



The Road Less Traveled

Weekly Devotional Readings and Guides

March 18-23

◇ ***Week 2 Lenten Discipline: Choosing to Fast***
(For more on Lenten Disciplines, see the box on page three of this study guide.)

Monday, March 18 Read Psalm 27

How does your knowledge and experience of God give you confidence in difficult times?

Take some time to think of times and places in which you have experienced God at work and share this in prayer with God today. Try to pay special attention to signs of God at work today.

Tuesday March 19 Read Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

While much of this scripture is ancient and alien, pay close attention to v.6. Abram's great characteristic is faith, even when such a thing seems impossible. Reflect on the ways we talk ourselves out of some of the ministries, opportunities and risks that God may be calling us to.

Are there times in your life when it could be said, despite all the odds, "he/she believed God?"
_____ When or why not? _____

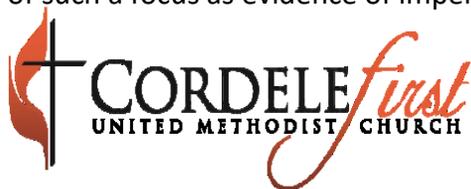
Wednesday, March 20 Read Luke 13:31-35

It's interesting that it is Jesus' usual enemies, the Pharisees, who come to warn him. Perhaps they want to distract him and scare him off from continuing his mission and purpose. What sort of things scare us away from true dedication to serving Christ's Kingdom building mission?

Thursday, March 21 Read Philippians 3:17- 4:1

Look closely at v.19. How might the reality that "their god is their belly" might apply to the world we live in? _____

How much of our lives are defined by these sorts of things and why does Paul give a dire warning of such a focus as evidence of impending destruction? _____



The Journey of Lent: Week #2

Friday, March 22 Read Luke 9:28-36;37-43

Jesus' appearance to his disciples in his truer form is meant as an encouragement for them and a source of strength for the difficult days to come. How does knowing who Jesus really is strengthen and equip us for the often difficult task of living? _____

Saturday, March 23 Read Psalm 91

Though we explored this psalm a little bit last week, go a bit deeper today and listen for what it might be saying to you personally. Read it through several times, pausing to savor the sights and sounds the psalmist is sharing. What does this psalm say to you, specifically, and to the tasks ahead of you? _____

Read it a final time as your personal prayer.

Sermon notes for

**“What Did You Think
You Were Here For?”**

Luke 13:31-35

1. Three figures in this story represent common human responses to God's call to Kingdom-building:
 - A. The a-moral pragmatist: *Rationalizes anything so long as it serves his interest.*
 - B. The stagnant worry-wart: *Resists change and a perceived loss of control*
 - C. The obviously short-sighted: *Those who put off doing God's will for immediate gratification.*

2. Like Jesus, our call is to be about God's purposes (making disciples, loving neighbor and honoring God) first.

This week I will Choose to Fast by:

(see next page for ideas and options for fasting)

With God's help, I will replace these things with:



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Small Group Discussion Guide

Part 1: The Three Characters

Lenten Disciplines

Week #2: Choosing to Fast

Our lives, when we look at them honestly, are pretty cluttered. We are overflowing with things we don't need but, more importantly, our time and energies are sapped by so many demands. Often things are so busy and noisy that we miss God's voice and the things that really matter. Fasting is an ancient practice both of sacrifice but also of humble recognition that we have filled our lives with unessential clutter.

This week your Lenten discipline is to fast. Most people think of food but fasting is any form of letting go so as to be more focused on God. Here are some suggestions of ways you might choose to fast this week:

- 1. Sacrifice one meal a day for the whole week.**
- 2. Make one day a full fasting day, abstaining from eating from sunrise to sundown.**
- 3. Fast from television, or all electronics or maybe just your phone.**
- 4. Fast from a hobby or habit for the week.**

However you choose to fast, it is important to fill the now empty time with scripture, prayer, reflection, or acts of service and kindness. In a fast you are consciously replacing the things of earth with the things of God.

In the sermon Sunday, we looked at Luke 13:31-35. Larry suggested that there were three characters in the section that represented certain attitudes about the Christian faith and walk that are still prevalent today. Re-read the passage and then evaluate those characters and characteristics using the questions below.

- 1. The Amoral Pragmatist (King Herod)-** *King Herod was the client-king of Galilee, working for Rome and straddling the Jewish and Gentile worlds. Ruthless and self-absorbed, the Herod family truly lived up to the motto "The End Justifies the Means."*

Discuss the following:

A. Why would the things Jesus taught and represented be a threat to Herod? Name some of the specific things Jesus said that would be troubling to such a secular, self-aggrandizing person as Herod? (Look up Matthew 5-6 if you need some examples to use)

B. What are some pragmatic reasons or excuses people give today for rejecting (or at least watering down) some of Jesus' teachings today?

- 2. The Stagnant Worry-wart (The Pharisees)-** *The Pharisees were the good, law-abiding church folk, but they found Jesus' teaching troublesome and disruptive. Their warning here might also be to get Jesus out of their hair! The change and challenge He represented was dangerous to their comfortable complacency.*

Discuss the following:

A. What aspects of Jesus' teaching would be upsetting to the Pharisees' understanding of



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Small Group Discussion Guide, continued

how Judaism was supposed to work? Imagine yourself as a Pharisee. What good reasons could you give for Jesus to stop preaching and simply go away? (If you have a flip chart, marker pad or dry erase board, try writing these down so everyone can see)

B. What are some of the changes going on in the church around you today? What are some of the ways people react to those changes? How do you react and why?

3. The Obviously Short-sighted (Jerusalem)-*Jerusalem was confident in its place as the preeminent city, capital of Judea, seat of the kings and home of the Temple. It should have been the heart of faithful Judaism but was more often concerned with its status and superiority. Traditionally it had been the place where God's messengers were rejected and killed in favor of whatever was currently popular or politically expedient.*

Discuss the following:

A. Why would the people of Jerusalem reject Jesus and his teachings? Look up some of the teachings of other prophets (Jeremiah 5:1-9; Isaiah 58; Amos 5:6-15, 21-24 & 8:1-8) and compare them to Jesus' message. Why did the people of Jerusalem recoil against such messages? How would modern Americans respond?

B. According to polls about 80% of the American public says they believe in God. Do we live as if we believe that we are accountable to that God? Why or why not? In what ways are we short-sighted as well?

Part 2: Jesus' Response & Our Response

A. When he responds to the Pharisee's warning, what is Jesus saying to Herod? To the Pharisees? To the people of Jerusalem? What is he saying about the priorities of faithful disciples?

B. How do the tendencies and characteristics of the Amoral Pragmatist, the Stagnant Worry-wart and the Obviously Short-sighted that we often find in ourselves manifest themselves? Be as specific as possible. How do we combat these characteristics?

Part 3: *If there is time, discuss the fasting experience members of your group might have had this last week. What did you learn from the experience? Are there ways to practice this discipline at times other than during lent?*