



# LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2026

# **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 2<sup>nd</sup> – 7:00 p.m.

## **Good Friday Event**

Friday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5:30-7:00 p.m.

## **Easter Sunday Service**

Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup> – 10:00 a.m.

**For more information visit [novachurch.org](http://novachurch.org).**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **1 PREPARATION**

[Wednesday, February 18](#)

[Thursday, February 19](#)

[Friday, February 20](#)

[Saturday, February 21](#)

## **2 CREATION**

[Monday, February 23](#)

[Tuesday, February 24](#)

[Wednesday, February 25](#)

[Thursday, February 26](#)

[Friday, February 27](#)

[Saturday, February 28](#)

## **3 FALL**

[Monday, March 2](#)

[Tuesday, March 3](#)

[Wednesday, March 4](#)

[Thursday, March 5](#)

[Friday, March 6](#)

[Saturday, March 7](#)

## **4 WILDERNESS**

[Monday, March 9](#)

[Tuesday, March 10](#)

[Wednesday, March 11](#)

[Thursday, March 12](#)

[Friday, March 13](#)

[Saturday, March 14](#)

## **5 REDEMPTION**

[Monday, March 16](#)

[Tuesday, March 17](#)

[Wednesday, March 18](#)

[Thursday, March 19](#)

[Friday, March 20](#)

[Saturday, March 21](#)

## **6 RESTORATION**

[Monday, March 23](#)

[Tuesday, March 24](#)

[Wednesday, March 25](#)

[Thursday, March 26](#)

[Friday, March 27](#)

[Saturday, March 28](#)

## **7 EASTER WEEK**

[Monday, March 30](#)

[Tuesday, March 31](#)

[Wednesday, April 1](#)

[Thursday, April 2](#)

[Friday, April 3](#)

[Saturday, April 4](#)

# PREPARATION



**Wednesday, February 18, 2026**

by Dean Mayeda

*Read Micah 6:8*

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God.*

**Micah 6:8**

## **A 40-Day Playbook**

The people of NOVA Community Church present to you a devotional with 40 readings for the 2026 Lenten Season.

Today is the first day of Lent and today is your first step on a 40-day spiritual journey that we will take together!

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 is a time we think of the victory of the light and life of Jesus over the darkness and death of sin.

When I coached basketball at North High School (my alma mater), I developed a playbook for our team. The playbook had over a dozen set plays that we would run when we had the ball. The members of the team read the playbook, memorized their moves in each play, we practiced the plays over and over again, and at gametime when we ran the plays – the team did well. We did not always win, but we were unified as a team, we had a blast, and our character grew as we experienced wins and losses together.

This 40-day Lenten devotional is like a playbook for the NOVA family. Every day we will be reading the same scriptures, reading the same devotionals, reflecting on the same questions, and praying together. And through it all, we will grow closer to Jesus as we experience the ups and downs of life together.

For most Southern California people - our days are active, exciting, and full. Because we tend to be very capable, achievement-oriented, and busy people, we need the living word of God to renew us and keep us on track on a regular basis.

During this Lenten season, let us pause, slow down and find a quiet place. 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 humbling yourself and cultivating your heart 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.

We are grateful for the team of leaders, editors, writers, and administrators who put this devotional “playbook” together.

### **REFLECT**

Am I choosing, over the next 40 days, to be disciplined to make a commitment to daily: read the scriptures and the devotional meditation, spend time reflecting, discuss the devotional with others, and pray?

### **DISCUSS**

Invite a someone to join you on this daily Lenten Devotional journey by giving them a hard copy, sending them a digital copy, or a link to the form to get the daily email.

### **PRAY**

Dear God, I am grateful that you called NOVA people to put together this Lenten Devotional. Use the scriptures and devotional writing for your glory in the lives of your people. We ask that you would remind us to connect with you every day, over the next 40

days as we seek to “...*act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with You.*”

In Jesus name, Amen.

## **BIO**

Dean is a free and redeemed son of God, husband to Janet, Father to Matthew and Charissa, Father-in-Law to Jericka (and soon to Tyler), Papi to Mila (and soon to Kataya). He loves spending time with his family, living in the South Bay, fishing in the Eastern Sierras, exploring the Hawaiian Islands, and eating delicious healthy food.



Thursday, February 19, 2026

by Adam Duchin

Read 2 Peter 1:1-8

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

2 Peter 1:3

## Deep Roots Are Not Reached By the Frost

My favorite author is J.R.R. Tolkien. One of the more well-known quotes from Tolkien's works is: "Not all those who wander are lost." You can find it on posters, shirts, mugs – a ton of stuff. But it's actually only one line from a larger poem in the book *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The full stanza reads:

*"All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost;  
The old that is strong does not wither,  
Deep roots are not reached by the frost."*

In the Bible, plants are used as one of the metaphors for discipleship. Especially the idea of roots. The rootedness idea gets at questions like:

- "Is the Word of God firmly rooted in your heart?"
- "Are you abiding in the vine (Jesus)?"
- "Is the Word of God bearing fruit in and through your life?"

Obviously, these questions are more challenging. God's word could have been rooted and growing in my heart last year, but maybe not so much now.

At a simpler level, to be rooted in Jesus refers to our ongoing connection to Christ. It is about our relationship with Him. There should be no greater priority in our lives or ministry than our intimacy with Jesus. Yet in a busy, demanding world, it's so easy to

lose focus, to be distracted, and have our time with Jesus squeezed out.

As we look to cultivating roots, we look to the Bible. The Bible is not so much a religious book. The Bible is a life book. It is given for life purposes – so that we would look for life in the only place where life can be found.

The doctrines of the Bible are not just ideology. They are living and divine tools of salvation, transformation, identity, and guidance. They are not something to just read about and know in our heads. They are things that change us at the core, affecting everything – who we are, and what we do.

In an agricultural setting, frost can kill. If a plant or tree is not deeply rooted, drawing the proper nutrients for life from the proper source, a frost can come along and severely damage, or actually kill it. But when something has deep roots, it is much more equipped and ready for what may come from nature, and the frost may not have much effect at all. Deep roots are not reached by the frost. We need to get our roots down deep in Jesus. Enough to let Him be living through us, every day.

Peter tells us: *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness* (2 Peter 1:3).

Packed into this little verse is the key to a fuller understanding of the Christian life, according to Peter. Peter says the Christian life is lived by Jesus Himself, in and through us. It is His divine power that has given us everything we need for this life he's talking about.

Through the years, I've known many people who have gone through some very hard things, in life and even in ministry. You yourself might very well have a moment when you turn eyeball to eyeball with God and you let him have it! And finally you say, "Lord, I can't do this anymore!"

In those moments, we need to understand that God's response is, "you're right – you can't! Because that's *my* job." God says, it is ME that lives in you, for everything you need for your Christian life. Are you trusting in His divine power which has given you everything you need for life? We will never be able to live this Christian life on our own. The answer is not in ourselves. The answer is found only in Jesus Christ! God tells us, "Trust *me* to do it. Trust in my divine power which has given you everything you need."

The attitude of many of us is that we happily board the Lord's salvation train to get us to heaven, but we shoulder the effort along the way. What we should do is trust in His divine power which has given us everything we need. In other words, the Christian life is all up to Jesus. Not only is He responsible for getting us to heaven, but He is also responsible for carrying us through this life on earth.

Continuous dependence on Jesus... That's the message of a life changed by the gospel. But somehow we've let ourselves be convinced that we're supposed to "live our lives for Jesus" instead of allowing Jesus to live through us. We need to understand the difference – there is a huge difference between trying to live our lives *for* Jesus and Jesus living His life *through us*. Jesus is not so powerless that He needs our help.

We can't live the Christian life, only Jesus can. And He chooses to do so in and through us. We need to follow Him, but let Him lead, and let Him live through us! This is how we get our roots down deep in Jesus. Enough to let Him be living through us, every day. And enough so that they are not reached by the frost.

As we prepare for this season of Lent, I hope your roots in Jesus continue to grow deep, and that you surrender more and more to His divine power living through You. May we remember that the one who calls, also enables. He may not give us all that we like, but He does give us all we need.



*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).*

#### **REFLECT**

Reflect on the difference between *living your life for Jesus* and *allowing Jesus to live through you*. Is there any area of your life and/or faith that you need to surrender to Jesus?

#### **DISCUSS**

Ask someone about the things that they do to deepen their roots and grow in their faith. Discuss how those ideas help maintain an ongoing connection to Jesus.

#### **PRAY**

Father God, Your word tells me that through Jesus You have given me everything needed for a godly life. Thank you for your mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Thank you also for your regular and consistent presence with me daily. Help me see the areas of my life that I have been striving to live for Jesus on my own strength, and guide me in learning to let Jesus live through me. Help me to rest in You and to continually rely on Your power as I grow in my faith and walk with You. I pray this in the mighty and powerful name of Jesus. Amen

#### **BIO**

Adam is a husband, a 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!

Friday, February 20, 2026

by Ron Graff

*Read Matthew 28:6; John 20:1-8*

Jesus has risen just as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay, (Matthew 28:6). Hearing Mary's report, Peter and John run to the tomb. John looked in and saw the linen clothes laying there; yet he did not go in. Peter comes, goes into the tomb and sees detail: the linen clothes and hankerchief not lying with the linen clothes. John goes in, sees what Peter saw and believed.

He not only saw with his eyes but also with his heart (John 20:1-8).

**Matthew 28:6; John 20:1-8**

## Come and See

All you fellow-married men can probably identify with me on this. You are looking for something and simply can't find it. Finally, you ask your wife, "Honey, do you know where \_\_\_\_\_ is? She promptly tells you where it is. You look again, but still don't see it. You respond, "I looked and it's not there." She comes, and you guessed it, finds it right where she said it was. The sad thing is you were looking right at it and still didn't see it. There is another thing I've experienced. We men remember the big picture of things; women remember detail. A recent example is just one of many examples. We have a wooden carving that says, "Prayer changes things." I simply remembered it as a gift someone gave us. My wife Millie remembers who gave it and why. That gift was given over twenty-eight years ago.

In the above passages, you will note that the word "see" appears four times. In the original language of the New Testament (Greek), however, three different terms are used. Understanding those three terms sends a powerful message to us in our pursuit of knowing not only about Jesus but knowing him from the heart.

In John 20:5 John "saw" (*blepo*) meaning he gave a simple seeing; a glimpse but did not go in to the tomb. In verse 6 Peter "saw" (*thereo*) suggesting a more prolonged look; seeing beyond simple physical sight. He saw detail. John then enters the tomb and "sees" (*orao*) denoting seeing with understanding. He saw beyond what Peter saw and believed. He saw, not only with his eyes, but also with his heart

and it transformed him. He'd spent three years with Jesus; knew all about him, but now sees him as he is, the Messiah, God in the flesh, the Savior. He went from being known as "Son of Thunder" (Mark 3:17) to being known as the "Apostle of Love" (I John). In like manner, the angel invites us to "Come and see" (*Eiden*, coming from the root word *orao*); to see like John saw.

It never gets old to see the change in their countenance and eyes when someone invites Christ into their heart. Several years ago, my late wife and I were at our friends house for dinner. Dean had not yet asked Christ into his heart while his wife Val had done so a week or two earlier. After chitchatting for a while, I asked Dean if he would like to ask Christ into his heart. He froze, fell to the floor and could not speak. I bent over him and prayed, asking him to just say the name Jesus. After a long while he whispered the name of Jesus and invited Christ to come into his heart. He stopped being so tense and a peace settled over him. He got up on his knees; his wife fell on her knees with him as they embraced and wept tears of joy together. Dean and Val came and saw.

### **REFLECT**

Are you satisfied with your relationship with Jesus or do you hunger and thirst for *Orao* seeing as the angels invited us to?

### **DISCUSS**

Tell someone about what that would look like in your life if that happened.

### **PRAY**

As I come to this Lenten season, I don't want to only know more about Jesus, I want to see him from my heart. I don't want it to be routine but for Jesus to pierce my heart like he did John's or like Moses where the Lord spoke to him face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11, LB). So dear Lord,

*"Open my eyes, that I might see glimpses of truth thou hast for me.  
Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me*



*free. Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God thy will to see. Open my eyes illumine me, Spirit divine!”* (Hymn: Open My Eyes).

*“O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God. Hold me as I wait before you near to the heart of God”* (Hymn: Near To the Heart of God).

Amen.

## **BIO**

Ron Graff is technically retired, but still serves as an Associate Pastor at Nova. He is approaching his 59th year of pastoral ministry and is a retired police chaplain following 33 years of service. He and his wife Millie have celebrated 28 years of wedded bliss. Our blended family consists of 7 children, 8 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, plus a set of twins waiting to be born. His greatest joy outside of spending time with Jesus is spending time with his wife Millie, family gatherings, and going out to eat – especially Mexican food.

Saturday, February 21, 2026

by Garrett Koch

*Read Hosea 6:6*

*I want you to show love,  
not offer sacrifices.  
I want you to know me  
more than I want burnt offerings.  
Hosea 6:6 (NLT)*

## Choices

When it comes to this devotional, you have choices.

First, you have the choice to show up. Will you make reading this devotional a part of your Lenten season (the 40 days leading up to Easter) this year?

You have the choice to be consistent in reading this devotional or not. We don't want to be legalistic and say, "If you are a good Christian then you better read every one of these devotionals." Nevertheless that doesn't change the fact that you do have a choice to be consistent in this devotional or not.

But, perhaps most poignantly you have a choice about *how* you will engage this devotional.

In Hosea 6:6 (and frankly the rest of the Bible), God makes it clear that he isn't interested in us "going through the motions" for him. He wasn't interested in the offerings that the people of Judah were making to him if he didn't have their heart.

You have a choice. Will you go through the motions of this devotional out of a sense of duty, obligation, or some aspect of "that's what I should be doing?" Or will this devotional be a time for you to truly be with God, wrestle with his heart, and wrestle with your heart? Will it be a time for you to anchor yourself in him as we approach Easter? Will it be a time of growing closer to him?

The choice is yours.

And the only person who can make this choice for you... is you.

#### **REFLECT**

Do you find yourself “going through the motions” as it pertains to your faith? Why or why not?

#### **DISCUSS**

What does it look like to truly be with God and not just “go through the motions?”

#### **PRAY**

Father, I confess that it is really easy to just default to “what we’re supposed to do” without actually engaging our hearts. But that’s not what you want from me. I want to grow closer to you this Lenten season. I don’t want to just go through the motions.

Amen.

#### **BIO**

Garrett serves as Director of Local Missions at Nova Community Church. He enjoys all things sports and drinking really good coffee.



**CREATION**

**Monday, February 23, 2026**

by Rebecca Reeves

*Read Genesis 1:1-5*

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And God said "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good...*

**Genesis 1:1, 3-4a**

## **Trusting the Maker's Hands**

The Bible begins simply, and boldly: God created. Before even color, texture or form existed, there was God. The earth lay formless and empty, wrapped in darkness. But even in that state, the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. It sounds almost like a quilter's table before the fabric is laid out, or an empty pair of knitting needles before the first stitch has been cast on. Nothing is shaped yet, nothing is cut or assembled. The quilter leans over her pieces, the knitter holds her yarn in ready hands and God hovers close to His work. He is not distant; He is attentive and preparing.

I am a creative person. I love the process of choosing beautiful fabric, thread or yarn and envisioning all of the possible ways they can be used to create something new and even more beautiful. I love settling on a plan for these raw materials, and setting about putting that plan into action, working towards my final product. Anyone who has ever made a quilt or knitted a garment knows that the beginning doesn't look like much. To someone watching, the scraps of fabric or tangled skeins might look chaotic, mismatched or even pointless. But the maker sees the pattern. Where others see disorder, the creator sees design.

God makes His first stitch with words: "Let there be light" and creation begins to unfold. Not randomly, but deliberately. With careful handiwork God does not rush. The light gives definition, direction and beauty. As He forms, separates and names it, He calls it

good. Every step is intentional. God creates from nothing. No fabric or yarn, His creation is crafted simply by His word.

Psalms 139 says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Another translation says “woven together” Maybe today your life feels like scattered scraps or tangled thread. Maybe you can’t see how the pieces fit. But your Maker does. He has not abandoned His work. He is still hovering, still stitching. What feels unfinished is simply still in process. God is still creating beauty out of chaos. He’s still sewing together broken pieces, still knitting grace into the fabric of your life.

From the very beginning, creation has been the work of loving hands. The same God who spoke the light into the darkness is still shaping, weaving, and forming us today. We can trust the pattern he sees because the One who creates is also the One who calls His work good.

### **REFLECT**

When have you looked back and seen that what once felt chaotic or mismatched was actually part of God’s design? What did that experience teach you about trusting His process?

### **DISCUSS**

If your life were a quilt or a knitted garment, what “threads” or “pieces” had God used (experiences, relationships, challenges, etc..) to shape who you are becoming?

### **PRAY**

Creator God, thank you for the care you put into everything you make. When my life feels tangled or unfinished, help me trust your hands. Keep shaping me according to your design and teach me to rest in the truth that I am lovingly crafted by you

**BIO**

Rebecca Reeves has been married to Dave for 22 years. They have three wonderfully creative children. Together, their favorite place to vacation is Shaver Lake.

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

by Justin Hester

*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**

## **Absolute Sovereignty**

Ever since I was 9, I have been obsessed with the CW's, *The Flash*. I started watching it during the third season, and continued to watch as the seasons came out until the ninth and final season ended, when I was now 15. I was dazzled at The Flash's speed, but as the show continued, the audience was reminded that The Flash cannot control everything, which included time, death, and consequences. He had to listen to and respect the rules of the Speed Force, which is a cosmic force that controls space and time.

In Job, every single creature's life and breath came from God Himself. In *The Flash*, Barry's (aka The Flash) speed was not truly his, but from the Speed Force, a much greater power than him. This is just as how humans cannot make their own power and life, but receive it from God. God has absolute sovereignty over all things, and we must respect that and learn humility towards our great God. We must also learn to trust in God's plan, as our life is in his hands. Whenever The Flash thought something was wrong, he would try to alter the timeline or try and fix it in some way that would not obey the Speed Force. Eventually The Flash learned that some things are left to the control of the Speed Force, and are outside his control. We must be like The Flash, and realize that our life is in His hands, and we cannot try and go beyond those limits.

It's easy for us to try and take control on our own, to be the one with greater power. But whenever we go outside, or take a gander over the

creatures of the Earth, remember that they are all obeying God's sovereignty. Our life will forever be in his hands.

### **REFLECT**

How does recognizing God as the giver of life change how you view your own limits and abilities?

### **DISCUSS**

How can the awareness of God's touch in all things affect how you treat the world as well as others?

### **PRAY**

Dear Heavenly Father, I praise you for being the giver of our life and breath. When I try to take control on my own, teach me how to trust in you. Remind me that my life will always be in your hands and not within myself. Allow me to respect your creation, and to listen to whatever it may teach me about you. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

### **BIO**

Justin Hester is a freshman in college, at UC Davis, who is majoring in Materials Engineering. When not studying for classes, he goes rock climbing and on runs.

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

by Jackson Reeves

*Read Colossians 1:15-18*

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 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.*

**Colossians 1:15-20**

## The Sovereign God

I think all of us can agree with the fact that sometimes (okay, a LOT of time) our lives don't go the way that we want them to go. Whether it be an unexpected loss, hardship, or a new trial we just feel that we aren't equipped to deal with, there's no doubting the fact that a lot of times we wish WE were the ones in control, that we could be the ones to plot out and decide our future. Ultimately, however, we are not. God is. And to us, sometimes it may feel like He is against us, putting these hardships in our lives.

At Hume 2025, one of the big things talked about was how "God is writing a good story, even when you can't see it." The speaker, Austin Payne, made a very relatable point and said, "in life, we are all either going through a hard time, are winding down from a hard time, or are in a period of respite before another hard time." Sometimes, it can feel relentless - like the hardships will never stop. Sometimes we may cry out to God, only to seemingly get no response other than more pain. This is a universal struggle that every single person of the Christian faith has gone through - but the thing that has helped not just me, but so many other people throughout this struggle is to remember God's sovereignty throughout it all.

I think we so often forget that God and Christ is the creator of everything we know today. So often when we pray, we've been

hard-coded to just start our prayer by saying the word “God” to address Him, so much so that we forget exactly what it means - or who He is. Think about it for a second: God, the creator of everything - the entire universe - the people, the earth you know and love today, all aspects of the environment. Like the text says, in Christ all things were created, in heaven and earth, and yet he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. There was nothing in the beginning, but through God, something was created. This is actually my favorite argument for proving the existence of God: the fact that there is something in this universe in the first place. No matter what someone believes in, whenever we think about how the universe was created, we need to answer the question of where everything came from - why does matter exist in the first place that was then able to form the earth, other planets, and stars as we know it? The only explanation is through a higher power. Our God has been there since the beginning, He brought the stars and heavens into motion. He laid the earth’s foundation. He is the author of our story - an author who is writing a good one, even when we can’t see it.

Most of us are familiar with the story of Job, a selfless, humble man who lost everything he ever had in life and went through a period of extreme hardship. God gave these ailments to Job in an attempt to test his faith - Job ends up losing his health, his children, his wealth, his crop, and much, much more. When Job ends up crying out and questioning God, He responds to Job with *“Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”* (Job 38:2-7). God responds to Job with a demonstration and description of His own sovereignty, to which Job responds with *“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will*



*“speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:2-6).*

Like Job, who are we to question God, the creator of all things? Do we not think that, surely, the God of the universe has a plan for us and that He is not going to allow us to suffer? After all, He created us with our deepest happiness in mind - a life spent with Him. In times of hardship, what we need to do is to trust in God’s plan and process. Think of who it is that’s taking care of you and is planning your story out - in the grand scheme of things, when we fully submit ourselves to God and commit ourselves to His plan, we strengthen our faith - and good works will follow. At the conclusion of the story of Job, he ended up getting everything back that had been taken away from him - and doubly so. For all who are struggling, remember that God is in ultimate control, and that you will not suffer forever - remember that He cares for you and loves you deeply. Take this as an opportunity to strengthen your faith in Him.

### **REFLECT**

How can we remember to trust in God’s plan? How can we remember that He has us in mind when plotting out our lives?

### **DISCUSS**

Can you remember a time when it was hard to see what God was doing in your life, but it turned out better than you could imagine?

### **PRAY**

Father God, you are the maker of heaven, and earth, and of all things. You are the firstborn over all creation - all things have been created through you and for you, and you are before them all. Help for us to never waver in our faith to you - help for us to remember who you are, and the plans you have for us - even when things get tough. Help us to keep in mind that you are for us, not against us; we ask for you to strengthen our faith in all of this so that we may deepen our relationship with you, just as you want.

**BIO**

Jackson Reeves is a college student, who currently attends Concordia University in Irvine, California. He is currently studying in the hopes of becoming a high school English teacher, and enjoys playing trombone in the Concordia orchestra, listening to music, and taking walks. He also plays bass guitar in the worship band at Nova Community Church.

Thursday, February 26, 2026

by Audrey Sanders

*Read Psalm 139:13-16*

*For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.  
**Psalm 139:13-16***

## Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Gen Z is the generation born into a time with the best technology, resources, and opportunities. And yet, my generation also has the highest rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and eating disorders than any other generation before us. As much as we try to ignore this reality in the name of comfort and entertainment, the reason behind this mental health crisis is grounded in my generation's access to social media. Teenagers and young adults struggle enough with identity as it is, but social media has given us a unique position to compare ourselves with billions of people around the world that we will never meet. With every mind-numbing doom scroll, we are subconsciously indoctrinated to think what the "correct" way to look, dress, and act is, and hold ourselves up against the picture-perfect, carefully-edited lives we see displayed on the other side of our screens.

A recent survey showed that only 9% of men consider themselves attractive, but for women, that number is an alarming 2%. Of course, there's a lot more to someone's identity than their looks, but if that's the statistics for the outside, I'm sure the numbers for the inside aren't much better.

Today's passage is a familiar one in Christian circles, found on notebooks, bumper stickers, and pro-life banners. But how many of us actually let the significance of this passage transform the way we think about ourselves and about God? Do you believe that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made"? By "fearfully," we mean "awe-inspiring." When was the last time you thought of yourself as "awe-inspiring"? In a culture of comparison, I'm sure most of us just think of ourselves as proof that God has a sense of humor.

It is significant that we find Psalm 139 in the "creation" section of our devotional. In Genesis 1, God calls all of creation as "good", but it is not until he creates man and woman that it is deemed "very good" (Genesis 1:27-31). Every man and every woman is intentionally designed by God to bear His image. The word for "image" in Genesis is synonymous with "idol." The God of the Bible stands apart from other "gods" because He chooses humans to represent His likeness, not celestial beings, stones, or wood.

The next time you're tempted to criticize your looks or your personality, remind yourself that the same God who set planets into motion, painted the sunsets, thought up music and food and beauty, also took painstaking care to intentionally design every aspect of you. Verse 16 reminds us that He has carefully ordained every day of our lives. Jesus commands us not to worry about the future because the same God who provides food for the birds and water and sunlight for the flowers shows great care for us (Matthew 6:25-26).

We are not accidents or fixer-uppers. We are God's masterpieces (Ephesians 2:10). And because of the great care that God has for us, He set the great plan of redemption through Jesus into motion, so that we might spend eternity in communion with Him.

### **REFLECT / DISCUSS**

What parts of yourself do you tend to criticize? I'm not talking about sin struggles, but aspects of your identity that you feel are inadequate. Share with a friend what it is and why you are tempted to compare yourself to others in this area.

How might God be using this “weakness” for His glory? Remember, God has intentionally created every aspect of you. For me, I have often worried that I’m too strong-willed, too assertive and felt shame about these aspects of my personality. But God has continually shown me that He can use me to lead and step up when others will not.

#### **PRAYER**

Dear Lord, thank you that I am “fearfully and wonderfully made” and that “all my days were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Would this reality transform the way I view my identity in you? Help me see others as image-bearers of you and give me opportunities to share the truth of your intentionality with humanity in this Easter season.

#### **BIO**

Audrey Sanders is a Bible and Theology major at Biola University and has been coming to this church since she was four days old. Currently studying abroad this semester at Oxford University in England, Audrey enjoys writing poetry, listening to jazz music, and collecting vintage clothing.

Friday, February 27, 2026

by Sofia Todd

*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**

## Majesty

David's hymn is a praise to God for his majesty as well as the majesty reflected in all of his works. He contrasts the greatness of the creator with the smallness of humans to show the immense honor that God has placed on mankind that we are tasked with protecting and appreciating his works. Similarly in Genesis 1:28, it is written that mankind must "Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

For the past 5 months I've been attending school at UC Santa Cruz. One of the things that most drew me to the campus was the focus placed on living in harmony with the surrounding nature. Even on my 20 minute walks to class I find myself surrounded by God's creation, from the beautiful trees and scenery to the different animals that live on campus like deer and turkeys (and banana slugs of course). What I've found in the recent months was how much calmer and more at peace I've felt while surrounded by nature. I think it's easy to take some of these things for granted, but truly stopping to admire the many works of God has become a daily habit for me and has contributed so much to strengthening my relationship with God.

We seem to live in a world where every moment must be filled; achieving the most possible in the least amount of time, and any spare time is often spent distracted. The average person checks their phone as many as 200 times a day, and the average screen time for adults is 7 hours. I think it's very easy to be caught up in the hustle and bustle of life which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but we've lost sight of the importance of solitude. In the Bible, Jesus often went into the wilderness to find solitude, and I think similarly we should look to nature to find peace and calm within the chaos of modern life. It's within those moments too that we can slow down and allow ourselves to sit in God's presence.

### **REFLECT**

Take a moment to reflect on how you can take time to slow down and find solitude within the chaos of today's world, even if it's simply stopping for a moment to admire the beauty of nature and God's creation.

### **DISCUSS**

What parts of the creation speaks to you of God's power and majesty (e.g., mountains, beaches, animal life)?

### **PRAY**

Dear God, we praise you for your majesty and grace. Thank you for entrusting us with your many works, and help us to appreciate and protect them. Guide us to find peace and calm within your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **BIO**

Sofia Todd is a freshman at UC Santa Cruz, currently studying biology and hopes to go to medical school!

**Saturday, February 28, 2026**

by Liz Stephanoff

*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.  
All things were created through Him,  
and apart from Him not one thing was created  
that has been created.  
Life was in Him,  
and that life was the light of men.  
That light shines in the darkness,  
yet the darkness did not overcome it.*

**John 1:1-5**

## **In the Beginning**

In the beginning, God spoke,  
and by his Word the heavens and the earth were established.  
Light was called forth from the darkness,  
and life was set within the world.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
All things came into being through him,  
and apart from him nothing came to be.  
In him is life,  
and that life is the light of humanity.

The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness has not overcome it.  
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,  
and those who dwelt in the shadow of death  
have beheld the glory of the Lord.

The Word became present among us,  
full of grace and truth,  
and those who receive him are born anew,  
recreated in the image of God.



God has raised this Word,  
And exalted him above every ruler and power.  
Those who are joined to him,  
share in his life, his light, and his victory.

As he cannot be overcome,  
neither shall his people be overcome.  
“Take heart,” he says,  
“I have overcome the world.”

The One who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who formed the earth and all that comes from it,  
has not abandoned the work of his hands.

He is creating again—  
forming a people in righteousness,  
restoring the image once marred,  
making them a dwelling place for his glory,  
until his image is fully borne in them.

A new thing is springing forth even now.  
Faithful is the Word.  
What he has begun, he has promised to bring to completion.  
The Creator is not finished with us.

### **REFLECT**

The same God who spoke the heavens into being has re-created us in the image of himself. No longer a slave to sin, but freed to be fully able to walk in his ways and do the good works he has prepared for us in advance. The creator of Genesis 1, full of power and might, is the same creator who gives new life to we who were dead in sin.

### **DISCUSS**

How has God revealed himself to you as you observe and contemplate His creation?

**PRAY**

Lord God, I pray that you would remind us of your great power as creator. Let us rest in the knowledge that you will not be overcome, and that you are not finished with us.

**BIO**

Liz Stephanoff is a homeschooling mom to two daughters, Ella (8) and Vera (3). She studied illustration in school and has a deep appreciation for visual storytelling. When she's not homeschooling, she can usually be found reading theology and history, or thinking about how faith and the past shape the present.

**FALL**

Monday, March 2, 2026

by Laurie Griffin

*Read Genesis 3:1-7*

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.*

*He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

**Genesis 3:1**

## Did God Really Say...?

Someone once asked me if I knew my Bible well enough to know what's *not* in it. Could I recognize a half-truth or outright falsehood? "God helps those who help themselves." Cute for a bumper sticker, but it's not in the Bible. Not in those words or in concept. Best I can tell, God helps those who *humble* themselves. Or how about this one, "God won't give me more than I can handle." Sounds great, but also not what the Bible teaches. He often asks hard things from his people, especially the prophets, yikes! If we hold these things to be true, and do not check out the Scriptures for ourselves, we will inevitably be discouraged when life plays out differently. We will begin to doubt whether God keeps his promises. You can't hold God to a promise he never made.

We're not that far into the new year. How are you doing on those resolutions? Was "Read through the Bible" on your list? A lot of people start a new Bible reading plan on the first of the year, and if you're like me, you've probably started reading through Genesis numerous times over the years. So how do we find something new in Genesis chapter 3?

I stared at these verses for hours. Somewhere there has to be a hidden gem in this very familiar passage. It's the foundation for the Gospel. The explanation for all that is wrong with our world.

God creates a beautiful, perfect world. He has so much love to give, he creates mankind to express it to. Then along comes the serpent,

that devious devil, more deceitful than all. He distorts God's word, plants doubt, denies God's truth, defames God's character, deceives them into giving up their God-given dominion, and destroys man's relationship with God. And he does it all with one simple question, "Did God really say...?"

He starts with a little distortion, a trick question: "Did God really say you must not eat from *any* tree in the garden?" The implication: God is withholding all this from you? That is not good.

Eve responds with a little distortion of her own. She adds her own prohibition and leaves out one little word. "We may eat from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *and you must not touch it*, or you will [*certainly*] die. The latter lessens the consequence just slightly. Now, her focus is on the one tree God forbade them to eat from.

The serpent then denies God's word, "You will not certainly die," questioning God's authority and attacking his character, essentially calling him a liar. He continues, "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened..." implying they are currently blind... "and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." In other words, God hasn't been totally honest with you. If God is good, why is he keeping this from you? That can't be good.

Eve, now completely focused on this fruit, thinks, "It looks good. Surely it tastes delicious. Good to eat and good for gaining knowledge? That sounds good to me!" If God was truly good, then why wouldn't he say 'Yes' to everything? That is at the heart of the serpent's question. She is now determining what is good in her eyes rather than trust what God has defined as good. But saying "No" doesn't mean God is not good. By having boundaries placed around the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve were introduced to the concept of obedience by choice. But she chooses to go with her feelings rather than obey God's command.

If Satan, the accuser, the father of lies, can convince you that God is not good, then you will begin to doubt whether he can be trusted;

whether he is really in control; whether he is really worthy of worship.

### **REFLECT**

The enemy still uses the same old trick question, getting humans to doubt God's goodness and determine for ourselves what is good. Did God really say...

...Love your enemies?	...but they don't deserve it...
...Honor your parents?	...but I want independence...
...Forgive 77 times?	...but I deserve better treatment...
...Give to the poor?	...but what about scammers?...
...Deny yourself?	...but I want... I feel... I need...
...No sex outside of marriage?	...but we love each other...
...Don't worry about anything?	...but life... but bills...

### **DISCUSS**

Are you able to trust God's goodness and sovereignty even when you don't understand or agree with his commands?

### **PRAY**

Heavenly Father, you are good. Your Word is trustworthy. You are holy. You are right and just in all you do. Your mercy is unfathomable. Your love is great. You redeemed us with your own blood. You have called us out of darkness into your wonderful light. You give life. You give hope. It is in you alone that our joy is complete. Thank you for rescuing me and making me new. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit to teach me all that you have commanded and may my love for you be stronger than my selfish desires. Help me to know your Word and trust in your goodness.

### **BIO**

Laurie is a part-time teacher's aide, part-time dog walker, part-time watercolor painter, full-time wife and servant of Jesus.

**Tuesday, March 3, 2026**

by Jim Ackermann

*Read Genesis 6:5-11*

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

**Genesis 6:5-8**

## **God's Great Love For Us**

We are God's creation, made in His likeness. Yet because of sin, God regretted that He even made human beings on the earth! How sad. This is part of the fall that began with Adam and Eve. Sin entered the world. Sin is unacceptable to God. But God loves mankind. Even though Noah wasn't perfect, God recognized Noah as faithful and righteous.

In some ways, as far as the world is concerned, nothing much has changed. Our world is broken and full of evil, pain, suffering, violence, and destruction.

But God promised a Messiah that would save mankind. He delivered, as always! Now we have Jesus and the Holy Spirit! Jesus paid the price for our sin once and for all, and intercedes on our behalf, constantly, in our relationship with God. As believers, the Holy Spirit lives within us, to guide our way and help prepare us for eternal life with God.

Even though this is basic, I find it truly amazing. God was very disappointed with His creation, but loved us so much that He sent the long-promised messiah, His son Jesus, to "take away the sin of the world," for those that believe.

Our God is loving, patient and merciful! We, as believers, are permanently adopted as children of God - through grace and grace alone.

### **REFLECT**

I often reflect on John 3:16-17, because these two verses cover the basics of the whole gospel story and God's ultimate redemption plan.

Think about how God regretted making mankind, His creation! But because of His great love for us, He provided a way for us to be perfect in His eyes (through Jesus) - as white as snow!

### **DISCUSS**

What plan do you have for improvement toward righteousness and walking more faithfully with God?

### **PRAY**

Dear Lord, please help me to become closer and closer to you, and to become more and more like Jesus. Encourage and strengthen me to strengthen my faith and become more aware of your presence.

In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

### **BIO**

Jim Ackermann is retired, married and enjoys performing gospel magic and roasting coffee.



**Wednesday, March 4, 2026**

by Alesia Giampaoli

*Read Psalm 51:1-9*

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to our unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.*

**Psalm 51:1-9**

## **We Need Jesus!**

Do you ever feel guilty? I felt guilty just reading this Psalm, realizing that I am not always passionate about confessing my sin in order to be changed by God. I don't like to be in the wrong. Who does? Why confess when I can blame someone else, claim "it's just who I am", justify and defend my actions, or don the superficial perfect Christian facade? Who wants to feel the misery of guilt, sin, and discouragement or the anguish of wrestling, struggling, grappling and pleading?

Psalm 51 was written after David engaged in lust, rape/adultery, lying, and murder which all resulted in a child's death (See 2 Samuel 11). It was written out of pain, anxiety, sorrow and regret. He felt dirty, sick, isolated and afraid because of sin. It reveals the true confession of a man who feels the full burden of his own guilt and his desperate request for God's help.

- Have mercy on me, O God,
- Blot out my transgressions
- My sin is always before me
- Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight

Our confession should be just as real and personal. As important as it is to bring glory to our Holy God, it is equally critical to come to God and recognize our own unworthiness. Helpless, we can turn to our only hope – the mercy and love of God; accept all responsibility for our actions, understanding our sin deserves judgment and that we need deliverance; recognize that we have offended God; pray for forgiveness and cleansing of sin; recognize God’s power to cleanse us from the inside out, and plead for renewal.

### **REFLECT**

Look at David – deceit after deceit and (spoiler alert) God forgives him. How about you? Is sin light to you? Are you breezing along or are you willing to expose your sins and receive mercy from God so that the restoration process can begin? Reflect on your desire to be restored in fullness of relationship with your God. God is willing and able to forgive and always desires reconciliation.

### **DISCUSS**

Do you see your sin for what it is, see God for who he is, see yourself for who you are?

### **PRAY**

Dear God, I thank you for your Word and how it teaches me more about you. I pray for all believers on their faith journey, in humility, to continue to confess their sins as you instructed in I John 1:9 because the cross of Christ reminds me of forgiveness. It is the basis of my confidence that I am forgiven. I am imperfect and cannot save myself. I need you Jesus! Thank you for forgiving me and drawing me closer to you. Amen.

### **BIO**

Alesia Giampaoli is an early-retired software engineer, wife of a wonderful husband and mother of a great son. She plays beach volleyball and some pickleball, enjoys Bible studies and singing, and loves to travel to see God’s creation all over the world.

Thursday, March 5, 2026

by Rick D'Amico

Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

*"If you return to Me, even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to Jerusalem, the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name."*

**Nehemiah 1:8**

## It All Adds Up

Nehemiah was the trustworthy cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, King of Persia. He reigned from 464 B.C. until 423 B.C. Even though Nehemiah was only one of the thousands of Jews taken into exile in Persia, he had access to news from across the kingdom. In 444 B.C. Nehemiah's heart is broken! Nehemiah cries out to God to forgive and restore His people from the curse of their disobedience and willful sin!

*"O, LORD, the God of heaven, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him, please hear my prayer and give attention to my confession! Day and night I lift Your people, Israel, and confess our deepest disrespect toward You! This people, my own family, have disobeyed the LORD, acted very wickedly, and ignored the commands and promises given to Moses! Now, LORD, fulfill Your promise made to Moses: "Choose Life! If you return to Me, even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to Jerusalem, the place chosen as a dwelling for My Name."*

However, the news from Jerusalem just gets worse! Nehemiah hears of deadly opposition threatening Ezra, the priest, and the few Jews remaining in Jerusalem. They have rebuilt the Temple, but they have no wall or protection from the overwhelming forces preparing to attack and annihilate them! Nehemiah is so overcome with grief that he can only sit and weep and plead for God's intervention.

Artaxerxes I, notices Nehemiah's obvious distress and says, *"Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This can only be sadness of heart!"*

Nehemiah whispered a quick prayer, *"O, LORD, I beg Thee, make Thy servant successful today! Hear my prayer, LORD, and grant me compassion before this man!"*

Nehemiah spoke boldly to Artaxerxes, describing the terrible conditions in Jerusalem, including the murderous plans to attack the unprotected residents.

The King asked, *"What would you request?"*

Nehemiah was not shy. He asked for an armed guard, money, materials, mounted soldiers, timber, and letters requiring the assistance of the governors to aid in the reconstruction and protection of Jerusalem.

*"And the king granted my every request because the good hand of my God was on me!"* - Neh. 2:8

Artaxerxes only asked for a timeline for his return to service as cupbearer!

Because of the accuracy of the Persian record-keeping, we know the actual date that Artaxerxes authorized and financed the rebuilding of Jerusalem! It was March 4, 444 B.C.

You remember the angel, Gabriel, who told Mary that she would bear the Christ-child? That same Gabriel explained the timeline for the triumphal entry down to the actual date! In Daniel 9:25, the angel Gabriel is speaking: *"Know this – from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, there will be 69 weeks of years."* Okay, so that's 483 years. However, in those days, a year was considered to be 360 days. (Yawn, if you must, but Stay With Me!)

Sorry, here's more math:  $483 \times 360 = 173,880$  days. So, what does it all mean? Here's what: from March 4, 444 B.C., we can calculate the date of Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem: March 29, A.D. 33. It was a Sunday.

Yes, it all adds up. However, it's not just a math problem. God will set His plan of salvation in motion, but not because the numbers require it to be so. It was Nehemiah's repentance and Godly sorrow for the poisonous sin of Israel that opened the prison gates of hell. It was always God's great love for you and me that would pay our debt and place us safely in the arms of the One who was "...THE WORD from the beginning, and THE WORD was with GOD, and THE WORD WAS GOD..."

And, since the Fall of Mankind in Eden, God always knew it would take the death penalty to atone for the sin of mankind. The sacrifice required by God has brought us peace. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

#### **REFLECT**

For me, the process of self-reflection is a "Stop / Start" affair. Unless I am doing my regular reading in God's Word, my thoughts are scattered across the floor like a box of photographs. There is no coherent pattern. I don't even know where to begin. So, get a system for reading the Bible and stick to it. God will make your path clearer to you as you walk beside Him.

#### **DISCUSS**

Share a time when you could not see how anything positive could come out of your present experience.

#### **PRAY**

All my words fall short. I've got nothing new.  
How can I express, all my gratitude?

**BIO**

Rick D'Amico is the husband of Donna, the father of three, and "Grandpa" to six small people aged 12 to 2 years old. He loved teaching grades 3–6 for 36 years. Now retired, he travels often, enjoys the arts, sports, singing, and making new friends.

Friday, March 6, 2026

by John Welch

*Read Matthew 15:15-20*

*"But the things that come out 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 15:18-20**

## Clean Hands or Clean Heart

While I would never want to go back to the beginning of this decade and live through the fear and sadness associated with the Covid pandemic, our need to quickly adjust resulted in some new practices and habits we all benefited from. For example, those years improved online conferencing, taught us to think about work-life balance, enabled us to start new hobbies and spend more time with family, and reminded us to wash our hands thoroughly and not touch our faces. This last one made me wonder how I survived growing up. I drank from a garden hose, ran barefoot everywhere, picked and ate home-grown vegetables and fruit without washing (or even wiping) them, and mucked our barn without gloves or a mask.

In the Pharisee's confrontation regarding ceremonial handwashing in today's passage, they ask Jesus, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat." Jesus points out their hypocrisy and tells the crowd, "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them." Jesus then quotes from Isaiah, saying these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, and their worship is useless as they teach merely human rules.

While we may not identify with any of the specific evil thoughts Jesus gives in today's passage, Jesus wants us to examine our hearts and our motivations and ask ourselves:

- Am I more concerned about how I appear to others while hiding inner sins, thoughts, and desires?
- Am I being consistent in what I say with how I think and act around others?
- Does my family see a different person on Sunday as compared to the rest of the week?
- Do my words and thoughts reflect my desire to follow God?

This goes against our human nature, but that is exactly the point Jesus is making. This is not about us or our desires, but rather about God and what he desires for us. How do we make that transition from appearances to heart?

*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 of the everlasting.*

Psalm 139: 23-24

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.*

Philippians 4:8

God is not looking for perfection, but rather a humble and teachable person, in recognition that we are works in progress. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit and our willingness to be led by Him can God bring about his purposes in our lives. May that be our prayer as we strive to follow Him more closely every minute of every day.

## REFLECT

Am I willing to be examined and searched by God to expose me to the hypocrisy Jesus accused the Pharisees of? What changes do I need to make in my life to have the clean heart God desires of me?



**DISCUSS**

What would our lives look like if we were more devoted to obedience to God? Would we tell others about Christ more boldly? Would we show more kindness and mercy instead of being judgmental?

**PRAY**

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 of the everlasting.

**BIO**

John is a husband, father and grandfather, works as an aerospace engineer, and enjoys maps, solvable math problems, and seeing new places.

Saturday, March 7, 2026

by Natalie Pitman

*Read Romans 3:9-11*

*"As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one."*

**Romans 3:10**

## All Fall Short

Throughout Scripture, we read that no one can come to the Father apart from the Son. Jesus Himself says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. *No* one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). There is *nothing* any of us can do to earn forgiveness. In Ephesians 2:8-9, we are told that "it is by grace [we] have been saved - and this is not from [ourselves]; it is the gift of God - not by works, so that *no one* can boast."

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he tells them, "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" (Romans 3:22-24). In the same chapter, Paul goes on to remind the Romans that God is the God of Jews and Gentiles alike, and that a person is justified by faith.

Paul makes it clear that Jews have no advantage because of their lineage or following the law. They can put no confidence in the things of the flesh. In Philippians 3, Paul details out all of the reasons he himself has to put confidence in the flesh - and then goes on to say he "considers them garbage, that [he] may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ" (Philippians 3:8b-9). Paul, who has this long list of reasons to have confidence in his heritage and works, says those things are meaningless.

Not a single one of us - whether we are “good” by earthly standards or have committed the most heinous of crimes or fall somewhere in between - is righteous. Only Jesus can claim this status. With the divisiveness of politics and other world events, it is easier than ever to get caught in the trap of comparisons and finger pointing, thinking we’re “better than” or “at least I’m not as bad as \_\_\_\_\_.” The appeal to measure ourselves against others as a means for justification can be strong. We sometimes operate as though we’re being graded on a curve and we just need to stay ahead of the lowest performers in order to receive salvation and earn God’s grace, mercy and love. However, the truth we know from God’s Word is there is nothing good enough we can do to earn His favor and nothing bad enough we can do to lose His love. All of us are lost without the sacrifice of Christ. There is no grading curve, no advantage to be found in the things we do or have received. Instead of grading us on a curve or using our sins and good deeds to rank us, Jesus gives everyone who believes in Him a passing grade. This is given freely to everyone, all of us fallen and in desperate need of a Savior.

#### **REFLECT**

Are there ways in which I rely on my own merit? How can I better love people who are difficult to love and see them as Christ does?

#### **DISCUSS**

How hard is it for you to believe that we are all in need of a Savior equally? Do you find it difficult to accept or understand that there is nothing we can do to give us an advantage?

#### **PRAY**

Father, remind me that I am just as much in need of You as the next person. Help me to truly understand the gift of salvation that has been given freely to each and every person, no matter who they are or what they may have done. Lord, help me see what You have saved me from and to live my life in light of the freedom found in You. Amen.

**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.

**WILDERNESS**

**Monday, March 9, 2026**

by Amy Hellinga

*Read Matthew 4:1-11*

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'..." "Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve'."*

**Matthew 4:1-4, 10b**

## **DWELLING IN THE REFINING WILDERNESS**

The wilderness is one of the Bible's most enduring and sobering themes. Instead of the Promised land, Israel was brought into the wilderness—a vast, barren, chaotic place of uncertainty, hunger, thirst, and testing. For forty years they wandered, learning what it meant to depend on God alone for bread, water, guidance, and identity. Later, Jesus entered the same story. After the Father declares Him beloved, the Spirit leads Him into the wilderness for forty days of fasting and temptation. Now that seems like quite the deliberate parallel. Jesus relives Israel's wilderness experience, but He succeeds and remains faithful where they often failed by focusing inward on their troubles and giving into temptation.

The wilderness was not a detour; it was part of the Father's plan. It can look different for many but it is the disorienting reality we all experience at some point. It is the season when structures fall away, answers don't come, pain lingers, or life feels unpredictable and chaotic. For me, the past year has been that wilderness. A surgical positioning injury to my leg has brought persistent tightness, radiating nerve pain, twice-weekly physical therapy, multiple doctor visits, calf injections, and no swift resolution—all while my children's schedules have grown busier and more demanding. The

physical weakness and constant limitations have made everything feel chaotic and exhausting.

The Bible shows us that prolonged wandering in the wilderness can make us weak—physically, emotionally, spiritually—and therefore more prone to temptation. When we are depleted, the voice that says “put yourself first” grows louder. Satan’s temptations to Jesus were not outrageous or obviously evil; they were deceptively reasonable. Each temptation invites Jesus to elevate Himself, yet Jesus never gives in. He does not use His power to serve Himself.

That example is both convicting and comforting. My own wilderness has revealed how quickly weakness can turn my focus inward—how tempting it is to demand relief, resent the limitations, or prioritize my comfort over faithfulness to others. Yet Jesus shows us that the wilderness is where God refines us and defines us. It strips away self-reliance and exposes what rules our hearts. And it is precisely in that place of vulnerability that we learn to live not by bread alone, but by every word from God’s mouth.

Sometimes we must dwell in the wilderness longer than feels bearable. But because Jesus has already walked this path in perfect obedience—led by the Spirit—we can trust that our time there has purpose. God is present in the wilderness, refining us through the very things that make us feel most helpless, defining us not by our strength or self-sufficiency, but by our dependence on Him.

## **REFLECT**

In what ways has weakness or prolonged difficulty tempted you to put your own needs or desires first? How have you seen Jesus’ example challenge that impulse? Where in your current wilderness is God inviting you to trust His Word more than your own reasoning or immediate relief?

## **DISCUSS**

How has a season of feeling weak or depleted in the wilderness tempted you to take matters into your own hands, and what has helped you return to trusting God instead?

## **PRAY**

Father God, You know the weariness and weakness of the wilderness. Thank You that my wilderness is not simply a detour but part of Your plan to refine and define me. When my strength fails and the chaos presses in, keep me from elevating my needs above Your will. Fill me with Your Spirit when I am hungry. Help me to dwell here in the wandering with trust, knowing You are near and Your plan is good. Amen.

## **BIO**

Amy Hellinga is a part-time RN, homeschooling mom who is losing all her retirement to travel hockey but loving every minute. She enjoys a good book on the beach or camping with family and friends.



Tuesday, March 10, 2026

by Nina Lenders

*Read Psalm 13: A Psalm of David*

- 1. How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*
- 2. How long must I wrestle with my thoughts, and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

**Psalm 13:1-3**

## FINDING HOPE & TRUST IN GOD WITHIN LIFE'S TRIALS

Do you ever feel like you're fighting for your life, battling with a long term issue that just doesn't resolve? Like a long term chronic illness, a financial issue, a toxic relationship, or grief over the loss of a loved one? Do you pray and pray, and wonder why these issues don't resolve? And ask God why He doesn't answer? In this Psalm, David is clearly wondering the same thing. He cries out *4 times* to the Lord asking "WHERE ARE YOU?"

As a young lad, David was no stranger to wandering and solitude. He was a shepherd boy who cared for his father's sheep. He wandered into wild pastures and praised and trusted God as he encountered many dangers. He killed a bear and a lion, and removed the sheep from their mouths (1 Sam 17:34-36). He also faced a fierce giant foe Goliath, saying "I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty!" (v45) then struck him dead! So, why here in these verses does David plead to hear God's voice? Wasn't David so close to God that he was referred to as "A man after God's own heart?" (1 Sam 13:14)

But, in doing good, David became the target of a crazy jealous king - Saul. He was forced to flee into the expansive En Gedi desert wilderness, moving constantly and hiding in caves just to preserve his life from Saul's army. In Psalm 13:3, when David asks "Give light to my eyes" it seems like the darkness of the cave was affecting his

vision. I'm sure it seemed like he was abandoned by God at times, but throughout David's life, God was right by his side protecting him.

Sometimes our own problems affect our vision. They are so big to us, they cover our eyes like GIANT shutters that we can't see past. They can affect our spiritual vision too. We often allow our anxiety, grief and fear of our foes overtake us. We repeatedly cry out to God, wailing impatiently for an answer. But, because our focus is on the enormous problem, we cannot see the good work God is doing and His protection that is happening all around us.

The amazing things about caves are that they provide safe shelter from storms, and have cracks and fissures that bring in water and light. Often the way out of a cave is to follow the light. In verses 5-6, David remembers a light! The light of hope! That God has been good to him and he begins to praise God through song. He puts his trust in God's unfailing love and rejoices in His salvation.

### **REFLECT**

God provides His sunrays to shine through the openings of the darkest of life's trials. When we experience troubles, we must not conclude that we have somehow missed God's protection. Allow Him to shine on your spiritual vision so that you may find His love, hope and salvation. In Ps. 27:1, David proclaims, "The Lord is my light and my salvation - of whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?"

### **DISCUSS**

As a child, where would you hide when playing "Hide & Seek?" Have ever had to wait so long to be found that you felt forgotten? Or had to go find the seeker?

**PRAY**

Father God, thank You for loving us so much that you have provided a way for us to find your light in a dark world. Let us always remember that we can find your guidance through life's toughest circumstances in your word and that we can find the way to the hope of your salvation there.

**BIO**

Nina is a wife of 44 years, mother of 3 and grandmother of 3. She has been a follower of Christ for 52 years and has served in leadership roles in various ministries throughout this time. She enjoys all things Interior: design, organization and decor.

**Wednesday, March 11, 2026**

by Michael Hoffmeyer

*Read Isaiah 41:17-20*

*The poor and needy search for water but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs...*

**Isaiah 41:17-18**

## God is Gatorade

What's the best drink in the world? No, it's not coffee, or boba, a Starbucks, and it's not even Dr. Pepper. It's water. When you're in the middle of exercise you don't want anything else. Not soda, only water sounds good. We as humans NEED water to survive and water is one of the things that a desert lacks. Deserts lack a lot of life because there is no visible water. There's no trees, no green, just sand.

In our lives, sometimes it can feel like we're aimlessly walking through the desert just looking for water and can't find it. Or sometimes for me, it seems like all the sudden a cliff appears in front of you for no reason and now you have to climb over it. That is not necessarily your fault. No one goes into a desert on purpose (except Jesus); they just somehow end up there. It's part of life and it might even be God's doing at times. If you find yourself in a spiritual desert, that doesn't necessarily mean you did anything wrong. If so, don't blame yourself. You're never going to get out of that desert if you are too hard on yourself. In my life, whenever I get something negative in my head like that, it just spirals and spirals and spirals out of control. No pulling back up. I've learned this the hard way multiple times... especially playing Mario Kart, perhaps the most frustrating game in existence... Who decided the blue shell was a good idea?! No matter what, it seems you always end up back there in that same unfortunate spot; last.

But what should you do when you can't find enough water on your own? The verses you just read tell us. Cry out to God. He can get us out of the desert when we don't feel like we can do it ourselves. In these verses God promises us what he will do in these situations. And for those of you who did not grow up going to Sunday school, God always keeps his promises. In fact, in this passage God promises us more than just what we need. He goes above and beyond! "No water! Pfft, so what. BOOM rivers! BOOM lakes! SHABANG I'm gonna add a whole bunch of trees in a desert!" The whole 41st chapter of Isaiah is about how our God is greater, stronger, and more powerful. It talks about how other nations will tremble in fear over the God of Jacob. How with the Lord's help armies will fall like chaff and God's weapons will crush mountains. I have found it very encouraging that in tough times, whether spiritual, mental, or physical, that our God has got this. With his help you can get out of the desert. Miraculously, even in Mario Kart with a cool head you can come back... even if you're in 12th going into the final lap.

God is more than what we need. We really only need water but God gives us more. He gives us Gatorade, designed better to help us replenish and refuel. Designed to hydrate better than water so we can get out of the desert and move on with our lives. He's the one that gives us those extra electrolytes to keep going and race out of the desert. Not you, God. When you come out with him, you'll feel better than ever.

### **REFLECT**

The fact that God is Gatorade (that he gives us more than we could ever imagine) is applicable in more than just wilderness. Where else can this be encouragement or advice?

### **DISCUSS**

What has been a time where it has felt impossible to achieve a goal or to finish a project, where you felt like there was utterly no hope and you wanted to give up? How would knowing this have helped you?

**PRAY**

Dear God, I can't do this on my own. I feel helpless, thirsty, and clueless. But I know that you alone can put trees in the desert and with your help my troubles can be smashed away. Please give me some Gatorade to get through this tough time with you on my side. Amen.

**BIO**

Michael Hoffmeyer is a nerdy band kid who plays trumpet, tennis, and tears through fiction faster than his mom can pick new ones up from the library.

Thursday, March 12, 2026

by Butch Paredes

*Read Deuteronomy 8:2-5*

*And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.*

**Deuteronomy 8:2-5**

## BREAKFAST BURRITO

When I think of the wilderness, I think of the 5 stages of grief - denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. These stages according to Kubler-Ross are nonlinear (meaning you can experience them in any order to get to acceptance), nor are they bound by time. Take my clumsiness as an example. One day I had a breakfast burrito, and I planned on eating it while walking from where I parked my car to my office. I quickly learned that walking, saucing my burrito, and eating is not something I can do at the same time. I tripped after my 2nd bite and burrito fell onto the parking lot asphalt. Here's my reaction: "Did that just happen? AHHHH!! 5 second rule? This sucks... I'll throw it away and buy breakfast at a coffee shop." All of that ran through my head in under 5 seconds, and in that time, I experienced all 5 stages of grief. Then I think of when my dad passed away, and that took me YEARS to get to a place of true acceptance.

The wilderness can be short or long, but usually it's more of the latter. The latest wilderness I experienced was along my journey towards me working at Biola University. For years in my previous role, I experienced spiritual warfare in the work I was doing, people I was leading, and attacks on my character to the point where I even second guessed my abilities and questioned God's plan for me. For years I went on interviews for other organizations, and deep in each

process the door would shut and I'd be rejected. Like the Israelites, I begged God to return me to a role where I worked 12-16 hours a day plus weekends and holidays and bring me back to the unbalanced life that I fasted for weeks to get away from. My daughter recently just said to me, "Israelites bro... what's with them?" If only I was as wise as my preteen.

Friends prayed for me every day. EVERY DAY. Last year I felt the Spirit drawing me back to Him and calling me to fast for 75 days. Every day I prayed for career direction and clarity and comfort in my work, multiple times a day. The first week of my fast, I received my initial email from Biola to begin the interview process, and on day 74 at 6:45pm, I received my employment offer from them. There's so much more to the story in the in between!! God is so good!!

God blesses us with wildernesses (not a word but whatever), but when I encounter one, it makes me feel apart or far from God, that he has not moved; he's patiently awaiting my return to Him with mercy and grace. These blessings are an eternal invitation to draw close to him, lean on him, forgo my sinful pride and recommit my trust in his perfect timing and plans. Throughout this period, God provided everything I needed and more. He gave me time to spend with my family, the community, our church; time I did not otherwise have. Never were we hungry, never were there gaps in provision, and throughout times of stress and anxiety God drew me back to Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-34, particularly verse 31, "Therefore do not be anxious, saying 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear?'"

This passage in Deuteronomy still holds true: walk the roads He places you on in reverence, trusting him with full faith, and never waver from the fact that God is drawing you closer to Him. This was shown to the Israelites, and ultimately demonstrated through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ for OUR sins so we can spend eternity with him.



**REFLECT**

Have you ever experienced a wilderness? How long was it? Where did you see God in this wilderness? If you tried to take matters into your own hands versus following God, what happened? How can you proactively prepare for times of wilderness?

**DISCUSS**

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

**PRAY**

I am a sinner. I want things to happen in the time I want them to happen and often fail to trust your perfect timing. I thank you for your forgiveness and pray that even in the midst of distress and feeling lost, I put my whole trust in you. Thank you, Father, for your provision, your desire to be in relationship with us, your eternal love. In Jesus' name, amen.

**BIO**

Butch works at Biola University where his eldest son, Seth will be attending in the fall of 2026. Butch is a volunteer coach at North Torrance Little League and loves sports (Lakers, Dodgers, Kings, Colts) and cooking.

Friday, March 13, 2026

by Carla Conte

*Read Isaiah 43:19*

*See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the wilderness  
and streams in the wasteland.*

**Isaiah 43:19**

## **DON'T FORGET WHO SAVED YOU**

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for a long, long, long time. God brought them out of slavery, provided for all their needs and led them to the Promised Land. They forgot how God parted the Red Sea and allowed it to close over the Egyptian soldiers once they were safely on the other side. They didn't hold fast to God's promise for a better life. During this time, the people complained a lot! They said they wanted to go back to Egypt because they felt they were better off in bondage to the Egyptians than traipsing through the wilderness. Whenever Moses left them to go up the mountain for God's guidance, they turned away and sinned over and over again. And yet, our Heavenly Father did not abandon them. He had a plan and purpose for their lives.

We all go through "wilderness" times in our lives. Often when we face uncertainty, we become fixated on our current situation. And although we may cry out to Jesus, we tend to stay in the moment and give in to our fears - that things will not get better. We forget the "mountaintop" times that our Savior has brought us to and through.

I have faced unemployment many times in my life and I have applied for more jobs than I can count. I know how to search for a new job (I am pretty good at it now!) but there is so much rejection in job hunting. Sometimes, you don't even know if your application or resume has been considered or read. The process takes a long time and I tend to worry constantly during my search that I won't find a

new job. I was once out of work for over a year and God provided for me and my family until I was hired at the job He wanted me to have (at my church). I second guess everything: my resume, the jobs I applied for, how I did in my interviews, etc. I pray fervently but I forget all those times when God provided a new position just when I needed it most. In the midst of the fear, I don't think about God's provision. I think the Israelites had a similar problem, they didn't trust that life would get better, just as He promised.

Isaiah 43 talks about all that God has done for us, how He created us to live in communion with Him, that we do not need to fear, and how much He loves us. The Message Bible translation of this verse reminds us of all God did for His chosen people and tells us not to dwell on the past but to focus on Him and the future He has for us.

*This is what God says, the God who builds a road right through the ocean, who carves a path through pounding waves, The God who summons horses and chariots and armies— they lie down and then can't get up; they're snuffed out like so many candles: **"Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands. Wild animals will say 'Thank you!'** —the coyotes and the buzzards— Because I provided water in the desert, rivers through the sunbaked earth, Drinking water for the people I chose, the people I made especially for myself, a people custom-made to praise me.*

**Isaiah 43:17-21, The Message**

In December I found out that the account I was on would be ending at the end of January and I would need a new job. This was the second time in 2025 that I had an account end. I had been on the same account for the previous 9 years so my job search skills were pretty rusty. I was fortunate to get a role on a new account in May 2025 without a break in pay and here I was looking for a new job, again. Usually, I worry and become very stressed about my future. But this time, I reminded myself of ALL of the other times when God came through and showed me a better future than I could have

hoped for. I was able to be calm and trust in His provision. I prayed specifically for a job with the same company, a remote position, and to work for someone I had worked for before. I wanted to keep the stress of my new role to a minimum.

God answered my prayer with a new account reporting to one of the best managers I have ever had. I started immediately after my previous account ended. Answered prayers are the best but not always what we asked for; this one was exactly what I wanted.

We all go through “wilderness” times in our lives. Often when we face uncertainty, we become fixated on our current situation. And although we may cry out to Jesus, we tend to stay in the moment and give in to our fears that things will not get better.

#### **REFLECT**

What do you do when you find yourself in the wilderness? Do you focus on the past or look to the future God has for you? Think about all the times our Savior has provided for you or even just the last time. Read Jeremiah 29:11-12 for a reminder of God’s plan for you.

#### **DISCUSS**

Make a list of the last 3 times you were in a wilderness situation and how God provided for your future. Share this list with someone.

#### **PRAY**

Dear Heavenly Father, I know you have a plan for my future but I often forget what you have done for me in the past. Help me to look forward and trust in your provision, now and always. You will never abandon me and you know exactly what I need. Thank you! Amen.

#### **BIO**

Carla Conte is a fully employed (remotely) mom of 2 young adults, loves serving in the Nursery, and singing in the Nova choir. She especially enjoys trips to Disneyland and San Diego to visit family.

Saturday, March 14, 2026

by Andrew Pitman

*Read Hebrews 3:7-13*

*...Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today", so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness*

**Hebrews 3:13**

## Daily Walking...

Unless you're Gandalf or Methuselah, forty years is a long time. It's an especially long time to meander around the desert with a few million of your closest friends. Some of the Israelites were wandering because they had sinned. Others (the kids, perhaps) were in the wilderness through no fault of their own at all.

"In this world you will have trouble." Some of that trouble comes because we are sinful and reap the natural consequences of our actions. Sometimes it comes because others do us wrong. And there is a third type of trouble that finds us: the trial that seems to have no rhyme or reason, no attributable fault, and no known remedy.

Most of the trouble in my own forty-plus years has been borne out of that third category, or so it seems. My early failures in navigating life's deep disappointments weren't a result of the circumstances, as painful as they were. The failure came from trying to control and solve all my problems in my own timeframes on my own terms. Frustration, despair, and heart-hardening began to creep in - and overwhelm me - when my desire for control was continually unsatisfied. My worries were miles (months/years) out ahead of me.

God's Word shows us a (much) better way to walk. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches his disciples to ask for their **daily** needs (Mt. 6:11). Later, Jesus exhorts us: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. **Each day** has enough trouble of its own" (Mt. 6:34). We find a similar theme here in Hebrews: encourage one another **daily** to fend off the sin of unbelief.

Daily reliance on the Lord is one of the greatest challenges of faith, but also one of its great rewards. As I have learned to suffer better in recent years, two practices have helped me most: refusing to worry about tomorrow's trouble, and leaning on the frequent support of faithful, caring friends.

"Today" is the only day we are asked to carry! Just as God meets all our daily needs and provides new mercies "every morning" (Lam. 3:23), we are called to help carry one another daily. There is a joy that comes from walking together that keeps unbelief at bay and strengthens us to persist in faith even on the darkest of days.

### **REFLECT**

When you have been in a season of trial or suffering, what are you tempted to rely on instead of the Lord? What parts of God's character do you tend to doubt when the road ahead is confusing and uncertain?

### **DISCUSS**

The writer of Hebrews tells us to encourage one another **daily**. Reach out to someone today that might help you walk through your wilderness, or someone whom you can help through theirs. Talk about a part of life that feels heavy or challenging, and encourage one another with perspective and truth.

### **PRAY**

Father, when life feels uncertain, I often seek control and answers before resting and relying on You. I believe, but help my unbelief. Thank you for the countless times you have delivered me in the past. Give me patience as I walk through today's trials, and encourage me through Your presence, Your word, and Your people. Amen.

### **BIO**

Andrew Pitman is the lone male in a house of ladies. He spends the majority of his time guessing the cost of satellites, eating chips and salsa, and waiting for his daughters to get home from dancing their lives away.

**REDEMPTION**

Monday, March 16, 2026

by Seth Soriano

*Read Exodus 6:6-8*

*...I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.*

*I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm... I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God...*

**Exodus 6:6-7**

## Don't Worry, I Got It

There are a lot of things that we tend to have a very independent mindset towards in our daily lives, from trying a new cooking recipe to driving to a routine destination, from doing homework to building that new couch you bought from Ikea.

While for *almost* everything, this is a very valid mindset to have (maybe because you've proved that you can indeed do this on your own in the past), but there are things in life that nobody can do alone. It takes a team of people to help people move house in a timely manner, it takes two or more people to build connections and relationships, and it takes God to get through the things that seem impossible in our eyes.

On Saturday, January 31st, I was taking a bus with my friends to compete as part of my High School Academic Decathlon team. I had a memorized speech I had to present in front of a panel later that afternoon, and knowing myself and my knack for not remembering important things when placed under pressure, I knew for a *fact* that my nerves were going to kick in, and I was likely going to draw a blank and stand awkwardly for a few seconds.

In that moment, in that seat on the bus on the way to another high school in San Gabriel in the *blazing* hot weather (it was 80 degrees out), I felt trapped. I think it's safe to assume that most, if not everyone reading this has found themselves in a place like this, where it felt like what lay ahead of you was going to end all *but* well in your



mind, where it felt like you could spell out exactly what was going to happen to a *tee* and watch it all unfold as it took place in real time.

I can imagine that's what the Israelites thought as they were under Egyptian rule in Exodus. Their fate, easily spelled out and lived out. But all of that can go right out the window once God comes into play.

On that bus ride to the competition, I suddenly became aware of exactly what I was manifesting in my head, and I immediately decided to pray about it. I had never done this before about anything I was nervous about, and I thought that it wouldn't hurt to simply give it to God for this one and see where He takes me. While I wouldn't say I did superb on the speech part of the competition that day, I can confidently say that the nerves that I was so paranoid about earlier never ended up showing up during my performance.

It sounds like one of those "broken record" kind of lessons, but it's a valuable lesson to be reminded of, the fact that you can't do everything yourself. You were *never* meant to do everything yourself. If you were, then you wouldn't need God, and Scripture makes it pretty clear that we, as sinners, very much need God. I like to think about the worship song "Great Are You, Lord." The first line in the chorus praises God, acknowledging that it's *God's* breath in our lungs, meaning we *breathe* because God said so.

So next time there's something stressing you out, no matter what it is, whether it be a concern over a family member's health or concern for what you're going to get on a test or exam, give it to God. We tend to get *so* wrapped up in how *we're* going to handle situations that we lose sight of God's provision in our day-to-day, so pray for His guidance, His help, and have faith that He'll show you that you don't have to worry, because He's got this.

## **REFLECT**

Why is it so easy to fall into the self-dependent mindset under pressure? As much as God assures the Israelites, as well as us who

read scripture, that He's got this, we *still* feel the need to take matters into our own hands. What are ways that I can remind myself to "give it to God" when I find *myself* on the ropes? What about others?

### **DISCUSS**

When's the last time you felt that God truly helped get you over a pretty sizeable obstacle in your life? Who did God surround you with during that time?

### **PRAY**

Heavenly Father,

You are so patient. Thank You for being there when I felt like I was on my own, thank You for picking up the slack where I couldn't. I acknowledge that I can't do everything on my own, and I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to give my worries to You and simply abide in You as I live my life. I pray that you keep me humble, remind me that You're always in my corner, guide me to display Your love, Your faith, and Your mercy in my day-to-day around others. I love You, Lord.

In Your name I pray, amen.

### **BIO**

Seth Soriano is a senior in high school who has a passion for coding, gaming, and anything that has to do with filmmaking and technology. He also loves nature, especially cherishing every day spent in the forests of Hume Lake and Yosemite.

**Tuesday, March 17, 2025**

by Shantel Duchin

*Read Psalm 130*

<sup>1</sup> *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!*

<sup>2</sup> *O Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

**Psalm 130:1-2 (ESV)**

## **Out of the Depths**

Life has a way of bringing us into deep places. These depths may look like grief that won't lift, guilt over past sins, fear about the future, or weariness from battles that seem never-ending. For me, one of those depths has been the passing of my dad. It has been one year and three months, yet in many ways it still feels like yesterday. Time moves forward, but grief often lingers, reminding us of how fragile life is and how deeply we need God's redemption.

Psalm 130 begins in the place where we often find ourselves: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice!" (vv. 1-2). Even in our sorrow, God invites us to come honestly before Him. He does not expect us to have the right words or the strength to stand on our own. He simply hears us, and His presence meets us in the depths.

The psalmist acknowledges human weakness: "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (v. 3). None of us can save ourselves or undo our mistakes. Grief and sin alike reveal our dependence on God's mercy. Yet, in the midst of brokenness, Psalm 130 points us toward hope: "But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared" (v. 4). God's mercy and redemption are steadfast. Through Christ, our sin is forgiven, and our hearts are renewed.

Waiting becomes part of the journey toward redemption. “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning” (vv. 5–6). Throughout Lent, we practice this waiting, trusting that God is at work even when we cannot see the full picture. Grief may linger, and struggles may feel endless, but God’s redemption continues quietly and faithfully.

Psalms 130 closes with a promise that reminds us of the certainty of redemption: “He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (v. 8). Our hope is not in our own strength, but in the One who conquered sin and death through Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. This Lenten season, we are invited to remember that no depth is too deep, no sorrow too heavy, and no sin too great for God’s redeeming love. We can cry out, we can wait, and we can hope—with confidence that Christ is faithful and redemption is complete.

#### **REFLECT**

Where in our lives today do we need to experience God’s redemption, and how can we bring that to Him in honest prayer this Lenten season?

#### **DISCUSS**

Where do you feel you most need God’s forgiveness, healing, or redemption applied to you right now? And what makes that hard or easy for you to trust Him with?

#### **PRAY**

Lord, You see the depths of our hearts—the grief, the sorrow, and the sins that weigh us down. Thank You for Your redeeming love, which restores and renews us through Christ. Help us to wait patiently, trust fully, and hope confidently in Your mercy this Lenten season. Amen.

#### **BIO**

My name is Shantel, and I am a wife and a mom of three. I love being creative, enjoy all types of crafts, and also have a passion for baking.

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

by Elizabeth Beissel

*Read Isaiah 44:21-23*

*"I made you, shaped you...I'll never forget you. I've wiped the slate of all your wrongdoings. There's nothing left of your sins. Come back to me, come back. I've redeemed you."*

**Isaiah 44:21-22 (The Message)**

## God's Not Done With You Yet

Our culture LOVES redemption stories, which are often portrayed in movies and books. Usually the plot is something along the lines of: a relationship between two people, one person makes a significant mistake (usually by falling into old habits), has some sort of revelation, apologizes, and then things are even better than they were before. The audience loves the thought of reconciliation after trials, that everything is going to be okay. But life doesn't always work like that. Sometimes the mistake or betrayal is just too big to continue a relationship with the other person. I think enough instances can happen like the latter where we realize that there is a sort of barrier to our human forgiveness - we start to believe that there are sins too big to forgive and we can carry that into our relationship with God.

We may fall into the trap of thinking that our sin is "too bad" and therefore God cannot forgive or save us. But the truth is that God has already redeemed us. He asks us to accept and believe that he has already "wiped the slate of all your wrongdoing" even though we don't deserve it. He wants us to turn our hearts to him. Why is the concept of just accepting what God has already done so difficult? Is it just too simple? It isn't like that in the movies... the protagonist usually has to apologize and make a grand gesture, and even then sometimes it doesn't work out. Luckily that's not God's story for us. He says, "I made you and shaped you. I'll never forget you." He has always loved us and wants us to love him right back.

BUT, the passage doesn't end there! It says to celebrate that God has chosen to redeem us by singing and shouting with joy. He made us, shaped us, won't forget us, redeemed us, and wants a relationship with us. I'd definitely say that's something to celebrate and share with everyone around us!

#### **REFLECT**

What is your redemption story, your testimony? Listen to Tauren Wells' song *God's Not Done With You* and reflect on God's faithfulness in your life.

#### **DISCUSS**

God tells us to celebrate because of who He is. Invite friends to dinner and celebrate the freedom we have received through Christ.

#### **PRAY**

God, you made the whole universe, every microscopic detail, and you still chose to sacrifice your son so that we could have right relationship with you. Lord, we confess our sins to you and ask for your forgiveness. Continue to remind us of your faithfulness to us and make us bold in your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

#### **BIO**

Elizabeth and her husband, Levi, are excited to welcome their first baby in a few months and are looking forward to the 2026 baseball season.

Thursday, March 19, 2026

by Joshua Sanders

*Read Romans 3:21-28*

*...we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*

**Romans 3:28**

## It Was Never the Way

Hanging just above our front door, near a picture of the Minnesota farmhouse that my family owned for four generations, is an unusual tool that once hung in my immigrant great-great grandparents' barn, so the story goes. Not just any old farming implement, this special wooden rake, I was always told, was used for skimming cranberries out of cranberry bogs. For those of you who aren't up on peculiar agricultural practices, these tiny red berries are harvested by flooding the pastures in which they grow, and then sifting them from the water with bog rakes. Anyway, it's a neat story about an old family heirloom.

Except that it's probably not true. My family never grew cranberries, no one can tell me whether this rake actually even came out of the old barn, and the tool itself couldn't be used in the way I described above: its tines (the prongs or teeth we find on forks or garden tools) are too far spaced. The rake *would* be good for sifting mandarin oranges or even ping-pong balls, though, should I ever find my backyard flooded with either of these. My favorite uncle recently suggested it could have been used for hay (and also assured me, since I have it hanging in our living room, that it wouldn't have been strong enough to rake manure). As it turns out, everything I've ever been led to believe about this family relic is likely false.

Similarly, the one thing that many people have been led to believe about following Jesus is also horribly, horribly wrong. One of the most oft-repeated misconceptions about the Bible is that the Old Testament is crammed full of rules God's people had to follow, but then Jesus came along, and rule following was no longer the way to

be “in” with God. In his letter to first-century Christians living in Rome, Paul sets us straight: rule following was *never* the way to be “in” with God. Honoring, living for, and following Him has *always* been a matter of simple trust. Paul makes this clear when he points out in the verses just after the ones we read for today that Abraham – the man Scripture calls the “friend of God” – was righteous in God’s sight long before there *were* “rules,” long before the Ten Commandments even. The crazy thing, though, is that we still often resort to trying to earn God’s approval, thinking that this is the way to please Him. It isn’t. Has this truth *really* sunk in for you, or is your Christian walk built on the same sort of stuff as my bog rake story? When God has truly set us free, we no longer worry about keeping score.

Most people will recognize the name Martin Luther. His life and work not only helped usher in the Reformation, but radically altered the whole course of human history. Modern democracy, the abolition of slavery, and the distinctly Western values of individualism, egalitarianism, and self-government are almost inconceivable apart from the impact of this brilliant sixteenth-century Catholic monk. You may know the story. On October 31 in 1517, he posted on the door of his church what amounted to a list of nearly a hundred problems that profoundly troubled him, issues he had with what Christian leaders were teaching in his time. The very first of these *Ninety-Five Theses* reads as follows: “The idea that a Christian believer is to be engaged in a kind of game with something like points [struggling through life to earn enough to win God’s approval] is a mockery of God’s will for our lives.”

What God wants of us is what He has always desired of His people. Take Him at His word. Believe His goodness. Receive His grace. Literally every other religious system in the history of the world is a matter of trying to measure up, accrue credit, earn one’s salvation. Don’t let your Christian experience devolve into that. Perfect rule following is impossible but, incredibly, when we truly learn to relax and let God love us, when we begin to bask in the assurance of His presence in our lives, He develops in us the kind of character and



righteous living that rule following could never achieve. He makes us like Jesus.

### **REFLECT**

What evidence do you see in your life that you're still trying to "get on God's good side"? Do you really believe Jesus when he says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light"? (Matthew 11:30)

### **DISCUSS**

In what ways does a religion of mere rule following seem both easier and harder than simply trusting God with our lives?

### **PRAY**

Good Father, thank you for loving me so much that you sent your son to do what I never could – to live a perfect life, and die a perfect death. Continually remind me that I don't need to impress you, or work for your approval. Forgive me for living as if I have to earn my way to you.

### **BIO**

Joshua Sanders is an English teacher who loves music almost as much as peanut butter. He has two incredible kids, and his big life ambition is to one day deserve his amazing wife.

Friday, March 20, 2026

by Mikayla Lee

*Read Colossians 1:13-14*

*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*

## Refreshed Through Forgiveness

Let's start with a story. There's been a time in my life when church wasn't enough. I felt like I was still with God, and I did believe in Him, but there was something missing. I wasn't feeling what I used to. I didn't feel like I was closer to God, and I just felt like I was getting more and more distant from Him, as if He wasn't there anymore. Then summer hit, most of the youth knew this, but we went to camp at Hume. Somehow, that changed things. I learned so much more and I became the kind of person I wanted to be. I quite literally woke up earlier than everyone so I could study what we learned to let it really sink in, and when I came back, I just felt like a better person.

So how does this correlate with the text? Well, the verse states that 'he', being God, rescues us from the dominion of darkness. In my life, one dark time was when God felt distant and not as close. Just because the Bible uses special big words doesn't mean that it has to seem like that in your life, and for me, that was what it was. This verse then talks about how after he rescues us, he brings us to the kingdom of his son. This all happens because he forgives our sins. So in my case, just because I felt extremely distant and my faith was withering doesn't mean that God doesn't forgive. He forgives, he brings me into his kingdom. He lets me know that he's there and he refreshes my faith.

Two parts of redemption involve rescuing and restoring. God delivers us by saving us from things that can cause us harm. He

restores us by transferring us into his kingdom. Redemption isn't just forgiveness, it's change. When I went to camp, so many of my habits changed. I woke up earlier to fully understand what the speaker wanted to get across. With God as the focal point, it helped me to reset my morals and things I wanted to do in life. Redemption means changing – moving from guilt to forgiveness, loss to belonging, bondage to freedom. Lastly, in verse 14, it makes it super clear that redemption happens through Jesus, with his forgiveness – and that forgiveness is given, not earned.

### **REFLECT**

What is one area of my life where I need to be “rescued from darkness” and experience God’s forgiveness or renewal? How does knowing that I’ve been redeemed and brought into God’s kingdom change the way I see myself or the way I live each day?

### **DISCUSS**

What does it mean to be “rescued from the domain of darkness,” and what are some modern examples of what that darkness can look like today? Why do you think forgiveness is such an important part of redemption, and how does it lead to real change in a person’s life?

### **PRAY**

Dear Lord,

Thank You for saving us from darkness and bringing us into the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for the gift of your redemption and the forgiveness that consistently refreshes our hearts. When we feel weighed down by mistakes or guilt, remind us that we are no longer defined by the past, but by you and our future that we hold in you. Help us to live as people who have been made new—walking in gratitude, grace, and freedom each day.

Amen.

### **BIO**

Mikayla Lee is a freshman in high school and she loves to dance, and is involved around school in a multitude of areas.

**Saturday, March 21, 2026**

by Denise Hellinga

*Read 1 Peter 1:17-21*

*“Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear...*

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that  
you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ.”*

**1 Peter 1:17-19**

## **Everything Starts With His Love For Us**

So many times I forget just how deeply God loves me.

Peter reminds us that we aren't welcomed into eternity because of money, success, or status, but because of the love given us through Jesus' sacrifice.

I look at myself and see average, plain, quiet, could have done better, or unable to do this or that.

But His Word tells us when He looks at us He sees  
precious,  
loved,  
worth dying for.

*“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”*

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20**

Peter says to live with “reverent fear” (v.17). Peter's not talking about the fear we often think of. Not the fear where you shrink back. It's where you live each day in awe, with gratitude and with a deep respect for all He has done.

When someone loves you so deeply that He sacrifices His life for you, you don't want to take it lightly. You want to live in a way that

honors that love. And to think this was always Gods plan, Love was always His plan.

*“He was chosen before the creation of the world.”*

1 Peter 1:20

Jesus wasn't God's backup plan. Before the stars were made... Before I took my first breath... Before I ever sinned... God already had a rescue plan.

*“For I know the plans I have for you...”*

Jeremiah 29:11

Even when my life feels unstable, God is stable.

*“Through Him you believe in God... and so your faith and hope are in God.”*

1 Peter 1:21

Our hope isn't in anything but JESUS.

*“Because He lives, you also will live.”*

John 14:19

That's the real hope that doesn't diminish when life gets hard. I'm thankful God isn't asking for perfection or I would have no hope. Instead He invites me to live a thankful and surrendered life.

I need to remember how loved I am by Jesus.

I need to remember He's worthy of trusting with everything I hold dear.

And in particular this year I need to remember to let His grace shape my choices.

*“Let all that you do be done in love.”*

1 Corinthians 16:14

## **REFLECT**

Do you agree with the words taken from this worship song?

*You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing  
You say I am strong when I think I am weak  
And you say I am held when I am falling short  
And when I don't belong, You say I am Yours*

*The only thing that matters now is everything You think of me  
In You, I find my worth, in You, I find my identity  
Taking all I have, and now I'm laying it at Your feet  
You have every failure, God, You have every victory.*

Taken from "You Say," by Lauren Daigle

## **DISCUSS**

What does God say about us in His Word? Does that line up with how you see yourself?

## **PRAY**

Father God,  
Thank You that man is precious in Your sight.  
Help me live each day with gratitude and trust.  
When I feel weak, remind me that my hope is in You.  
I place my life in Your loving hands.  
In Jesus' holy name I pray.

## **BIO**

Denise Hellinga, married for 51 years to Paul with three wonderful children Chelsea, Luke, and Tyler, who married three equally wonderful people Jeff Cook, Karina, and Amy. Now, what I call "The Super Seven" grandkids add joy to our lives every day. We love doing life with our Nova Church family!

# RESTORATION

**Monday, March 23, 2026**

by Dave Smith

*Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

*<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

## **Carving Out A Legacy**

My father had a fondness for whittling. During the summers when I was a kid, our family spent a good chunk of our school break camping and waterskiing. In the periods between hauling us around the lake behind the boat, Dad could be found sitting in a beach chair in the shade among his family whittling on a piece of wood.

When he retired, his whittling graduated to carving. I had no idea the talent he had for it until one day he showed me a couple of pieces he'd been working on. He was really good! His vacation property in the forests of Northern California was a treasure trove of wood chunks just waiting to be transformed. He even carved an image of Jesus into a dead tree trunk that guarded the foot bridge crossing the creek to his cabin.

By the time he passed away from cancer, way too young, he'd created many pieces of art giving new life to something that would have ended up in the fire or decomposing on the forest floor.

In cleaning out his garage, I found a large box with works in progress. I had, and still have, no idea if they were cast offs,



experiments, or just pieces left unfinished when God took him to Heaven. Somehow, I couldn't bring myself to throw the box away, so I transferred it to my garage.

I just kind of lived with them for a while to see if any of the projects would speak to me. They did. I started in, not really knowing what I was doing but seemingly being guided in my efforts. I was able to reconcile a few with what I believed was Dad's vision. Even though he was no longer with me, he had helped me learn one more lesson. Those items now live with Marla and me and are another reminder of Dad with us.

While my Earthly father gave new life to cast off pieces of wood, we see in Paul's words above that our Heavenly Father creates people anew through our belief in Jesus. We just need to accept the gift, to reconcile ourselves to him. He then expects us to show others the way, to teach them the truth of Jesus., and serve as his ambassadors so that they may become new persons in the righteousness of God. And like the wood chunks my Dad saved, thereby escape the fire.

### **REFLECT**

Have you taken steps lately to serve as Jesus' ambassador and share this news with others? How can you use your gifts to show others the path to reconciliation?

### **DISCUSS**

What does the gift of the Ministry of Reconciliation mean to you? Why?

### **PRAY**

Dear God, thank you for sending your son Jesus to save us. Please lead us to embrace the role of serving as Jesus' Ambassadors. Give us the strength to share Paul's message with others, even though it may not be easy for us. Amen.

**BIO**

Dave Smith is a retiree who enjoys spending time with his family and friends, traveling with his wife, and conquering honey-do's on a regular basis.

**Tuesday, March 24, 2026**

by Burvil Chang

*Read Mark 8:22-25*

*<sup>22</sup> They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" <sup>24</sup> He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." <sup>25</sup> Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.*

**Mark 8:22-25**

## **Why is This Taking So Long?**

Are we there yet? I'm bored. I wanna go home. Why do we have to do this? I'm sure parents out there have heard these kinds of complaints and many more. But it makes me think about my spiritual life, and how I'm often impatient or think I know the best way instead of God's way.

In my 29 years as a Christian, one thing that God continues to teach me is that I need to trust and rely on God's ways and not the world's ways. Over and over again, I see God teaching me that I can't rely on anything in this world to thoroughly satisfy and heal me in the way that only He can. But, as with the blind man's healing, I may have to wait on God for his touch.

In today's scripture, Jesus heals the blind man in two phases. Why is that? We don't see the passage of time between the first attempt (with saliva) and second attempt (where Jesus touched him). Jesus's action has two distinct phases; the first that only gave partial restoration to the blind man's sight, and the second that fully restored it. In the first phase, Jesus spat on his eyes (because in biblical times, saliva was considered a cure for blindness). And while this opened his eyes, what the man saw were people that looked like trees; his vision wasn't fully restored. Jesus had to touch the man on

his eyes in the second phase for him to see clearly and be completely healed.

Essentially, what the blind man experienced was the difference between Jesus using saliva on his eyes as the worldly way of healing, which brought him incomplete sight, and Jesus's personal touch which truly healed and restored his sight. In this passage, God is teaching us that instead of just relying on human sources for comfort and restoration, we need to seek out and rely on Jesus; to cry out to Him for help.

The chorus of one of my favorite songs, "Cry Out to Jesus" by Third Day, shows such a picture of restoration that can come from crying out to Jesus.

*There is hope for the helpless  
Rest for the weary  
And love for the broken heart  
And there is grace and forgiveness  
Mercy and healing  
He'll meet you wherever you are  
Cry out to Jesus*

In my conversation with God, as part of the process of sanctification, of being molded by God, I ask Him, "Why do I have to go through this? Why does it have to be so hard? Why do I keep running into the same thing again and again?" This brings me to another song in my favorites playlist, "You Are More", by Tenth Avenue North. The chorus further drives the point home that being restored in Christ is to be made a new creation.

*You are more than the choices that you've made,  
You are more than the sum of your past mistakes,  
You are more than the problems you create,  
You've been remade.*

This part of sanctification, of growing in Christ, is much like how God's people went through cycles of sinning (e.g the Fall), wandering in wilderness, repenting, being redeemed and restored, then falling away and repeating the pattern. But as we go through

each cycle, as His people themselves experienced, God is there with us, and we grow from the process.

This process takes time and may not always be how we envision it; Yet, it is a part of how God teaches us. And this helps me see the bigger picture of the work of restoration that God is doing.

### **REFLECT**

Are there times when you felt God wasn't working, but you didn't realize how much He restored you until much later?

### **DISCUSS**

Think about some times when God has restored you. How has he done it? What made it special, where you were not only redeemed, but restored?

### **PRAY**

Lord, you are my Creator; the one who made kings rise and fall, the one who has a perfect plan for me. I thank you for your mercy and for restoring me. Help me see the areas of hurt, of inadequacy, of loss, however deep it may be. Give me the faith to move mountains, in your strength. Help me trust as I walk with you day by day. Amen.

### **BIO**

Burvil is a husband and father and works as a systems administrator at the Aerospace Corporation. After growing up most of his life on the East Coast and going to school at UW-Madison, he moved to LA in 2000 and has been here since. He enjoys running and Ethiopian food.

**Wednesday, March 25, 2026**

by Michelle Moore

*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**

## **Grief for a Little While, Joy Everlasting**

We know that the Scriptures are meant to be read and applied to our daily lives, but it strikes me how personal this passage is from Jesus to his disciples. He takes some of his last moments with his friends and followers to explain that soon they will no longer be able to see him or spend time with him in the same way. To a confused group, Jesus says, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy' (John 16:19-20)." He is preparing the disciples for the sting of sorrow and pain from Jesus' arrest to his torture and death by crucifixion. In these few words, Jesus communicates a universal experience shared by anyone that experiences loss in death - the world moves on, and may even celebrate, while you are left behind to process and heal from the raw, biting emotions that come with grieving the person you loved.

When my dad passed, I really thought there would be no end to the sickness that I could feel in my gut, like a dark mass that would arise at any moment of the day and bring with it the crashing despair of the moments when I found out that he was gone from this world. These wild emotions rippled under the surface, and I gripped a flimsy mask all while attending to my customers at work, planning meals for the week, getting a bit of exercise to maybe feel a little better. Life seemed to be moving faster than I noticed before; with every moment that I wanted to stagger back and be consumed by the

grief, I felt a little more left behind by everyone and everything else. These were dark days, and the pain and shock don't ever really subside completely, but the truth is that I was never really alone, and neither are any of us. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18)."

Jesus' message to the disciples is a gentle forewarning of grief, but it is also an incredible promise of complete joy. "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. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete' (v22-24)". Jesus is telling them that very soon they will no longer be able to talk to him in his current form as a man, but they will be able to speak to his Father, in Jesus' name, and they will receive whatever they ask. There is a completeness, in a sense of a completed cycle, of knowing and loving Jesus as a man, to grieving his death, to seeing him again in a new form and rejoicing, and the final step is the joy experienced in the closeness to God through knowing Jesus. "No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God' (v27)." As Jesus' disciples in current times, we too can experience this completeness, or depth of joy, in our pain and grief by our continued faith in everlasting life through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and the peace and comfort that He provides. In Jesus' words, no one can take that complete joy from you.

## **REFLECT**

Scripture tells us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15)." Is there someone in your life that needs your encouragement, either to celebrate something joyous, or to provide comfort as they grieve?

## **DISCUSS**

Do you have a book or song that upon finishing made you feel a mixture of joy, sadness, melancholy, relief, etc.?

## **PRAY**

Lord, I pray that you will ease my pain and for your peace to wash over me. I have faith that this suffering is temporary, and your love is forever. Be close to me and heal my broken heart.

*Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;*

*And renew a right spirit within me.*

In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **BIO**

Michelle Moore is a music enthusiast who currently serves on Nova's sound board and broadcast team. She enjoys reading fantasy and science fiction, listening to music from all time periods, cross-stitching, and experimenting with new recipes in the kitchen.



Thursday, March 26, 2026

by Chris Whiteside

*Read Galatians 5:16-6:1*

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>  
For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is  
contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to  
do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the  
law. <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and  
debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage,  
selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance,  
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such  
things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the  
flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in  
step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited,  
provoking and envying each other.

<sup>1</sup> 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 5:16-6:1**

## Restoration After Sin

Today we see conflict, division and strife in news and world events daily. Although many of these seem like remote issues, locally there are also tragic situations in various forms of violence or injustice. The root of many of these can be usually traced back to the “desires of the flesh” as referenced in the passage.

I have served on three separate criminal jury trials over the years. Yes, lucky me! In each of these cases, the defendants are there because they have chosen activities which lead to breaking the law. Grand theft auto (selfish ambition), gang related murder (fits of rage) and vehicular homicide caused by intoxication (drunkenness) all point to letting oneself give-in to acts of the flesh.

In contrast, the Holy Spirit produces qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and

self-control. Paul notes that there is no law against these virtues, suggesting they fulfill the true intent of the law. Although our judicial system may not be perfect, it does have many good qualities that reflect the better values that are promoted by “the fruit of the spirit”. Additionally, Paul instructs the church to gently restore any member who falls into sin, doing so humbly and being mindful of their own potential for temptation.

### **REFLECT**

What makes us fall victim to our sinful nature?

Do we stop and think of how it affects others beyond our own personal satisfaction?

### **DISCUSS**

Have you ever served or observed an actual jury trial?

What caused that defendant to want to perpetrate that unlawful act that they were being accused of?

How could they be counseled after conviction to improve their lives by pursuing the fruit of the spirit?

### **PRAY**

Father God, thank You for giving us the guidance to understand our sinful nature and how it can impact others. Following your word can provide us clarity on how to best handle the restoration of our fellow man when they have fallen into sin. We ask for your strength and wisdom to be wary of our own temptations in such circumstances. Amen.

### **BIO**

Chris Whiteside is a semi-retired electrical engineer that helped develop multiple satellite programs over his career. He lives with his wife Susan and, together, have 2 sons that live in the area.

**Friday, March 27, 2026**

by Cheree Whorley

*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**

## **Restore My Life Again**

Before you go any further, please pause and read the entirety of Psalm 71. So, what stood out to you? Do you resonate with the author's pleas to God? Are you encouraged and refreshed by his praise and petitions? Do the attributes of God as refuge, rock, fortress, deliverer, and hope bring you strength and comfort? What a great gift this book is to us! The word we're going to reflect upon from Psalm 71 is found in verse 20: Restore.

When I think about this word, my mind immediately remembers Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression. This was one of the largest sets of legislative initiatives ever implemented in United States History. It created over 10 million jobs that expanded the nation's infrastructure; building roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, dams, airports and national parks. We can see evidence of this in our own city. The WPA constructed the Post Library, our Torrance library from 1936 to 1978 and the PWA built a portion of Torrance City Hall and the Torrance High School auditorium. One legacy of the New Deal is that it restored Americans' trust in the federal government, in the leadership of the nation, and gave them hope for a way out of their hard times. The New Deal proved that the government was for its people and would go to great lengths to return the nation to its former condition of prosperity.

Psalm 71 identifies God as our restorer, one who is greater than any earthly leader or government. We know this to be true in the lives of many throughout the scriptures. Let's start with Joseph, who went

from a betrayal into slavery to become a ruler of Egypt, only to use his position to show forgiveness to his brothers which brought restoration to his family (Genesis 37-50). God ALSO restored Moses from a murderer to the one who would help free the Israelites from Pharaoh's grip and then lead them to the Promised Land (Exodus 1-40). God ALSO restored Job after everything imaginable was taken from him. Job 42:12 reads: "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part." Jesus ALSO restored Peter from denier to leader of the church. (Matthew 26). The Lord ALSO restored Saul/Paul from a murderer of God's people to a defender of His gospel (Acts 9). WOW! Just like our verse says, God restores AGAIN and AGAIN. Isaiah 40:28 teaches us that God "does not grow tired or weary" of this work, but He delights in it.

The most beautiful example of restoration happened when Jesus died on the cross and rose three days later. What a stunning public illustration of love He lavished on us that day! Jesus restored us to the Father; an act we could never have accomplished on our own, proving He is our true and only refuge, rock, fortress, deliverer and hope. Jesus' restoration gives us confidence to repeat the words of our Psalmist, "As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long" (Psalm 71: 14-15). God is in the business of restoration now and always has been. He takes the most dire of situations and transforms them into beautiful reflections of His majesty, sovereignty, and neverending love for each of us. Thanks be to God, again and again!

### **REFLECT**

Where have I seen God's restoration throughout my life or others?  
Where do I need it now?

### **DISCUSS**

Do you trust that God can transform any earthly situation for your good and the furthering of His kingdom? Do you trust that God will do this again and again in your life?

**PRAY**

Thank you Lord for the many examples throughout scripture that showcase the way you restore your people. Thank you for your patience with us. Please help us to seek you in the areas that our hearts and minds long for restoration. Please give us eyes to see the ways you are restoring those around us and help us to support them and spur them on in the process. We need you now and always. Thank you for being our restorer and rescuer. Amen.

**BIO**

Cheree Whorley is a Torrance native. She loves being a Nova family member, a youth leader, an auntie, going on walks with friends, delighting in God's creation, playing basketball and eating ice cream as often as possible.

**Saturday, March 28, 2026**

by Lance Capel

*Read Revelation 21:1-5*

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” <sup>5</sup> 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**

## **All Things New**

When was the last time you really wanted something new? When something gets old enough or is not quite as shiny as it once was, we long to have the newest version because we imagine how much better it will be. I think our human nature is designed to love new things - babies, puppies, new homes, new jobs and new products are all highly favored in society (and they should be!).

There are moments in life when we feel the weight of what is broken. Loss that still aches. Relationships that didn’t turn out the way we hoped. Dreams that quietly faded. Even on our best days, the world reminds us that things are not quite as they should be.

Revelation 21 gives us a breathtaking glimpse of God’s promise to restore everything. Not just parts of creation, not just our spiritual lives, but the whole story. John describes a future where heaven and earth are renewed, where God dwells fully with His people, and where pain no longer has the final word.

What stands out most to me is that God doesn’t diminish our suffering. He gently wipes away every tear. That image tells us something profound about His heart. God sees the tears we cry in

private. He knows the grief we carry silently, and He promises that one day, every sorrow will be met with His healing presence.

This passage reminds us that restoration isn't just something we wait for, it's something that begins now. Through Jesus, God is already making things new in our lives. Healing may be slow. Answers may not come immediately. But the good news is that we know that as believers, we get to experience hope and eternity with the Maker of heaven and earth.

In a world that often feels fractured and worn down, Revelation 21 invites us to lift our eyes. What is broken today will not be broken forever. God's restoration is certain, and His faithfulness will carry us all the way home.

#### **REFLECT**

Where in your life do you most long for God's restoration right now? How does the promise of a "new heaven and new earth" shape the way you face pain or uncertainty today?

#### **DISCUSS**

What is something broken in the world that you most hope God will one day restore? Why?

#### **PRAY**

Lord, thank You for the promise that You are making all things new. When we feel overwhelmed by loss, pain, or disappointment, remind us that our story does not end in brokenness. Help us to trust You in the present, knowing that restoration is coming. Give us hope, patience, and faith as we wait for the day when You wipe away every tear. Amen.

#### **BIO**

Lance Capel is a husband, father to 4, business owner and youth sports coach.

**EASTER WEEK**



**Monday, March 30, 2026**

by Leah Brock

*Read Matthew 21:12-17*

*<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. <sup>13</sup> He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."*

*<sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.*

*<sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, <sup>16</sup> and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" <sup>17</sup> And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.*

**Matthew 21:12-17 (ESV)**

## Fearless Obedience

There is something underwhelming and against the norm about the way Jesus enters Jerusalem. He doesn't sneak in quietly, and He doesn't storm the city in power like we would expect a king to do. Instead, He sends His disciples ahead with simple instructions. They could have questioned Him or offered their opinions, but they don't. They obey. They bring Him a donkey. It's what I call unimpressive obedience- easy to overlook, ordinary on the surface, yet exactly the kind God regularly uses to move history forward. Jesus rides straight down the road on a donkey- gentle, exposed, unarmed, and fully aware of what waits for Him at the end of the week. Cheers and praise now; torture and humiliation on the cross later.

As a mother forming my children through a biblical lens, I deeply feel the gravity of that calling. When biblical motherhood is labeled intense, I call it a steady commitment to obedience. There was a time when a mother who shaped her life around Scripture was simply called faithful. Now she's often labeled extreme or fringe.

Every day, our culture urges us to choose a safer way- go with the flow, outsource everything, don't stay home with your children,

don't cook for your family, don't limit screen time, don't homeschool. Instead, we're told to be empathetic at all costs even when empathy is detached from truth. *The pressure is toward a less confrontational obedience, a version of Christianity that avoids discomfort and fades into passivity.* But I don't think Jesus gives us that option here.

Jesus enters Jerusalem at Passover, when the city is overflowing with crowds, emotions are high, and Roman soldiers are watching closely. This is not the time for a symbolic gesture unless you are prepared for consequences, and Jesus is. He chooses the donkey. He chooses to fulfill prophecy publicly. He allows the crowd to call Him "Son of David" and shout "Hosanna."

Hosanna is often mistaken for a declaration of praise, similar to hallelujah, but actually it is a plea for salvation. The people are crying out, "Save us!" but from what? That question matters. The crowd loves Jesus until His plan of redemption involves sacrifice. When salvation doesn't look like they expected, praise quickly turns to disappointment.

Jesus is unwavering, even knowing that the same city will soon reject Him. This is not recklessness; it is fearless obedience to the Father—and that encourages me as a mother. Jesus does not protect Himself from misunderstanding. He walks straight into it.

How often do I do the opposite with other mothers I'm around? Staying quiet on certain topics so I don't scare anyone off, telling myself that silence is somehow better for the body of Christ. But is it better for my children to see their mother hesitate to confront a lie with truth? Motherhood costs something: financially, physically, emotionally, in comfort, and in plans. Following Jesus costs something too. And Jesus refuses to be edited for public consumption.

If I quietly train my children to soften Him, am I preparing them for a faith that can withstand hard questions and difficult seasons? Or

am I preparing them for confusion and ultimately denial when obedience becomes costly?

My favorite part of this passage is verse 12, when Jesus goes straight to the temple in a perfect display of righteous anger. I love that His first stop is to clean house, in God's house. He could have seized political power or confronted corrupt leaders outside the faith, but instead He confronts compromised worship among God's people. Before Jesus challenges the culture around Him, He challenges the hearts within His own household. The temple had become a place of profiting off religion rather than honoring God.

As we leave this passage, the question is not whether we admire Jesus's courage, but whether we will imitate His obedience. Faithfulness may look underwhelming to the world, even awkward at times, but in His kingdom it is never small. When we choose steady obedience over safety, clarity over approval, and truth over comfort, we are walking the same road He walked, trusting Him with both the cost and the outcome.

### **REFLECT**

The disciples display what I called "unimpressive obedience." Where do you see that kind of obedience in your own life, or where is God inviting you into it?

We see Jesus go straight to the temple after His entry. What might it mean for Him to "clean house" in our own lives, homes, or faith practices?

### **DISCUSS**

Where has passivity shaped your patterns of obedience? Can you trace any current struggles back to a moment when you chose comfort over conviction?

**PRAY**

Jesus, thank You for Your obedience to the Father. As I wrote this, the word that kept returning to my mind was obedience. Help us to be obedient to You and to Your Word. Help us to stay attuned to Your Spirit in our daily lives and resist the temptation to become merely religious. Teach us to be meek while standing firmly for truth, because Your Word is truth (John 17:17).

Thank You that You are sovereign over all things, and that even when we don't understand what You're doing, Your plan is still unfolding perfectly. Amen.

**BIO**

My name is Leah Brock. I've been married for 13 years to a man whose first words to me were that being in ministry is like being a Navy SEAL, and we were married nine months later.

We have three little blessings: Ava (6), Wyatt (5), and Boone (1.5). I am passionate about Jesus, homeschooling, fitness, and home-cooked meals.

**Tuesday, March 31, 2026**

by Jennifer Welch

*Read Matthew 21:33-46*

*"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the fruit in the proper seasons."*

**Matthew 21:40-41**

## **Incredible Mercy**

The number of dogs useful when gardening is zero. My two dogs cannot understand this, but their lack of thumbs make them completely useless when I am weeding my flower beds. My cattle dog Shasta, however, is utterly convinced that I require close and constant supervision and will even accidentally push me over in her enthusiasm to be a part of the yardwork "fun." My cocker spaniel puppy, Rainey, will dance around carrying and scattering the weeds I have just uprooted. Yet even as I chase her to get the dandelion back, I can't help but laugh and think how much joy God has granted me with these two animals. They are my kids. The idea of someone torturing and killing them is unimaginable. Yet God sent His son to earth knowing that that is exactly what would happen. My flawed, human love is just a taste compared to God's perfect love for His son. Jesus gives us a glimpse into the depth of this love with one of His last public parables before the crucifixion.

The religious leaders believed they had the inside connection to God. They knew and followed all the rules and held all the necessary knowledge. Yet as Jesus taught in the temple, it was the ordinary masses who came with a genuine hunger to learn from the respected rabbi. The chief priests and elders came to entrap and discredit Him. Jesus, the ultimate judge of the human heart, delivered His sternest warnings to these leaders who failed to guide God's people with humility and love. This parable of the landowner is a direct condemnation for the murders of the prophets. They are the

servants God has repeatedly sent to His people. Jesus must have been thinking of the death of His cousin, John the Baptist, as the most recent prophet killed. He knew that He would be the next to die as the son and warned these elders that His death would bring the wrath of God upon them. Yet God should also unleash this wrath upon us. It is our sin that held Jesus to the cross. I would feel the rage of John Wick if someone brutally murdered my dogs. Imagine the anger of God that we turned against His beloved son. That He offers us mercy in the face of our sin is incredible. It continually humbles me to think of the extreme lengths that God undertook to reclaim me from my own stubborn and willful nature.

### **REFLECT**

As we enter Holy Week, take a moment to think of areas in your life that you need to turn over to Christ. What areas are you still holding back from His restoration and healing?

### **DISCUSS**

How would you have responded to this parable if you were in the temple that day? First as a person in the crowd, and also as a religious leader.

### **PRAY**

Lord, we thank you for reaching out for us even as we turned away from you. Thank you for your endless forgiveness when we wound you with our sin. Please keep our hearts tender to the promptings of your Spirit. Keep us constantly walking in our discipleship journey, even as we rest assured of the salvation you have freely given us which we celebrate this week. Amen.

### **BIO**

Jennifer Welch works as a Clinical Laboratory Scientist at a local hospital and is the proud mom of two very spoiled dogs. She loves reading, crafting, and traveling.

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

By Tim Nash

*Read Luke 22:1-6*

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. <sup>2</sup>The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people [who listened devotedly to His teaching, and who respected His spiritual wisdom].

<sup>3</sup>Then Satan entered Judas, the one called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve [disciples]. <sup>4</sup>And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him *and* hand Him over to them. <sup>5</sup>They were delighted and agreed with him to give him money. <sup>6</sup>So he consented, and *began* looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus to them [at a time when He was] separated from the crowd [because the people might riot or stop them from seizing Him].

**Luke 22:1-6 (Amplified Version)**

## The Blood Which Covers Us

It's Passover time. Winter has passed. Families go out to select their personal Passover lamb, a young male with no defects. They scrutinize the lamb for 5 days. They bring the lamb to the courtyard of the temple where the Lamb is sacrificed, the blood sprinkled on the alter and the lamb is consumed by fire, careful not to break any bones in the process. The lamb was clearly a precursor of the perfect lamb of God who was to come, Jesus.

...The phone rang. It was Tina, a missionary we worked with in Mexico City. We were working together to reach a group of about 30 street kids living in an abandoned warehouse. I had just finished up reading Isaiah 57. A strange thought came to me as I was reading this passage that verse one applied to this specific group of kids. Verse one states, "The righteous man perishes [at the hand of evil], and no one takes it to heart; Faithful *and* devout men are taken away, while no one understands that the righteous person is taken away [to be spared] from disaster *and* evil."

On the phone, Tina started to speak but couldn't. She choked up, I could hear her crying. "What's wrong?" I asked her. "Something terrible happened to the kids last night," She said. I knew it had to

be bad. I waited. She composed herself again and began to speak. "A fire broke out late last night at the warehouse where the kids were staying." "Oh no," I stated. "What happened to the kids, are they ok?" "Some are..most are. Most got out in time through the door or the window we cut out recently. But 7 didn't. They died. 6 were from the group and one was a kid no one had seen before. Three are in the hospital." The six were the ones we worked most closely with. My heart sank. She wept. I wept. We were heartbroken.

After a moment, I began thinking of the Isaiah passage I just read and mentioned that passage to Tina. Again she went quiet. "Are you there?" I said. Through sobs and somewhat stunned she stuttered out, "I just read that passage this morning too."

Wow. Strange coincidence. I mentioned that I felt verse 1 applied to the street kids but didn't know how. I was confused, since I knew those kids and knew up to that point they haven't given their lives to Jesus. I thought to myself, how could anything good come out of their dying? We got off the phone and I sat there with a wave of sadness. Questions filled my mind. How could God let this happen? Where was God in this? These were just kids that had horrible lives, how could it end like this? Why didn't God protect them? Is God really the God I think he is? These questions went on for several days. Sapping my strength. My faith was assaulted.

Several days passed until one of the kids that was in the hospital was strong enough to speak and share more details about what happened that day. The fire arson, the child recalled someone throwing an incendiary device into the warehouse. A day or two before the fire broke out a child evangelist came through the area with her team and called this group of kids into a local park. Through games, skits and a Gospel presentation, a challenge was made for these kids to accept Christ. Most didn't. But six did. It just happened to be the same six kids that later died in that fire. Stunned, Isaiah 57:1 suddenly became clear.



Joseph said in Genesis 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

God can work through the most evil situation and bring about a resounding God glorifying good end to it. Will he? Yes, he will. He is just that good.

### **REFLECT**

Romans 8:28 states, “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” Do you believe this? Reflect on a time you ‘passed through’ an evil done to you or someone you loved, or perhaps you or they are going through one now. What were or are the thoughts going through your mind? Do you find it easy or difficult to trust that God has a greater plan that is at work, one that can take the worst that Satan has and redeem it into something beautiful, life-giving and good either in this life, or the one to come?

### **DISCUSS**

How did God bring about a greater plan for good through what Satan did in this passage we read today? Knowing what Jesus has done for us, how can we view the evil we pass through in this world from a different perspective?

### **PRAY**

Lord, thank you for working all things for the good of those that love you. We love you. And we thank you for how good you are, able to take any situation and bring redemption and life. Thank you for your son that you sent to die on a cross in our place, gaining victory and defeating Satan through his death and resurrection. Today we place our whole lives into your hands, knowing you are more than able to sustain and bring life to us in this broken and sinful world, and ultimately bring us to our true and glorious home that awaits us after this life. Thank you, God, through Jesus we pray this. Amen.

### **BIO**

Tim Nash lives in Tecate, MX. and likes to disciple others, start Bible studies, and hike up local mountains with his dogs.

Thursday, April 2, 2026

by Phyllis Jew

Read Matthew 26:36-46

*<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." <sup>37</sup> He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup>*

*Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. <sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed. "My father, if it is possible, may the cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." <sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

**MATTHEW 26:36-41**

## Be Alert for God!

I am for the most part a relaxed, calm, and positive person, but when I am stressed about a situation it usually hits me at night when I am trying to go to sleep. My mind wanders over the 150,000 ways something could go wrong with the situation at hand. For the most part I remember to pray for others when something is going on in their lives, but when it comes time for me to pray for myself, I feel like I am selfish in my wants/needs. But thankfully when I do pray for someone, or even myself, God is right there to give me peace even during the rough times. One example in my life was when my son was in the military overseas- it was very hard to be at peace, but my faith in God was strong enough that I felt God was right there with me. Friends kept asking me how can you be so calm and I told them that my faith in God was what kept me going.

He wants to hear from us during the good and the bad times. Jesus did not stop praying during his time of need. Jesus knew he was headed for the cross and he stayed focused through prayer despite the darkness, pain and loneliness ahead for him. The following day was the worst day of Jesus's earthly life with all he endured. He shared his fears with the disciples and then went to God for help. He asked the disciples three times to stay awake and watch, but each time they fell asleep again. Jesus continued to pray and through his sacrifice on the cross, we have eternal life rather than eternal wrath.

**REFLECT**

Are you alert when you are praying? Do you seek God's will and strength during your prayer time or do you struggle with trying to solve or control things for Him?

**DISCUSS**

Spend time with others discussing the power and persistence of prayer. How did Jesus persevere in prayer despite knowing what would be happening to Him. What can we learn from his perseverance? How can we grow in this area of our lives?

**PRAY**

Dear Lord, I pray that you can help me be more alert during my prayer time and not feel selfish to pray for my own needs too. Help me to follow through with my friends and family when I am praying for them.

**BIO**

Phyllis Jew is the wife of Herb Jew, mother of Chris and Greg and the grandmother of Emi and Jett. I love to read in my spare time, go to plays and travel to new places.

Friday, April 3, 2026

by Dan Hall

*Read Psalm 22:1-18*

*To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.*

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*

*O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.*

**Psalm 22:1-2**

## Why, God?

Through a difficult and long chain of various clues and symptoms, Lori and I found out that our son Jeremy had developed Crohn's disease at 10 years of age. A battery of specialized tests with a pediatric gastroenterologist was required to make and confirm the diagnosis.

We struggled with his suffering; among other things he had low energy, a poor appetite, and he developed a high degree of abdominal pain that would come and go. I couldn't and didn't believe this was happening. Years passed with some minor improvements, but by the time he was a late teenager/young adult he had been hospitalized at least 15 times over an 18-month period- many lasted nearly a week. Knowing the truth of his chronic condition was hard to watch and more difficult to accept.

***Why God? Have you forsaken us? He's our only son...***

The truth eventually sunk in, and we faced it the best we could- supporting Jeremy through many doctor appointments, additional painful testing, various medications and side effects, and much prayer. His journey to adulthood was difficult. While through faith we knew God was there and heard us, we just didn't hear Him answer our questions.... yet today Jeremy is married and has a successful career in computer network technology where God has made him to thrive.

When David wrote Psalm 22, he meant these words either for himself- reflecting perhaps on his many life struggles- or for someone he knew enduring a level of suffering that was unexplainable. Doubtless he did not know that ten centuries later Jesus of Nazareth would appear in salvation history as one of his promised descendants, and David's words would be on Jesus' lips as he suffered the torture of crucifixion. The Holy Spirit revealed through David's words not one, but a series of stunning scenes of fulfillment of Jesus on the cross. Jesus' meekness, mission, and love landed him on that cross *voluntarily* taking our place and our due punishment upon himself. Where was God when this unjust suffering was taking place and why doesn't He answer?

When we read the Bible- especially the gospel accounts- we often ask the same questions this Psalm asks as we see Jesus suffer: Why, God? Have you forsaken Him (v1)? Why is He mocked (vv 7-8)? Why is He despised (v6)? Why is His trust in You and Your Name an avenue of contempt for the people (v8)? Why is trouble so near to Him (v11)? Why are our leaders surrounding and executing Him when we've not seen any sin in Him (vv11-15)? Why is His life being poured out before our eyes (v14)? Why are they piercing the hands that healed so many people and the feet that walked up and down the land promised to Abraham to bring good news of the kingdom of God (v16)? Why are they dividing up his clothes (v18)?

Some are valid questions we wonder about ourselves when we suffer today- but usually the biggest and most difficult question we ask is the first- "Why, God?"

Three and a half centuries after David, the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to tell and encourage Judah with the future God had in store for his people. He wrote of a suffering servant that God would send to endure merciless punishment to atone for their sin, and in those writings an even clearer picture of Jesus of Nazareth emerges... Scan Isaiah 52:13-53:12 for yourself and be amazed. It is almost as if Isaiah himself was an eyewitness to Jesus' suffering and his purpose. This is the final of four servant songs in Isaiah's book (42:1-9;

49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) describing what God's servant will do.

Seven centuries after Isaiah, God the Father spoke to them once and for all- using the voluntary suffering of His one and only begotten Son to convey God's unfailing and steadfast covenant love for all who believe in Him (Hebrews 1:1-3). To clearly understand His deep and steadfast love means we must go through the blessings and suffering God has for us, and we must honestly ask Him, "Why?" It is both perplexing and a struggle to do this and yet as we keep asking, we are continually pointed to His answer to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

We have examined only a brief portion of the Bible's harmonious testimony about the Messiah and what he would accomplish. It literally spans the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The few Scriptures we've considered, and their historical context reveal a salvation for mankind that God planned and set in motion before time began, as the apostle Paul noted in Ephesians 1:4-5 *"...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will ..."*

Thus, with all things considered- the "Good" of Good Friday is the scene of the Son of David as the suffering servant on the cross taking our well-deserved place of punishment, and it helps us gain proper perspective and see the great extent of God's love for us before time began until now. This also speaks volumes (John 21:25) about God's promise keeping ability. If He can keep promises across the great divide of time, then we can put our hope in Him- despite any suffering we or a loved one must endure- because He is greater than our suffering and has endured more than we ever could. This steadfast hope we have is anchored to this Jesus (Hebrews 6:19) so we can endure the difficult things of life we cannot possibly understand on this side of heaven.

**REFLECT**

Recall a season of suffering in your life where you asked God- why? How long did that season last? How did he answer? Was his answer during or after the suffering? Did the suffering draw you closer to him or separate you from God?

**DISCUSS**

How does Jesus' suffering on the cross enable us to handle/endure/remain steadfast/be humble when we experience suffering today? What aspect(s) of suffering from Psalm 22:1-18 convey God's love for you?

**PRAY**

Father God, you and your Word are amazing and deserve the highest praise for the plan you initiated before time began to save those who trust you by faith. Thank you for loving us so much that even in our times of suffering you've provided a way for us to be restored to a right relationship with You through the shed blood of your son Jesus. Thank you for the Goodness on Good Friday. Amen.

**BIO**

Dan Hall has loved God since 1980 and is a retired mechanical engineer, grandfather, husband of Lori, dad to Jenn and Jeremy, a student of the Scriptures, a worker of wood, and a cycling and an automotive enthusiast.

**Saturday, April 4, 2026**

by Shannon Pitman

*Read Luke 23:50-56*

*The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.*

**Luke 23:55-56**

## **Resting in the Darkness**

It was over. The rabbi they had followed, the one who they believed might be the fulfillment of all they had hoped for, was dead. For the last few years they had watched him teach, heal, feed, and even bring people back to life through his miraculous acts, but he hadn't saved himself. They watched him die. They saw where his body was laid. Their hopes dashed, they went home.

What scripture says they did next on that darkest of Sabbath Saturdays is so counterintuitive to me it jumped off the page. When hope was lost and the entire structure of their lives was falling apart what did these followers of Jesus do? They "rested...in obedience." They didn't run around making plans for what was going to happen next or even finish preparing the body of their beloved rabbi. They rested and they obeyed.

I don't know about you, but I can tell you with certainty that my own inclination when it feels like hope is lost is definitely not towards rest or obedience. Maybe it's a personality thing or our culture's emphasis on having it all together, but I know for sure I'd be planning, problem solving, looking for a new source of hope, and trying to figure out what comes next, all by myself.

I think there is a valuable lesson for all of us to learn from these followers' actions on this darkest of Sabbaths. In our darkest moments, when hope feels lost and there seems to be no way



forward, the God we serve does not require us to have the answers or “get it together”. We simply need to rest and obey.

We can rest in His sovereignty and obey his commands knowing that although we cannot see the way forward and do not understand what comes next, He does and he always has. Jesus’ followers could not even begin to comprehend what was waiting for them on the other side of that dark Sabbath Saturday. On the other side of their darkest and most hopeless of days was the fulfillment of God’s greatest and most glorious of promises. The same is true for us; on the other side of the darkness, God’s glorious promises await. They may look nothing like our plans, that was certainly true for these first century followers, but they’ll be His plans, which are always for our ultimate good.

And in the meantime, while we sit in the darkness, we can remember that our God is good. He’s kind. He cares for us. And he weeps with us.

You know I believe, help my unbelief.  
Yet I will praise you. Yet I will sing of your name  
Here in the shadows, Here I will offer my praise  
What’s true in the light, Is still true in the dark  
You’re good and you’re kind, And You care for this heart  
Lord, I believe, You weep with me

*Weep with Me, Rend Collective*

## **REFLECT**

Think about one of the darkest times in your life, when hope felt lost. How did you navigate that time? What would you say your tendencies are when dealing with the most challenging times in life?

## **DISCUSS**

What might it look like to encourage one another towards rest and obedience when hope feels lost and God feels distant?

**PRAY**

Lord, you know I believe, help my unbelief. Thank you for being a God who loves me and who provides a light for my path, even amid the darkest night. Help me to remember in the darkness that your desire and plans for me are better than anything I could come up with on my own. Remind me always that what you require of me is simple, rest and obedience. Might I seek, find, and trust you when hope seems lost.

**BIO**

Shannon Pitman is an elementary educator and mother of two teenage girls. She enjoys coordinating Nova's elementary children's ministries, spending time with friends, and dancing.