else? (Also, Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; John 19:38-42.)

We know from reading in John 19:38, that he was a disciple of Jesus, "but secretly, because he feared the Jews." We know he was a rich man, a prominent (Mark 15:43) member of the council (Sanhedrin), and had not consented to their decision or action. He was a good and upright man, waiting for the kingdom of God.

In verse 52, this is the moment he leaves behind his fears, potentially everything, and boldly steps out in faith. Interesting side note: He takes with him another formerly secret believer, Nicodemus (John 19:39).

In reading on in this passage, we see that Joseph takes down Jesus' body, prepares it for burial in his own new unused tomb, with witnesses as to the location, and proper closure with a large stone sealing the entry.

Joseph of Arimathea didn't know he was fulfilling prophecy (rich man's tomb, Isaiah 53:9), nor did he know he would see Jesus raised

from the dead, showing God's power over death itself. He only knew it was time to step out in faith, and do what God wanted him to do.

In my involvement in supporting missions, I get to have a front row seat to so many examples of faith and answered prayer. It might be that one specific item prayed for, that no one else knew was needed. A missionary is brought to happy tears over yet another demonstration of God's provision, His loving care, and answered prayer.

An action of faith could be a ride, help with a repair, a meal, or note of encouragement that God directs you to give at just the right time for His purpose. Those things can make all the difference in strengthening another's faith. You may not be forever known for doing God's will like Joseph of Arimathea, but to the person or group who has been helped, it can be life changing. We don't always see how God answers those prayers, but our own faith is made stronger by it.

REFLECT

Is there something God is nudging you to do? It could seem super difficult, or just inconvenient.

Can you trust God to help you follow through?

DISCUSS

When has a Christian helped you out, encouraged you, or prayed for you? What effect has it had on you?

PRAY

Lord, please help me to keep an open heart, ears to hear, and the strength to do your will, with your help, every day. Amen.

BIO

Charlotte is a wife and grandmother, enjoys quilting, and loves to serve God through supporting missions.