



# DRAWING NEAR

The Spiritual Discipline  
of Worship

Lenten Devotional





Time is a gift and a thief. These words ring true in my Dad heart as I watch my children grow up, quite literally, before my very eyes. I find myself continually wishing things would slow down. If only I had a way to slow time down. This, of course, is in great contrast to the earlier parenting years, when it seemed like the only thing time was stealing was my sleep and my sanity.

As I come upon Lent this year, I've been struck that Lent extends this very invitation to all of us. Lent invites time to slow down. Lent invites you to slow down. In fact, I would argue that Lent begs you to slow down and pay attention. Lent wants you to slow down and examine your heart, your habits, and your rhythms. Many people think Lent is a turn from something. A turn from chocolates, alcohol, or caffeine. But Lent, at its core, is a turn toward something. Or to be more specific, a turn toward Someone. Lent is a time to slow down and (re)turn to the LORD.

This Lent at St. Peter's, we will be slowing down and paying attention to how time in worship forms and norms us into His disciples, ready to live out our faith in our week. A lot of us treat worship like "the Sunday thing", inspiring maybe, meaningful maybe, but basically disconnected from the way we talk, spend, work, scroll, and stress from Monday through Saturday. Have you ever watched The Karate Kid with Mr. Miyagi? Mr. Miyagi trains Daniel through repetitive motions (wax on, wax off), but Daniel doesn't realize that he is being trained in defense until Mr. Miyagi helps him see where those actions fit. This point lands close to home for the church. God trains us in sacred repetitive motions, but these sacred repetitive motions are not disconnected from our Monday-Saturday. In fact, it's the exact opposite. Sunday trains us for Monday. It gives us a pattern for the "world done right" and then launches us into a world, with the right motions, to thrive in that world that is discipling us differently.

Think about the flow of the worship service. We begin with the invocation, calling upon God's name, because that is the name into which we are baptized. God freely welcomes us into His family, so we, in turn, on Monday, can be hospitable to those around us. Confession and absolution forms us to see this practice not just for Sunday, but to speak forgiveness into our marriages, our parenting, and in our work. As we listen to Scripture being read, we submit ourselves under the truth of God's Word, instead of trusting our own instincts. In the prayers of the church, God is forming our hearts to be daily intercessors for the needs of others. The time of offering each week teaches us to unclench our fists from grasping onto our possessions and to see those gifts as things to share, not things to protect. Communion reminds us that we are united by faith with those who kneel beside us. And in the benediction, God sends us out with His blessing so we can be a blessing to those around us. This is the "world done right". Worship forms and norms us so that the practices of Sunday flow into our Monday.

This is the beautiful life of a follower of Jesus. In a world where time so easily becomes a thief, worship becomes God's gift. It slows us down long enough to remember who we are, Whose we are, and what kind of people we are being formed to be. So let me ask you, in a world where time is a gift and a thief, why would you not want to listen to Lent and slow down to be shaped into the "world done right"?

-Pastor Adam

**Return to Me**

AUTHOR: Sheila Thomack

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: JOEL 2:13**

“Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

Have you ever been so upset over something that happened to you, or maybe even something that you did, that you wanted to throw something? You want your situation to change so badly, you would do anything just so you could see a different result from what your actions have produced? It is difficult to have “do-overs” in life, isn’t it?

Even though that feeling brings you frustration, anger, and guilt, be assured that your Lord knows that feeling and can see your heart tearing as it all plays out. Our Verse of the Day, Joel 2:13, tells you what happens as He watches your journey through this difficult time. It states, “Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity.”

Doesn’t that sound wonderful? As you are in misery, you have a God that knows what you need. As you are wanting that “do-over” to fix the situation, you have a God that is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.” When you feel that you should be punished for what you have done, you have a God that “relents from sending calamity”.

Now it is clear that God understands your journey, go to Him as soon as you recognize the mistake you have made. Big mistakes, or little ones, are hard to admit, especially if you believe it is unforgivable by God and those you have hurt. But God invites us to “Return to the LORD your God”. Simply start talking to God and let Him help you through the healing process needed to set things straight.

Finally, the forgiveness that you receive from your God is unlike anything you will receive from humans. It is truly unimaginable. Hebrews 8:12 tells you about His amazing forgiveness. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” This, as humans, is unfathomable. He forgets our sins? Yes, that is correct. It’s yet another reason you must seek God first in every situation. He loves you no matter what. He wants the best for you, even when you want to throw something.

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving me through difficult times. Please help me to recognize when I am wrong. Help me to remember to come to You, before trying to fix things myself. You are so full of love and forgiveness, thank You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

**Create in Me a Clean Heart**

AUTHOR: David Luken

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSES OF THE DAY: PSALM 51:10-12**

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

The Christmas season is still fresh in my mind. I don’t know about you, but during the holiday season deserts are plentiful around our house. I try to justify my indulgence in more sweets than normal by telling myself that I “exercised today” or “it’s ok because it’s the holidays”.

We don’t just try to justify what we eat, we also try to justify the things that we do, say, and even feel. We try to explain to ourselves the reason for our sins. We say things like, “everyone does it”, “it’s really not a big deal”, or, “I am just so stressed right now” to justify why we might have done something sinful. We are all also likely guilty of trying to compare our sins to others because if their sins are “worse” then it makes us feel better. In a way, we are using self-justification because it might feel safer than confession.

After reading our Verses of the Day we are reminded that we should always be confessing our sins to God. Confession is simply to rely and trust in God’s love and mercy for us rather than trying to justify the sins we commit. We do not need to worry about the feeling of exposing ourselves in confession because the cross has already answered that fear for us. Because of Christ, confessing our sins is not only safe, but helpful. In our Verses of the Day David does not say that he can do better or try to show that it’s up to his own self-improvement. David prays, “create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

He places the burden where it belongs, which is on God’s power to forgive. Confession is not brokenness, but hope and an act of faith in God’s promise to forgive. During this time of Lent we should be called away from trying to save ourselves, confess our sins, and start trusting in God’s mercy for us. When we do this we can take joy in knowing that, through faith in the cross, our sins are forgiven. In Lent, we learn again that a forgiven heart is given to us by God’s grace.

*Heavenly Father, we confess that we often try to justify ourselves and not trust in Your grace. Create in us clean hearts and don’t allow us to be pulled away from Your presence. Instead, bring us near to You through our faith in the cross. During this Lenten season teach us to let our guard down to depend on Your mercy. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Habits Build**

AUTHOR: Allison Mack

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSES OF THE DAY: HEBREWS 10:24-25**

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

By February 20th, most New Year’s resolutions have quietly disappeared — the gyms are emptier, the planners are sparse, and the enthusiasm has faded. Let’s face it, forming new habits is easier said than done. There is no single conclusion as to how long it takes someone to form a habit. Some people may say twenty-one days, but truly it depends on the complexity of the habit. Recent research has found that more complex habits take an average of sixty-six days for us to complete the task in true “auto-pilot.”

Every day we are faced with the challenge of making it a habit to follow and live our lives in reflection of Jesus Christ, but yet we fall short every single day. Living a life in Christ takes discipline, just as it takes discipline to form those habits that we all are so confident we will incorporate into our lifestyle at the start of each new year.

Let’s start with worship. For some, attending church every Sunday morning is already a habit, but maybe this was your New Year’s resolution. While perfect church attendance is certainly habit producing, we must reflect on our daily worship habits throughout the week as well. Daily worship comes in many forms including the music we listen to, the shows we watch, and especially the people we surround ourselves with. What if our resolutions don’t fail because we lack discipline or miss the magic number, but because habits are meant to be lived out together? What if worship works the same way? What if it becomes a lasting habit not through willpower, but through community?

Like any good habit, worship shapes us. It steadies us. It reminds us Who we belong to. When we practice worship regularly, not perfectly, but consistently, it becomes a rhythm that forms our hearts. And the beautiful thing is that when we allow worship to form us, we become people who help form others. In Proverbs 27:17, King Solomon writes “as iron sharpens iron, so does one person sharpen another.” Parents form children. Bosses form workers. Teachers form students. Our posture, our gratitude, our joy, and our dependence on God are the things that become contagious and form others. Will you make worship a habit this year?

*Heavenly Father, We thank You for the habits that You’ve helped us form in our life that lead us closer to You. We pray that You will continue to allow us to lead others by Your example through our daily worship. Shape our hearts, steady our steps, and remind us that we grow best when we grow together. Help us recognize every moment as an opportunity to turn toward You and to encourage others to do the same. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## What Pulls Me Away

AUTHOR: Krystyna Carter

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: HEBREWS 12:1

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

Our Verse of the Day invites us into a hopeful picture, a life that is not weighed down by sin. The writer does not begin with condemnation. Instead, a reminder that we are not alone, but that others have gone before us. The call is simple and gracious: throw off sin and run less burdened.

Many of the things that hinder our worship do not arrive loudly or with bad intentions. They slip in quietly. A packed schedule that leaves no room for stillness. A phone that keeps us endlessly informed but rarely attentive. The good habit of productivity that slowly convinces us our worth comes from output. Comfort that dulls our hunger for God. The desire for approval that shapes our prayers into performances. Even good gifts like work, family, rest, and recreation can slowly crowd out worship when they become our deepest love or primary refuge.

These are not named to shame us, but to help us notice. Worship begins with awareness. We gently ask, what is filling my attention? What do I reach for first when I am tired, anxious, or joyful? What claims my imagination more than God?

Worship is the reorientation of our hearts. When we worship, we remember who God is and who we are with Him. Worship pulls our gaze upward and outward. It loosens the grip of lesser loves by replacing them with a greater one.

As we worship, busyness gives way to trust. Control softens into surrender. Noise is met with the steady voice of God. Worship reminds us that we are not defined by what we produce, consume, or achieve, but by being beloved children of God. In His presence, the weight we have been carrying begins to feel unnecessary.

Today, you are invited to notice what may be hindering your worship and to throw it aside. God is not far off. He is drawing near to you.

*Gracious Lord, thank You for continuing to draw closer to me. Enable me to put away the things of this world that distract me from You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

**God Loves to Forgive**

AUTHOR: Chris Baker

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: 1 JOHN 1:9**

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

How often do you sin? If you are like me, that number is embarrassingly high. But let me ask you another question: how often do you actually admit that you sin? I used to say, “oh, that’s not a sin because it was something small or miniscule” such as saying a curse word. But as I have gotten older and somewhat wiser I confess that I sin every day. The great thing is God already knows that I sinned, but I take that sin to Him every day and ask for His forgiveness so that I can be cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Admitting your sin is the first step in faith. 1 John 1:10 says, “If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.” God wants you to take responsibility for your actions, big or small. But God doesn’t just leave you there, God will always forgive you. That’s what our Verse of the Day is all about. And being forgiven allows you to continue to strive to do better each and every day.

Look, God knows we are not perfect. That’s the staggering thing about forgiveness: He knows we are not perfect but yet sees us as perfect through the cross of Jesus. So we wake up each morning with a fresh start knowing that when we confess our sins, He will be with us. How does He do this? He sends His Spirit to help us do better. With the Spirit’s help and guidance we turn away from sin and look for how we can work for the good of others.

If you sin are you a bad person, father, mother, son, daughter, coach, or employee? No, because that defines you by your sin. If God doesn’t define you by your sin, then we shouldn’t either. What defines us is God’s Word, and God’s Word says that He has purified us from all unrighteousness.

In today’s challenging world where everyone is looking for an image of perfection we must be honest with ourselves. We must ask for forgiveness. Confess to the Lord your sins and ask His help to continue to grow your faith and you will start to see God’s plan working.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for all You do for us. Please continue to watch over us and keep us safe. Thank You for dying on the cross for us and forgiving us of all our sins. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



**Blessings through Sacrifice**

AUTHOR: Lindsay Schultz

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: GENESIS 3:16**

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

There is an old saying: “Beauty is pain.” I used to find the saying odd; how can something full of pain bring about something beautiful? However, in reflecting on this verse, it rings true. Painful things, like childbirth, often bring the most beautiful parts of life. The birth of each of my three children brought pain, yet I would relive each one endlessly, if possible. Even in the consequences of God’s punishment to women, He provides the most beautiful joy.

My first impressionable moment of a mother’s sacrifice came in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We were on a mission trip to Mexico with our church and we went to visit the family of a woman who was pregnant and had cancer. Her doctors had told her to terminate the pregnancy and seek cancer treatment, but she refused. We prayed with the family, brought food, and a doctor in our group checked on her. Shortly after returning home, we learned she had passed away, but the baby was alive and healthy. This mother held fast to the hope God placed in her heart and chose to literally bring life out of great pain.

The second moment shaping my heart forever came when I was twenty. My sister found out she was pregnant with conjoined twins when she was just eighteen. I will never forget where I was when I got that call and the confusion I felt trying to process what she was saying. To watch her go through the next eight months - her simultaneous hope and despair - was a pit of the depths of a season I would never wish upon anyone. That season held grief, hope, sadness, and deep despair. She saw specialists that couldn’t provide much information other than the likelihood of survival was low. The doctors all recommended she terminate the pregnancy. She chose faith. She chose hope. Despite despair, pain, sacrifice and grief, she chose to love them as long as God gave them to her. She chose beauty. We heard them cry, saw their eyes open, and held their hands as they passed into God’s kingdom. A mother’s love, a mother’s sacrifice knows no limits. Her body forever scarred, our hearts forever changed, her arms empty, for now, but with God’s promise, not forever. Arianna and Isabella would have been fourteen this year.

God uses motherhood and childbirth to show us, early on, that love can enter this world, only through great sacrifice. The kind of sacrifice that Jesus endured for us. The kind of love that leads to pain and the beauty that comes from that pain. Without the depth of His love and sacrifice, we would have no hope. We will be forever grateful for the beauty found in Jesus’ pain, which gives us hope for eternity with Him.

*Heavenly Father, we are forever grateful for the sacrifice of sending Your Son to die for our sins so we can have a chance to spend eternity with You. Comfort us with the depths of love only You can provide. In the pain and times of sacrifice, let us find the beauty in Your hope. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Receiving, Not Proving

AUTHOR: Mike Winters

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: EPHESIANS 2:8-9

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

In most areas of life, we are trained to prove ourselves. At work I must provide a specific performance to receive better pay or increased recognition for advancement. When I was a competitive cheerleader in college we had to put in countless hours of practice running the same two minute and thirty second routine over-and-over again to perfection, usually twice a day for two hours each practice to gain that national title. When I chose to pick up flying, I had to prove to my instructor I was ready to move on with every flight. I had to show him I was ready to pass that check-ride and gain my pilot's license. If you do not perform, produce, or progress, you do not receive the reward.

Over time, this mindset becomes deeply ingrained in one's mind. I learned that my output and performance directly impacted how I was able to provide for my family. Without realizing it, we can carry this same mindset into our relationship with God, approaching Him as if we must prove ourselves before we can receive anything from Him.

But worship does not operate like the rest of life. Our Verse of the Day says grace is not earned. Forgiveness is not awarded for effort. Mercy is not granted because we tried harder this week. God's favor is not unlocked by climbing a spiritual ladder. Worship is not about impressing God, it is about receiving from Him.

In worship, we come with nothing but ourselves. We bring our fears of the future, our problems with money, our doubts, and our needs. Instead of Him asking us to prove our worthiness, He offers us forgiveness. Instead of Him asking for perfection in our lives, He gives us grace. Instead of Him measuring how much we can lift, He provides us with His own strength. This is what makes worship so different from everything else in life. Worship is a place of rest. It is where striving ends and receiving begins. It is where we stop trying to earn God's approval and start living from it.

Today, allow yourself to rest. Let go of the pressure to prove. God already knows you, and He still chooses you. Jesus doesn't say come to Him with a resume of accomplishments and I will give you rest. No, Jesus' invitation is much better. Are you tired and weary of proving yourself? Jesus gives you rest.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of grace that cannot be earned and mercy that never runs out. Help us release the need to prove ourselves before You and instead rest in what You freely give. Teach us to worship from a place of trust, humility, and gratitude. Renew our strength, forgive our shortcomings, and remind us daily that our salvation and worth come from You alone. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## The Absurd Invitation

AUTHOR: Ariel Lenz

DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: ISAIAH 55:1

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Many of us haven't experienced the kind of love and grace from people in our lives to give us context for Isaiah—this lavish generosity to provide everything we need and more. Some of us have had something like it—from parents, grandparents, siblings, a spouse, or a friend. Others among us, despite not experiencing this fully or enough, relate to it from the perspective of the giver: boundless love that wells up inside of us for our children, our families, or the love of our lives. Still others among us have lost that or are still waiting to find it. But all of us share one thing in common: We are offered it. Here! Now! And again and again for the rest of our lives!

However, instead of simply receiving this, we try to pay for our redemption ourselves. Some of us have too much pride to bow to the humbling nature of this magnitude of grace, and so we try to earn it. While others among us have been so crushed by the weight of our own unworthiness that we deny ourselves what our Comforter has prepared for us—victory, legacy, descendants, miracles, splendor, and bounty all in the chapters that surround this verse.

An adopted friend once told me that it's a milestone for a foster or adopted child to feel free to open the fridge in their new home to get something to eat. Too many of us stand in the corner of God's kitchen, so hungry, but too afraid to open the door.

In our Verse of the Day we find the Father of our spiritually orphaned souls. He is the Dad who brings His child to the fairgrounds and, with a smile, tells them they can get anything they want—any treat, any ride, any prize. He's the Husband who tells His wife, "All that I am and all that I have is yours." He's the Prince in Cinderella, offering His bride, once covered in ashes, not only His love but His entire kingdom. And He's the good Father who gives His inheritance to his son and, even after he's squandered it, welcomes him home with open arms.

How do we receive this gift? God makes it so simple a few verses later when He simply says, “Come to me.”

*Heavenly Father, stir our hearts to come with both humility and boldness before the throne of grace. Thank You for being our Redeemer, and our Comforter. Thanks for offering us so much. Help us forsake our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts so we may receive Your compassion and Your abundant pardon—to glorify You and enjoy You forever. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## The Pattern of Love

AUTHOR: Ben Sylva

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: 1 JOHN 4:10-12

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

John begins by reminding us where love truly starts. Love does not begin with what we do for God, but with what God has already done for us. Before we understood faith, before we made good choices, and even in our brokenness, God loved us. His love is not something we earn, it is something we receive.

That can be hard for us to accept. We often think love must be deserved, especially when we are used to measuring our value by our actions or successes. But God’s love works differently. He did not wait for us to fix ourselves before loving us. He sent His Son because we needed grace, not because we had earned it. When we truly rest in that truth, it brings peace and freedom. We no longer have to prove ourselves; we are already loved.

John then challenges us with what comes next in our Verse of the Day: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Loving others is not meant to be forced or fake. It flows out of the love we have already received from God. For some of us, being kind and friendly to others may come naturally. We may not feel like we have clear enemies in our lives. But God’s call to love goes deeper than just being nice.

Loving like God loves means choosing patience when it would be easier to get annoyed, showing grace when someone disappoints us, and caring for people who may think or live differently than we do. Even if we don’t see others as enemies, there are still moments when love requires effort and sacrifice. In those moments, we are invited to reflect the same love God has shown us. And in this love, we make God visible in the world. God’s love is made complete when it moves through us into the lives of others. As we rest in His love, may we allow that love to shape how we treat everyone we encounter.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us before we ever loved You. Help us to truly rest in Your love and remember that it is a gift, not something we earn. Teach us to love others with patience, kindness, and grace, even when it is difficult. May Your love be made complete in us as we reflect it to those around us. Guide us to show Your love in our words and actions each day. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**God is Seeking You**

AUTHOR: Kyle Taylor

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: JOHN 4:23**

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

During the Lenten season we often reflect on our relationship with God. We often ask ourselves whether our prayers are frequent enough, our repentance is sincere enough, or if our faith is strong enough. It is easy for us to imagine God as a distant person, sitting on a throne, just waiting on us to do or say the right thing before we are worthy of having a relationship with Him. But Jesus’ words in John chapter 4 shatters that image. God, our Father, is not seeking people who pray enough, or are sincere enough. God is actively seeking people who worship in the Spirit and in truth.

True worship is not something we manufacture or earn. It is created by the Holy Spirit, through the truth of Christ given to us. God seeks us not only where He has promised to be found, in His Word, in Baptism, and at the Table where Jesus gives His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, but Jesus can be found in all aspects of life.

I distinctly remember about a year ago wondering if I was worthy of having a relationship with God. I was driving on 25<sup>th</sup> street, coming from Petersville toward Columbus, which I do at least twice a day for work. My dad had just passed away, and I was having a rough few days, but that day was the worst. Then, around Bonnell Road, I saw a mural with a large cross painted on a fence. I had never noticed it before, and the cross really caught my attention in such an extreme way that I knew God was reaching out to me. I had not been praying much, if at all those last few days, but after seeing that mural I began to pray. From that moment on I began to feel more at peace with dad’s passing.

God is actively seeking you out today. He is working in His Word and Sacraments, but not just there. God will use whatever means He sees fit to communicate His love for you. It’s comforting to know that even at times when we feel distant from God, He is not idle, but is actively and always seeking us.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for seeking us always, especially when we are lost in sin and doubt. Thank You for knowing us each by name and constantly giving us everything that You know we need. Please continue to draw us to worship You in Spirit and truth, trusting not in our worthiness but in Christ’s cross. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Faith is a Hearing Experience**

AUTHOR: Leslie Weaver

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: ROMANS 10:17**

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

In our Verse of the Day, Paul writes that “faith comes from hearing the message.” Faith does not come through seeing, smelling, or feeling, but through hearing. When I come to church, I appreciate that the service begins with singing. I consistently use music to change my mood, spur inspiration or create focus when I find it difficult to do so on my own. The worship music serves as a reminder to set my intention and prepare my mind for the hearing of the Word.

As the Word is shared, this is God’s way of actively giving and strengthening faith through what is heard. The church creates space to listen, reflect and be reminded of God’s promises in a way that is hard to do alone. We can trust that God is at work through His spoken Word, even at times when the message might feel familiar or even unimpressive.

Think of the preached Word as a refrain in a song. Listening to it over and over again, we carry the Word with us throughout the coming week. The message preached has the power to shape our hearts and minds. You may walk into the service feeling distracted, anxious or just tired from the daily grind, but when you practice attentively listening, you allow something in the words to stay with you long after the service ends.

The preached Word helps us understand God’s character and live out our faith with intention and humility. Let the preaching become “an earworm” when life gets loud again, and allow the message to come back to us. It may be quietly or unexpectedly, but the Word reminds us of truth, grace and who God is calling us to be. It doesn’t necessarily change everything at once, but it keeps our faith in rhythm and steadies our hearts when we start to lose the melody.

*Heavenly Father, we know that faith is a hearing experience and this is why preaching is in every worship service. You are at work within us through Your spoken Word. Help us to be attentive listeners so that we can recall Your Word. Allow the Word to guide us and trust that You are at work within us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## God Gives Himself

AUTHOR: Brendan Larrison

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 26:26-28

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

On the night that Jesus was betrayed He stayed with His disciples. He knew that one of them was going to betray Him that very night, but He still invited all of them to a last supper. He did not ask any of them for allegiance or alliance but rather invited all of the disciples to sit with Him and dine together in what we now know as the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion is a perfect example of how God does not wait for us to come to him, but rather He comes down to us in the presence of His body and His blood through Holy Communion.

At the table, Jesus does not say, “Prove your worth.” He says, “This is my body, given for you.” He does not say, “Clean yourself up.” He says, “This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” Before the disciple’s scatter. Before Peter denies Him. Before the cross. God gives. He always gives and He always will.

The Sacrament reminds us that our faith is not built on what we bring, but on what we receive. We come empty-handed, and God fills our hands with Himself through His body and His blood. All of God’s children have a seat at the table. Through this Sacrament God is showing us that He is present in all things.

By receiving The Lord at His table through the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we are reminded that our God is a gracious God. He is a God that is always and forever. He is a God that comes down to us so that we may be forgiven and have eternal life with Him. He is a God that does all of this out of love for us, His children.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving Yourself unconditionally, through Your body and Your blood for our never ending forgiveness of sins. Teach us to receive these gifts with humility and understand that You are not a demanding God, but a compassionate, giving God. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Letting Go of Evaluation

AUTHOR: Kevan Pence

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: ISAIAH 55:10-11

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

We constantly live in a world that is driven by evaluations. We measure progress, judge outcomes and question timing. Even in our own faith we often evaluate God's work, "is this working?" "Did I hear him right?" or "Why hasn't anything changed yet?" When we don't get answers quickly, we tend to try and take control and rely on our own understanding rather than trust in God's plan. When this happens, God calls us back to Him and asks us to trust Him and His plan for us.

Our Verses of the Day remind us that God's plan is beyond what we can understand. When God talks to us either through the Bible or prayer, His Word is already at work. God asks us not to evaluate how effective He is in our lives, but to believe and trust that He has a plan for us and for us to trust Him with our whole heart.

Letting go of evaluation doesn't mean abandoning what we have learned or using good judgement. All God is asking us to do is to trust that His timeline and outcome might be different than ours. What feels unproductive or delayed might be God's way of preparing us for His perfect timing. Trust grows when we stop asking "Is this working?" or "When is it going to happen!" and start declaring that "God is faithful."

Proverbs 3:5-7 tells us, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." When we trust our own understanding and not God's then we are still clinging to our evaluations, but when we learn to let them go then we begin to trust in the Lord's plan and path for us.

Faith requires patience. I know this, because I farm for a living. When I plant seeds, they show no immediate results, yet underground, I know that life and growth are happening. That is what our Verse of the Day is getting at. God is quietly shaping our lives every day; we may not be able to see the results that we are asking for, but underground God's plan is hard at work. Today God is asking you to loosen your grip of control and self-understanding and to trust Him and His Word, even though we can't see it.

*Heavenly Father, please help us to put our trust in Your understanding and to not lean on our own. You have created a plan and a path for us that will lead us to become closer to You. Even though we can't see Your Word in action in our lives sometimes, our faith and trust in Your plan for us will lead to everlasting righteousness in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



## Worship Without Pretending

AUTHOR: Sarah Elsbury

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 6:16-18

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

I didn't grow up Lutheran, or even going to church every Sunday. Faith, for me, was something you felt when life got hard, not something you practiced in daily life. When I started attending St. Peter's regularly with my now husband and his family, I had to learn not just what Lutherans do, but why they do it. This took me longer than I would like to admit, and I still sometimes find myself looking at my husband and asking questions during service.

In our Verse of the Day, Jesus talks about fasting, but behind it sits an insidious truth: you can turn faith into a show. Jesus warns people against this. He warns people not to look sad or make a big deal out of their sacrifice so others will notice them. He's saying, don't perform your faith for other people. Coming to St. Peter's, I often felt the pressure to look like I belonged. To know when to stand, when to speak, when to bow my head just right. Over time, I realized how easily worship can slip into performance. We can learn the language, and the habits, and before we know it, we're more aware of how we appear before others, than the God that is before us.

Jesus reminds us that God sees what others don't. “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” God isn't fooled by a good performance. God isn't impressed by us looking holy; He knows that we are not. God cares about the parts of us we keep hidden and the guilt we don't talk about, the mistakes we excuse, the shame we carry quietly. That's where repentance comes in. And not the kind that's loud or dramatic, but the quiet kind. The kind that happens in your heart, maybe when no one else knows.

What I'm learning is that faith doesn't need an audience. Worship isn't about what's on the outside, how spiritual we appear, but about what's happening on the inside. The Good News Jesus offers here is that God already sees us fully. And the God who sees in secret is the same God who forgives completely. No performance needed.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving us and seeing us as we truly are. Please forgive us in times that we turn worship into a performance. Help us to trust in Your forgiveness, and that You know the reflection of our hearts without trying to impress others. Shape our worship from the inside out. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Holy Ground

AUTHOR: Scott Sasse

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: EXODUS 3:4-6

“When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

Our Verses of the Day from Exodus are from within the famous story of Moses and the burning bush. Why did God command Moses to take off his sandals? Because Moses was standing on holy ground. And what is significant about something being holy?

The word holy is used hundreds of times in the Bible. There are holy convocations and the holy sabbath. There are holy places and holy people. There are holy garments, gifts, crowns, ointments and oils. There is a most holy and even a holy of holies. Holy cow! That’s a lot of holiness.

Anything that is holy is set apart and of God. The common thread among all things holy is the presence of God. I’m assuming Moses had his sandals kicked off by the time God got around to identifying Himself. Moses hid his face and was afraid, but God continued to reveal His plan to free Israel from Egyptian slavery using Moses to lead His people to the land of milk and honey. In God’s presence and upon that holy ground, Moses received his life’s calling and purpose.

While having a direct conversation with God through a burning bush is an extreme Old Testament version of experiencing God’s presence, I think Moses has something to teach us that applies to us today. With fearful respect in his heart, his face hidden and bare feet, Moses is vulnerable and submissive. If we desire to hear God’s calling and purpose in our life, we might consider becoming vulnerable as well. This type of spiritual posture puts us on holy ground and helps us to be receptive to God. And then, He makes us holy too! You and I, the whole church, that’s a lot of holiness.

*Dear Heavenly Father, In this season of Lent as we focus on different forms of worship, may we emulate the obedience of Moses. With humility and reverence in our hearts, and even if we need to take our shoes off, may we experience Your presence and may we hear all that You would call us to do. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Cleansing Before Calling

AUTHOR: Hayden Carothers

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: ISAIAH 6:6-8

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

In Isaiah 6, we witness a powerful moment of encounter between God and the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah stands before the holiness of God and immediately becomes aware of his own brokenness. He cries out, “Woe is me! I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips.” Before Isaiah ever hears God’s call he recognizes his need for cleansing. Isaiah is not sent out while still weighed down by guilt or shame, instead, God meets him in his confession and responds with grace.

One of the seraphim touches Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal from the altar and says, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” Isaiah does nothing to earn this forgiveness. He does not have to fix himself or prove that he is worthy - God takes the initiative. God chooses to remove Isaiah’s guilt completely before asking anything of him. Only after Isaiah is cleansed does God ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And only then does Isaiah respond “Here am I; send me.”

The order of this is important as cleansing must come before calling. Forgiveness comes before service, and God does not send us out carrying our guilt. That truth can be difficult to believe, especially living in a world that constantly reminds us of our failures and where we fall short. It’s easy to feel like we need to be “better” before God can use us. We may believe that our mistakes disqualify us or that our past defines our future. This passage in Isaiah shows us that God meets us exactly where we’re at and uses us to fulfill His purpose.

During this Lenten season, we are invited to reflect honestly on our sin, but confession is not the end of the story - God’s grace is. When God forgives us, guilt is removed and we are forgiven in full. God may be calling us to serve others, to speak words of hope, to love graciously, or to step into something new and unfamiliar. As we journey through Lent, may we trust that God has already cleansed us. And in that freedom, may we listen for where God is calling us next - and have the courage to say, “Here I am; send me.”

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the grace that You so freely offer us to remember that we are fully forgiven, not because of what we do, but because of what You did for us through Your Son and give us the courage to respond in accordance to Your will for our lives. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

AUTHOR: Brooke Bense

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: HEBREWS 12:28-29

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”

When my kids were little, one of our favorite ways to spend time together was playing board games. Most evenings, after the busyness of school, work, and errands, we would gather in the family room, pull out a game from the closet, and settle in for a couple of rounds. Some games stretched our thinking and encouraged learning, while others were silly and meant purely for fun. No matter what we played, our home was filled with laughter, playful teasing, and the familiar sounds of rolling dice and sliding game pieces. Those moments became a treasured way for us to reconnect and unwind after being apart throughout the day.

Of course, not every game ended cheerfully. As any parent knows, children can be energetic—and sometimes fiercely competitive. Every so often, an unlucky roll or a disappointing turn would spark frustration. I can clearly remember several occasions when a child, overwhelmed by the sting of losing, responded by shaking the board in anger. Game pieces would scatter across the room, and just like that, the game was finished—not in the satisfying way any of us had hoped, but abruptly and messily. The joy that filled the room only moments before would quickly drain away, replaced by heaviness and a sense of brokenness.

Life can feel a lot like those disrupted games. We face moments when things seem to shake beneath us—plans fall apart, losses surprise us, circumstances overwhelm us, or emotions flare up unexpectedly. In those times, we may feel unsteady, frustrated, or even broken. Yet our Verses of the Day offers us a powerful reminder: we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

The love, joy, peace, and hope God gives us in this life are small glimpses—tiny previews—of what eternity with Him will one day look like. These gifts are not dependent on how well things are going or how “together” we feel. They aren’t fragile like game pieces scattered on the floor. They cannot be taken from us, shaken loose, or undone. Because of this unshakable promise, we can come to God with hearts full of gratitude. Even when life feels uncertain, our worship becomes an anchor—reminding us of the Kingdom that stands firm, the God who holds us steady, and the hope that can never be broken.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for moments of joy and happiness and thank You also for being with us in the moments when our lives feel scattered like pieces of a board game. Thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, as Your unbroken promise to us, that we will spend eternity in Your unshaken Kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Listen to Him**

AUTHOR: Casey Elsbury

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 17:5**

“While [Peter] was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

We live in a world full of noise—opinions, notifications, schedules, and endless reasons to stay busy. Without meaning to, we can find ourselves so caught up in listening to the wants and demands of the world around us that we forget to listen to God. This isn’t because we are rejecting Him, but because we are distracted.

If you’re anything like me, you’ve probably experienced seasons where worship has felt a little too optional. Sometimes staying home or making other plans seems easier than showing up, and before you know it, it has been weeks since you last attended worship. But sometimes, listening to God is most meaningful when you least expect it. A few months ago, I woke up on a Sunday morning feeling distracted and “off,” but I went to church anyway. As I listened to the message, something shifted—I found myself fully absorbed, and before I knew it, I was in tears. The message felt like God was speaking directly to me, and I had finally stopped long enough to really listen.

Listening to God is not always about feeling prepared or motivated. Sometimes it’s simply about putting ourselves in a position where we can hear Him—places like worship, daily devotions, songs, or even fellowship events. Our Verse of the Day doesn’t say, “Listen when it’s convenient” or “Listen when you feel ready.” It simply says, “Listen to Him.”

Worship shapes our hearts to do just that. Even when we are tired, distracted, or hesitant, God promises to provide space for us to hear His Word. We just need to pause long enough to hear His voice. Just as the disciples had to step away from their ordinary routines to encounter God on the mountain, we too need to create space in our lives for Him.

This week, take one intentional step to listen. Maybe it’s waking up ten minutes earlier to read Scripture, putting your phone on silent during a meal to reflect on how you saw God that day, or looking at the calendar to decide which service you will attend this week. Do not worry about feeling ready or inspired—just show up and listen to Him.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the many blessings You have given us. We pray that when some of those blessings become distractions, may we recenter ourselves on You and truly listen to Your voice. Open up our hearts to hear Your Word every day and to let You lead the way always. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Movement as Worship

AUTHOR: Becca Bonnell

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: PSALM 95:6-7

“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.”

We are invited into worship not only with feelings or words, but also with bodies that move in response to God. Our Verse of the Day uses verbs such as, “Come, bow, and kneel.” These movements are all acts of worship. Our posture tells the truth about who God is and who we are as followers in Christ.

Many times we think our emotions lead us in worship - “I feel blessed so I praise God”. However, we are reminded that Scripture often tells us that our posture comes first. We stand to express our attention or honor. We sit showing we are listening and receiving. We kneel expressing surrender and trust. All of these different types of postures aren’t just traditional concepts we practice in worship but they shape us. When we kneel, our bodies remind us, we are not self-sufficient. When we stand to pray and sing, we proclaim that God is worthy of our full attention. Our bodies lead us to truth.

These moments aren’t only limited to worship. If we are “the people of his pasture” then all of this is also lived out in our daily lives. This means our posture throughout the day becomes a form of our testimony to God and serving Him. Ask yourself what does my body usually communicate about Who is in control. How might God be leading me to show trust, humility or attentiveness today? When we think about posture sometimes it’s easy to forget the posture we portray in everyday situations is also a way we glorify God as His followers.

No matter if you are a young adult, a parent, grandparent, etc. there is always someone in your circle that your posture is helping display the work of God. As a parent I think about my children and how my everyday posture and thoughts are a display to my children. I pray that I can lead a life of faithfulness for them.

Now while it is easier to think of a direct impact your posture can have on someone you know well, think about someone you may work with or had an interaction with. This displays just how important your posture can reflect the word of God to all those around you no matter how well you know them. As Psalm 95 teaches us, when we bow and kneel before the Lord we are training our hearts to remember the truth that we are guided and known by God.

*Heavenly Father, help us to use our bodies to align our heart, mind and actions with Yours, and help us show humility and love in our daily posture as followers of Yours. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Fear and Comfort Together**

AUTHOR: Bianca Howe

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 19:16**

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.”

In Exodus 19, we are given a powerful picture of God’s holiness. God descends on Mount Sinai in fire and smoke. The ground shakes. Thunder roars. The people are afraid. There is no mistaking what is happening—God is holy, and His presence is overwhelming. At first, this scene can feel far removed from our everyday lives. We are not standing at the foot of a mountain watching it tremble. Yet God’s holiness has not changed. What has changed is how easily we lose sight of it in the middle of everyday life.

For many of us, especially in busy seasons of parenting and full schedules, life moves fast. Mornings start early. Days are filled with work, school drop-offs, practices, meals, and the constant pull of what needs to be done next. These are good and necessary things, but they can quietly take over our attention. Before long, we find ourselves moving from one task to the next without slowing down long enough to remember the holy God who is present in it all.

It’s often only after especially busy seasons—after the holidays, or at the start of summer when schedules finally loosen—that we notice the difference. Life slows just enough for us to breathe. We have more space to be present with our families. We find time to pray, to open Scripture, to be still. Those moments remind us how much we need rhythms that keep God at the center, not just when life naturally slows down, but even when it doesn’t.

The people at Mount Sinai understood they could not casually approach God. They stood at a distance, aware of His holiness and their own limitations. That truth still matters. God’s holiness is not something to take lightly. But Lent does not take us to the base of Mount Sinai trembling. Instead, Lent takes us to another mountain rejoicing—Mount Calvary.

Where Sinai was marked by fear and trembling, Calvary is marked by sacrifice and love. Jesus willingly went to the cross, carrying the weight of our sin. Through His death, He made a way for us to draw near to God without fear. Because of Jesus, we are no longer kept at a distance. We are welcomed into God’s presence. Lent is a season to slow down on purpose, to loosen the grip of urgency, and to remember what matters most.

*Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season, help us slow our hearts, even when life feels full. Draw us closer to You and remind us of the grace we have through Jesus. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## That is the Question

AUTHOR: Emmitt Romine

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

“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.”

One of the most famous lines in literature is Shakespeare’s question: “To be or not to be.” At its core, this is a question about existence. In our Verse of the Day, Paul is asking a similar question, but with eternal weight behind it. To be reconciled or not to be reconciled.

According to Google, reconciliation is defined as the restoration of friendly relations. For Christians, reconciliation is at the very heart of our faith. It doesn’t take long to see that we live in a broken world. Broken relationships are everywhere between people, families, communities, and ultimately between humanity and God. Sin entered the world and brought separation with it. But we believe that God came down in human flesh to save us from eternal death. He restored our relationship with the Father because we were the ones who broke it.

I like to fix things. Shortly after I started driving, I bought a diagnostic code reader so I could work on my own vehicles. When my truck acted up, I could plug it in, get a diagnosis, and then figure out what needed to be done to get it running right again. I’ve used that code reader on my vehicles, my mom’s vehicles, my brother’s vehicles, and even some farm equipment. Once you know what’s wrong, you can usually take the right steps to fix it.

But what if we could plug a code reader into ourselves? What if the diagnosis came back as “sin”? Scripture is clear that sin separates us from God. So how do we fix that? How do we restore that relationship so we can live in communion with Christ? That’s where the illustration falls apart. Because unlike a truck or a tractor, there is nothing we can do to fix sin on our own. We can recognize the problem, but we can’t repair it. That’s why Paul doesn’t say, “Reconcile yourself.” He tells us to receive what God has already done. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, reconciliation was accomplished. All of that without a diagnostic code reader!

So the question I have for us is not “to be reconciled or not to be”, but rather, will you live like it’s true? Will you keep trying to fix yourself, or will you rest in the grace God has already given? As people who have been reconciled, we are called to live as ambassadors, pointing others to the God who fixes what we could not even without a code reader.

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for making a way back to You when we couldn’t fix the problem ourselves. Help us stop striving to earn Your grace and learn to trust what Jesus has already accomplished. During this season of Lent, shape our hearts to worship from gratitude instead of guilt, and teach us to live as ambassadors of reconciliation in a broken world. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



**I Was Glad**

AUTHOR: Layne Wetzel

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: PSALM 122:1**

“I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

In January, my family and I went to Denver, Colorado, for the National Western Stock Show. This is one of the largest livestock shows in the United States. Not only are there multiple breeds of cattle and other livestock, there are also numerous activities including stock dog trials and a championship fiddle contest. This was the 120th year for the stock show and this year, the cattle show was in a brand new, state-of-the-art facility. All of this with a backdrop of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. We planned the trip several months in advance and the anticipation and excitement about going grew as the trip got closer. I am happy to report it met all of my expectations and I can't wait to go back again.

Can you remember a time when you were anticipating a trip or an event? Hopefully we all have something that we look forward to or anticipate. In our Verse of the Day, the people of God were anticipating going to the temple on Mount Zion with the backdrop of the Judean mountains. Despite what may have been a difficult journey, the people sang as they ascended the mountain because of their anticipation of what was to come; an encounter with God. I can only imagine that their anticipation and excitement grew and their singing became more joyous the closer they got to the temple.

What does your journey to worship look like each week? Do you prepare the night before by laying out your clothes? Do you, like the people of God, sing with excitement as you journey to church? Do you look at the sunrise as you are driving to the 8:00am service and think how great God's masterpiece is? Or maybe you rush out the door and barely slide into the pew in time for the announcements.

Others may get their coffee ready and snuggle into their favorite chair while watching church online. Regardless of how we prepare for worship, as brothers and sisters of Christ we are all looking forward to and anticipating the same journey and outcome; an encounter with God. What could possibly be more exciting and joyous than that? Let's try to be more like the people of God who were singing as they made the trek to Mount Zion and look forward to worshipping each week with joy.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for this day. Please keep us safe throughout the day and help us to trust and follow You, spreading Your good Word to others. Help us to look forward with anticipation each week as we come together to worship You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Drawing Near with Confidence

AUTHOR: Jon Collins

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: HEBREWS 10:23

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

Most of us will never forget 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire world was sent into a months-long lockdown. With that lockdown came a host of new challenges. Perhaps one of the hardest parts for many of us was being unable to worship together. Church doors closed, and we found ourselves in a new kind of “sanctuary” — our living rooms. I’ll admit, I enjoyed attending church in my pajamas, and my couch quickly became the most comfortable “pew” I’ve ever sat on. But still, something was missing. It just wasn’t the same, and I know I wasn’t alone in feeling that way.

I was blessed to be raised by parents who knew the importance of gathering for worship. Even though our family lived forty-five minutes from church, we were there “every time the doors were open,” as my mom often said. The importance of us—as mentioned in our Verse of the Day—was something I learned early on. Every church I’ve been part of has added new members to my “family,” my “us”.

Last summer, Pastor Tim preached a message that really stuck with me and helped me understand even more deeply why “us” matters. He spoke about being “gathered to be scattered.” That’s what worship is—a time to be refilled with the Spirit and with the encouragement of community—the us. When we are gathered, we are strengthened and refreshed so that when we scatter back into the world, we can share love and do good works—things our world needs now more than ever.

A day I will never forget was the first Sunday when the pandemic finally slowed, and we could worship together again. The “us” had been returned to me and to my family. Just as our Verse of the Day reminds us, I was encouraged that day—not only by words—but simply by the presence of others. Even if I don’t speak to every person on a Sunday morning, I am encouraged by seeing your faces, your faithfulness, and your commitment to the Gospel...to us.

At St. Peter’s, we are richly blessed to have so many walks of life represented in our congregation. Every Sunday when I look out from my “50-yard pew,” I am reminded that God designed us to need one another. I am deeply grateful to be walking through life and faith with all of you—the “us” God has given to me and my family.

*Heavenly Father, I thank You for my St. Peter’s community, for my “us”. I pray that You will use that community to strengthen and encourage us all to be scattered to bring love and good deeds into the world. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

## A Costly Act of Love

AUTHOR: Jesse Smallwood

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8a

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

It's an all-too-human experience to dispense with those we “love” at the slightest offense. It can be difficult to remember that the people that hurt us are those that our Creator put in our path to love as Jesus loved (and still loves). It's also true that we make it difficult for others to love us. That's kind of the point though. By our nature we're all supremely selfish beings. Doesn't it sound nice to be unconditionally loved without reciprocating the sacrifice, the effort, and the overall investment that it takes to love another human being in return? But that's not how it works, does it?

In some ways I see this in my vocational calling all the time. I confess that I can be very cynical in my work as a physician treating patients that seem determined to harm themselves, and in some cases, those around them. I can also be a challenging person to love for those in my life when I bring my work home with me during vacations and holidays, or when I'm unavailable for days, weeks, even months at a time. I think that's true of everyone. I think there are times when we remove others, or even parts of ourselves, because we don't think it's a battle worth fighting.

In our Verses of the Day, Paul tells us that Jesus' perfect example of love had no time for that kind of behavior. As followers of Jesus, we don't have the luxury of a la carte relationships. We can't tolerate the attitude of Jonah, who ran from God's calling; and His calling to love one another. We should recognize when we're tempted to withdraw our love from those who are most difficult to love and resolve to turn to Jesus and ask Him to help us love those He puts in our path. We should also remember that we worship a God who keeps His promises, and when we fail to heed His call to us, Jesus' love is not easily angered, because Jesus' love keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus' love never fails.

*Heavenly Father, You are an all-benevolent and jealous God that created all things, and could very easily choose to scorn us. Yet, You do not. When we become cynical with those You have put in our lives to love, or when we feel resentful towards ourselves, remind us of Your infinite love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Preparing Beforehand

AUTHOR: Claire Ayres

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: PROVERBS 16:3

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

Preparation is something I spend a lot of time thinking about, often without realizing it. As a working mom of two, much of life is made up of planning ahead — setting alarms, packing lunches, choosing clothes the night before, checking the calendar (again), and trying to think one step ahead so the next day goes a little smoother. Most of the time, preparation doesn't feel spiritual. It just feels necessary.

When it comes to worship, preparation can look very similar. We plan what time to leave, make sure everyone is dressed, and try to arrive on time. On a good day it feels rushed, most Sundays it feels like we barely made it — one shoe missing, coffee half finished, minds already full. Yet Proverbs reminds us that when we commit what we do to the Lord, even these ordinary preparations matter more than we might think.

Preparing for worship doesn't have to be elaborate or perfect. Some mornings feel calm and intentional. Others feel like we're just trying to make it out the door. It might look like choosing clothes ahead of time so the morning feels a little calmer, setting an alarm with intention, or creating space in a busy schedule so we can arrive without rushing. These small choices help create space — in our calendars and in our hearts.

There are also days when preparation doesn't go as planned. Kids are tired, schedules shift, and we arrive feeling distracted or worn down. On those days, it's comforting to remember that God meets us exactly where we are. He isn't waiting for us to have everything together. He takes our imperfect efforts and uses them in ways we may never fully see.

Preparation isn't about earning God's presence. It's about trusting that God is already at work before we arrive — already preparing to meet us, already shaping our time together for good. When we commit our plans to Him — even the small, unseen ones — we can rest knowing He is faithful. As you prepare for worship this weekend, consider the small moments beforehand. Let them be gentle reminders that God sees your effort, values your presence, and is ready to meet you — right where you are.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for meeting us in the midst of busy days and full schedules. Help us commit our plans, our time, and our hearts to You. As we prepare for worship this weekend, quiet our distractions and draw us closer to Your presence. Remind us that You are already at work, preparing to meet us with grace and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Time Reveals Value

AUTHOR: Dustin O'Neal

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 6:21

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus gives us a simple truth in our Verse of the Day: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” We often hear this verse and think about money or possessions as our treasure. What's even more valuable is time. Unlike money, you can't invest time and get more in return. Time is the resource we guard most carefully. Therefore, if you want to know what you treasure, look at your schedule for the day.

As a dad of two amazing kids, a typical day looks like this: an early alarm for the morning preparation to get everyone out the door on time, commute to school, handling work demands all day, scramble for dinner, homework, practices, showers, bedtime... and then I wake up and do it all again. This in no way is a complaint! In this season of life, I can see clearly that much of my time goes toward my family. That's a treasure I'm extremely grateful for.

Lent gently invites a deeper question: not only what do I treasure, but also how do the activities I spend my time on and the people I spend my time with impact my heart?

You see, time isn't neutral. Our schedules shape us. Our attention forms us. Even good gifts can quietly crowd out the very space where God meets us - until we realize we've been running on empty.

That's why worship is not meant to feel like one more thing to cram in. Worship is where God redeems our time by re-centering our hearts. God, the Creator of all things, wants time with you. Dr. Jene Walker, a Christian author, sums it up well: “Time with God is never wasted. You can be certain that the time you spend studying His Word, praying to, worshipping, praising, and serving God will be the best time you could ever spend. We waste time in so many areas doing worldly things. Let's spend time doing what will yield us a return. And all we need in return is to really know Him.” So let me ask you, during this Lenten season, what does your calendar say is your treasure?

*Heavenly Father, You created time, and You came down into time in Your Son. Help us use our time in a way that brings glory to You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Worship with the Body

AUTHOR: Liv Nichols

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: ROMANS 12:1

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”

As a mom of two young girls, my days are filled with lifting babies, wiping spills, soothing cries, folding endless loads of laundry, and collapsing into bed exhausted. It might just be me, but when the Lord is commanding me to do something like our Verse of the Day says— “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.”... cleaning crusted yogurt off the table and wiping runny noses doesn’t feel like what He is asking for. I think to myself I should be giving something grander than a tissue filled with toddler mucus to the Almighty.

However, how many times have I read this verse and missed that Romans 12:1 doesn’t begin with a command, but with mercy. Our Verse of the Day says, “In view of God’s mercy.” Before we are commanded to offer anything, we are reminded of everything God has already given us. Forgiveness. Grace. New Life. When we gather on Sunday mornings to hear God’s Word and receive the Sacraments, we are filled again with that mercy. Worship is not us bringing something impressive to God; it is God bringing something impressive to us- Himself. And having received that gift each and every Sunday, we return to our daily lives each Monday.

Offering up our bodies as living sacrifices is not about striving to earn God’s approval. It is the response of hearts that have already received everything in Christ. As a parent, this means the sacredness of everyday tasks. Holding a crying child. Packing lunches. Showing patience when we’d rather hurry. These moments are not interruptions to our worship; they are our worship. God does not wait for us only on Sunday mornings to meet us. He meets us in the kitchen, in the carpool line, in the office, in the neighbor’s conversation over the fence. Our bodies—tired, busy, imperfect—become instruments of His love in the world. Not because we must prove ourselves, but because we have been loved first.

Sunday worship fills us with God’s gifts. Monday life is where we share those gifts. So when the busyness, or mundane of your day feels overwhelming or underwhelming remember: your ordinary life is holy ground. Crusted yogurt and boogery tissues are your “true and proper worship”.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the forgiveness, grace and new life You have given to me. Help me remember that even the ordinary moments in life are an act of worship. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

## What is Good

AUTHOR: Emily Maschino

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: PSALM 34:10

“The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

I want to zero in on one word: the word good. A word that I’ve struggled with, but have recently found a comfort in. The word used here by the Psalmist is the Hebrew word “toe-v”, translated good. It points to the definition of good as ‘a suitable fit’, instead of the more commonly used ‘favorable’. The Psalmist is praising God’s provision of what we need. I’d like to share a personal example.

I was in a place I never wanted to be. As I grabbed the entire box of tissues and shoved them in my purse, my husband asked, “Do you really need all of those?” “I don’t want to run out,” I replied.

We were greeted at the doors to the sanctuary by two volunteers. One handed us each a candle. The other individual had a clipboard in hand. She asked if there was a name they could read for who we had lost. I was struck dumb. My Little Bean had been so small. It had been a huge shock to learn at our eight week pregnancy visit that we were likely having a miscarriage. Our Little Bean, who we had prayed for and already cherished, would never be born. What would they do if I told them I’d barely been pregnant? Would they turn me away, say my loss ‘wasn’t big enough’? “They were too small to have a name” I finally managed to get out. “That’s OK”, they re-assured.

I cried quietly throughout the whole service. The tears just kept coming. About halfway through the sermon I started to feel a little vindicated. Yes, I did need to grab the whole box of tissues, thank you very much. My wonderful husband just sat close and patiently held my hand as I cried my eyes out and blew my nose.

At the end of the service each family was given a little candle. As we left, I made a point to thank the pastor for his message. “It can’t have been easy to speak at a service like this” I said. He nodded. “This can’t have been an easy service to come to,” he said kindly. “No.” I agreed. “But it was good.” It was “toe-v”. It was a “suitable fit”, because God had provided what I needed. That light we were given during the service sits in our living room still. Sometimes it makes me sad, but usually it reminds me that, God is good.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for always providing for us. We know that no pain, grief, nor any form of darkness can keep us from You. We ask that You open our eyes to Your provision, that we may see and praise the ways that You care for us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Reflected Glory

AUTHOR: Frank Jamerson

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: EXODUS 34:29

“When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.”

I opened Instagram this morning. This was my feed. Steelers lost. Apparently I can meal prep fifty-six high-protein burritos in under thirty minutes. If I go to bed at midnight and wake up at 4 AM, I can get a six pack, finish all the laundry, and fly my entire extended family to Hawaii for a vacation where everyone gets along. If I just learn these three hacks, I can make \$30,000 a month and be my own boss. Example after example of things I could be doing, things I should be doing, things that if I would just do them, my life would be so much better. We are all obsessed with the “glow-up”. If we aren’t careful, we can bring that same exhausting energy into our pew. When we do, we turn worship into a spiritual self-improvement seminar, thinking that we can change into the “holy” version of ourselves we put out on social media.

But our Verse of the Day offers a reality check to our DIY-sanctification. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face was literally glowing. It was so bright that people were genuinely a little weirded out. Yet, the text points out that Moses “was not aware” his face was radiant. The radiance on his face wasn’t an achievement. It wasn’t that GRYM (Get Ready With Me) trend with the twelve step skincare routine. It was a byproduct. Moses was changed not by his effort, but by his proximity to God. He didn’t work for the glow; he simply stood in the presence of the Almighty.

This is phenomenal news for us. Worship isn’t primarily about what we do for God, but about what God does (and has done) for us. It is what happens when God draws near to us through His Means of Grace. When we hear the Word proclaimed, it isn’t just “self-improvement” for a tired dad; it is the creative voice of God shaping our hearts. When we receive the true Body and Blood Of Christ in the Sacrament, we aren’t just performing a memorial; we are being physically united to Christ Himself. He does the heavy lifting of changing us in worship. Now we might not notice “the glow-up” when we’re cleaning up another spill later that afternoon, or getting splashed at bath time, or HOW DID WE GET SO MANY MONSTER TRUCKS, but we will be changed because He has drawn near in His Word.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for drawing near to us in Your Word and Sacraments. As we sit in Your presence this Lenten season, quiet our hearts and our inner critics. Work in us what we cannot work in ourselves, and let the light of Your mercy reflect through us to a world in darkness. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



## Freedom From or Freedom For?

AUTHOR: Julia Luken

DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: 2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

Let me ask you, are we freed from something or for something? Jesus died for us on the cross and freed us all from the devil's power. He freed all believers enslaved by the fear of death by promising eternal life. Freedom is a “gift” to empower us for service to each other, humbly in love.

Although we are set free by the truth, we should not indulge in sin and lack of self-control. Receiving His love and forgiveness makes us “new again” and offers us lasting freedom that only He can give us. We are not slaves of our past or bound by our bad choices. When Jesus sets us free from our sins we are redeemed and restored for being the disciples and servants He wants us to be.

Many people believe that they have to earn Christ's love through acts of kindness, serving others in their community, being an honest person, offering things to the less fortunate, etc. Many of us carry the weight of feeling like we have to prove ourselves.

As long as I can remember, our family has taken a tag for Angels of Love during Christmas time at St. Peter's. We don't do that to “earn” our place with God. We provide gifts for others because Christ lives within us and we find “joy” in giving, just like He gives to us. We have made life better for someone else. That is the true meaning of freedom.

As a believer in Christ, we have received His grace and love freely. Christ is in us providing a limitless source of healing, hope, and wholeness. Christ's love for us remains constant and for that we are blessed. John 8:31-32, reminds us that we are set free by His truth when it says “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”. Yes we are freed from sin, but we are also freed for love.

*Heavenly Father helps us to see that we are no longer slaves of our past. Help us to receive Your love and forgiveness that offers everlasting freedom that we need to love and serve others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Be a Vine

AUTHOR: Dick Johnson

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: JOHN 15:12-14

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

When I was about twelve years old I lived next to a field that was covered with trees and lots of weeds and vines. My cousin and I spent many days just playing and enjoying the nature of the place. When we found a vine that was coming down from a tree limb we would swing on it till we were exhausted! We would let go from the end of the vine to see how far we could land from the release spot.

While that was fun, I never connected that to John 15. Jesus used vines as an example of His relationship to His Father and our relationship to Him. Jesus revealed His Father to us constantly. He was love in person! His whole point in the vine was that He loved us and as an extension of that love we are to love others.

Many times we think that we have to do spectacular things to show love. But usually, that’s not true. Love is usually found in the simple things. We give generously, hug someone in public, or greet someone at church or in town. These are simple outward showings of love to others.

With the love that we give, fruit is to be the result. That fruit can be a lasting friendship, a person reclaiming their relationship to Jesus, or a person finding the true love of Jesus for the first time. John 15:16 says it all, “Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” When Jesus died on the cross and rose again we had the joy and love of God put upon us. So when you swing through life, exhausted from it all, are you holding onto Him, the true Vine?

*Heavenly Father, I thank You for the gift of Lent, to think about the gift You have given me through the death and resurrection of your Son. I pray that You would give me the strength, will power and courage to share that love to everyone around me. I realize that I am a weak sinner and need Your forgiveness constantly. Your love and promise to save me from my sin is all important to me and all those connected to You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

## Silence Before God

AUTHOR: Jenny Mohr

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: HABAKKUK 2:20

“The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

We live in a world filled with nonstop noise. Phones and watches constantly buzz with notifications. Music, podcasts, or TVs play simply for the background noise. Some of us even need noise to fall asleep. It's almost as if we're afraid of the silence.

If we have even a few minutes of quiet, what do we do? We scroll social media or find something to stay busy. We fill every moment with sound and busyness, often without realizing it.

Because constant chaos is the norm, silence can feel uncomfortable. It's in those quiet moments that we're left alone with our thoughts and worries, things we'd rather distract ourselves from. So we reach for something...anything...to fill the space.

If you think about it, endless voices are competing for our attention all day long. It's exhausting. What if we embraced the silence, and intentionally listened for the one Voice that matters most? Jesus' voice. Perhaps, like me, you've found yourself asking, Why is God being silent? But, what if He hasn't been? What if it's been hard to hear Him because of all the noise.

Last year, I tried something new. I grabbed a pen and paper, left my phone behind, and sat alone in a quiet room. I prayed a short, honest prayer, confessing that I had filled my days with so much busyness that I hadn't made space to listen for God. Sure, I had been praying each day, but I never made the time to listen for what He had to say. Then, I sat in silence. When words or thoughts came that felt like gentle nudges from Him, I wrote them down.

It felt uncomfortable and awkward at first. But I came to realize: God speaks to us quite a bit; we just have to slow down and quiet everything else.

Today's Verse of the Day reminds us of this truth: silence isn't emptiness. It's attentiveness before the living God. By coming to Him in silence, we're simply being present before the God who is always present with us. Sit in awe and trust that He's at work even in the quiet.

This weekend, let me challenge you to come worship a few minutes early and sit in silence before the service begins. Remember that the Lord is in His holy temple and you are standing on holy ground.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your constant presence. The noise of this world often makes it difficult to hear You. Help us to slow down and sit with You in silence. We want to hear Your voice and be present with You. Meet us in the quiet and teach us to trust that You are there. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Yes, You Should Boast

AUTHOR: Abigail Hovis

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: JEREMIAH 9:23-24

“This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.”

Everyone boasts about something, the Bible just insists we’re probably bragging about the wrong thing. Our Verse of the Day says, says just that. It’s not that you aren’t supposed to boast. God hears the words of the rich and the wise. He knows of the magazines that detail the hard work of people who dedicate their lives to a company or a brand. God says the problem isn’t boasting, it’s the object of our boast that really matters.

Take the story of David and Goliath. Most people were taught of this moment in history at a young age. By all odds, Goliath should have won his battle. He was a giant, backed by a massive army and his opponent was a young man, not known by many. Goliath believed he would win! He boasted about his strength and his own might, not needing God (1 Samuel 17). But we know how that turned out. Similarly, the Bible briefly mentions a man named Theudas in the book of Acts. It was mentioned that he “boasted himself to be somebody”, however his promises fell short and his story, along with his followers, ended in tragedy (Acts 5:35). In the Bible there are many examples of people who boast in their own self-righteousness, which proves to be their weakness.

So what are we to boast in? Our Verse of the Day says that we are to boast about God’s “kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth” (Jeremiah 9:23-24). We are to boast about having “the understanding to know” Him (Jeremiah 9:23-24). We believers are not better than the nonbelievers. We also commit sins and dishonor God. But the difference is that we boast not in our own accomplishments, but in God’s accomplishment: sending Jesus to die for those sins.

So do not boast about your own ability to be a good Christian. That in itself is self-centered, but boast in being granted the ability through Christ to know of and experience the grace and miracles that God provides. Boast about God’s willingness to carry worries and burdens. Boast of His ability to help and guide you through your successes and failures.

Everyone boasts about something, what are you boasting in?

*Heavenly Father, help us learn to always give You the glory through our words and actions. Lead us to recognize how all good things come from You, and be able to boast of Your good works. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

**Rest on a Monday**

AUTHOR: Robb Tarr

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: PSALM 62:1**

“Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.”

Monday arrives like an alarm clock with legs: loud, persistent, and completely uninterested in how little sleep we got. Before our feet even hit the floor, the noise begins. Calendars ping. Lunch needs packing. Uniforms, cleats, and water bottles mysteriously disappear. In our family of eight, mornings feel less like a peaceful devotion and more like a small, well-intentioned parade. Add a two-week-old baby who believes 1:30 a.m. is an excellent time to practice singing, and rest can feel like a mythical creature spoken of, rarely seen.

That’s why our Verse of the Day feels like a treasure on a Monday. My soul doesn’t find rest from a color-coded schedule, from getting everyone to practice or school on time, from checking every box on the “to-do list,” or even surviving another extracurricular activity (or three). My soul’s rest is solely from God. Salvation interrupts the chaos of a Monday morning, because salvation fulfills our greatest need. And our greatest need doesn’t come from our effort, but Christ’s and Christ’s alone.

This truth is especially grounding when life feels like a relay race. Between practices, rehearsals, meetings, feedings, and the never-ending question of “What’s for dinner?”, it’s tempting to believe our worth is measured by how much we manage. But Psalm 62:1 invites us to start the week differently. It tells us to sit down and breathe. While our Monday’s might have long to-do lists, do you know what has never been on your to-do list: salvation of the world. Remember this, before we do anything today, God has already done the most important thing. Let that sentence sink in: before you do anything today, God has already done the most important thing.

This doesn’t mean Monday magically becomes quiet. The baby will still cry. The schedule will still be full. Someone will forget something important. But beneath all that commotion, there is rest. A settled confidence that no matter how messy or busy the day becomes, our salvation is secure. God is not waiting to see how well we perform today. He is here to give rest before your Monday even begins.

*Heavenly Father, as we step into this Monday, help us carry this verse like an anchor in our pockets. When the noise rises, remind us where true rest is found. Not in what gets done today, but in what God has already done for us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

# I Have How Many Days?

AUTHOR: Josh Lienhoop

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: PSALM 90:12

“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Have you ever thought about how long eternity is? I know many of us as Christians hear the word “eternity” a lot both in scripture and in our daily and weekly worship.

Eternity is truly a powerful word given that it truly means forever, with no end. Eternity is sometimes a hard word to fathom given the daily grind of this mortal world. We all have routines and deadlines to meet in our daily lives. Our schedules are loaded with reminders of what we have to do next, what is due this week, or even what we have planned for the upcoming weekend. Jobs, children in sports and extracurricular activities, social events, and running errands all occupy our time and lives. We live in a busy world and it is easy to get caught up in the busyness. There are times that, when we have an opportunity to sit down to take a breath and collect ourselves, we look back and a month ago seems like yesterday. I wonder if that is what eternity will feel like. Not the business, but the month feeling like yesterday.

Our days are numbered. We all are mortal and we all will die at some point in time. So this begs the questions: What is truly important? What truly matters? We need to turn to God and God’s Word to see and know what truly matters. Our Verse of the Day reads “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”.

Our days being numbered means that we should not be anxious about our daily lives and schedules, or our time on this earth, but that we should focus on what truly matters - God’s love and eternity with Him. We should always turn to God and His love and wisdom for what is truly important in our lives. God’s Word reminds us that He is in charge of all things and that we can trust Him no matter how many days our lives might last on this earth.

Eternity is forever. And Eternity with God is promised to those who put their faith in Him. I don’t know about you, but the mere thought of Eternity with God makes all the anxiousness of my numbered days on this earth go away.

*Heavenly Father, please help us to not be anxious about our daily lives or our numbered days on this earth. Please give us continued guidance and wisdom to continually remind us that our time on this earth is nothing compared to the beautiful and perfect eternity that awaits us by Your side in Heaven. Thank You for all You provide for us and for all Your blessings You bestow upon us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Living Sacrifices

AUTHOR: Lauren Ferguson

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: ROMANS 12:2

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

I love working on arts and crafts. If you can think of a project, I have probably tried it. You can often find me sewing, making a rug, or recycling old materials to make something new. Crafts can be uniform or unique. Think about the foam sticker crafts for small children. The creator has some choice (where to put the stickers) but the pieces lack originality and are mass produced. Unique crafts call for more creativity and personalization from the crafter. There is a reason that a handmade quilt is cherished while a factory made blanket may be tossed to the side. We value creations that are unique or transformed, not conformed to a pattern.

Every day the world is subtly, or blatantly, pressuring us to conform to its way of thinking, values and expectations. We look for advice from those on social media or TV instead of God. We strive for a comfortable lifestyle, try to fit in with others and look out for ourselves. God speaks to us in our Verse of the Day about this very issue. He says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world.” Even Solomon, the richest man to live, conformed to the world’s standards. Solomon built a beautiful temple to the Lord, but he also built temples to other gods to appease his hundreds of wives. His actions caused the division of Israel and an increase in idolatry. Like Solomon, we all conform to the world’s way, but will we let God transform us instead?

Our Verse of the Day continues, “but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” We are in a daily battle to conform or be transformed by God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are great examples of people who resisted the pressures of the world. They were exiles in Babylon who were commanded to worship a golden image of the king. In Daniel 3:16-18 we see them boldly say, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

These men were transformed by God through prayer, worship, fellowship and His Word. They boldly risked their lives for their faith. When we are transformed by His Spirit, we also live a life free from the guilt of sin and free to spread His love and grace to others. This transformation is not a one time event. It’s a life-long process of learning and growing with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Let’s be reshaped each day by God’s Word and trust Him to guide our lives instead of being conformed into the mass produced patter of this world.

*Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your Word which guides and leads us. Please help us to be transformed by You daily. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## The Cost

AUTHOR: Tyler Downing

DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: 2 SAMUEL 24:24

“But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.”

I love sports. I’ve played them my whole life. I believe in the competitiveness and the character development that they mold. Take for example, Monty Williams. Monty is a former NBA head coach of the Phoenix Suns and holds, perhaps, one of the greatest pre-game speeches in all of basketball. Going into an elimination game, Monty looked to his team and said, “Everything you want is on the other side of hard.” Interviewed later, Monty said this phrase came from losing his wife.

David knew this phrase. David personally knew that “everything you want is on the other side of hard. Our Verse of the Day zeroes in on this idea. David says, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” David’s words teach us that worship that costs nothing, changes nothing. In the same way that David refuses offerings of no value, we should too refuse to only bring God into our lives when it is convenient. Our love for God is not about pain and suffering, but about love and sincerity.

As a spouse, parent of three and coach it is easy to only give God the spare time of the daily grind. There are days that seem to have more to do in it than time allows. But are we to only pray at church on Sunday or at the dinner table in the evening? Are we to only consume the things that the church provides, or are we to help provide them? This verse challenges us to show our sincerity to God at all times, even when it is inconvenient or uncomfortable.

Whether you’re at work, in the middle of making dinner, driving a child to practice or watching your favorite show, make the time to thank God daily. Do not be afraid to bring Him into every aspect of your life. Challenge yourself to answer this question, what does my worship truly cost me? Because worship that costs nothing, changes nothing.

*Heavenly Father, I confess that I too often choose worship only when it is convenient. Teach me to offer You more than what costs me nothing. May my true love for You be shown in my choosing of devotion over comfort. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*



## The Widow's Trust

AUTHOR: Dennis Stuckwisch

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: LUKE 21:1-4

“As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

While lounging poolside during our family vacation last summer, I was enjoying playing with my nearly three-year-old grandson. Suddenly, he saw his father standing chest-deep in the pool and wanted to join him. He was wearing his inflated swim vest and arm bands, but still the water looked deep and scary to him. Seeing his fear, my son-in-law held out his arms and said, “Jump! I will catch you!” Quickly, my grandson jumped into his father’s arms. Did my grandson believe his dad could catch him? Sure, but I believe he jumped into the pool because he trusted that his father actually would catch him!

In today’s Scripture reading, Jesus observes a poor widow giving to God all she had to live on, which wasn’t much. So why does Jesus say the meager amount a poor widow gave was so much more than all the rich gave combined? Because it was all she had, given with a sincere heart in worship of her Heavenly Father. This was unlike the rich, who were giving out of their surplus, perhaps hoping the many large coins they tossed into the temple treasury boxes would make an impressive sight and sound. The widow, quietly putting in her two tiny coins, not only believed God could provide all she needed, but fully trusted that He would, in fact, provide for her.

It makes me wonder: Do I always display that level of trust in God in my own life? I believe He has the power and ability to provide all my daily needs, but I admit I sometimes act as if it all depends on me. It helps to remember the words of Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” I need to place complete confidence in His wisdom, power, and promises, instead of thinking I need to control it all.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee put it very well when he said, “Faith isn’t believing that God can—it’s knowing that He will, in His time and way.” God’s plan for our salvation is trustworthy and true. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we have complete confidence in His faithfulness to forgive us our sins and to provide not only what we need here on earth, but also in Heaven for all eternity with Him.

*Heavenly Father, as a small child trusts a parent who loves and provides for them, help us to unquestioningly trust You above all things. Thank You for Your daily provision in our lives and the promise of eternity with you. Help us to give generously and cheerfully to Your Kingdom from a heart full of worship and praise. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Called Where You Are

AUTHOR: Mindy Chapple

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: COLOSSIANS 3:17

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

When I study scripture, I tend to ask three questions. First, what does this mean? Second, why does it matter right now? And third, maybe my favorite, how does this apply to my life or how will I live this out in my life? As a former math teacher, application matters. Understanding isn't complete until it's practiced.

Paul's words to the Colossians remind us that when we have Jesus, we truly have everything. Surrounded by false teachings and competing beliefs, this community needed to remember that salvation, hope, and life itself are found in Christ alone. Because of that Good News, gratitude doesn't stay hidden within us, but it shines through our words, our actions, and our worship. Giving thanks becomes a way of life. Just a few verses earlier, Paul describes the word of Christ living among God's people teaching, encouraging, and singing songs together. God's Word isn't meant to echo in empty rooms or remain trapped on a page. It is meant to be spoken, shared, sung, and carried together by a community shaped by Christ. I see this come alive most clearly when I'm with our youth.

For the past eight years, God has continued to draw me into serving with our youth, and it has become one of the clearest places I see His living Word at work. On Sunday nights at Venture, something special happens. The room is filled not just with sound, but with the living Word. Youth share testimonies. They sing songs led by their peers. They open Scripture together and then open their lives in small groups. God shows up every week. His Word shows up in conversations, in fellowship, in messages, and in fun. If you've ever had an experience so amazing that words fall short, that's how I feel about worshiping with these young people. Christ's Word isn't just taught there, it lives there.

Serving with our youth has become one of my favorite ways to live out our Verse of the Day. It makes me want everyone to experience a community like that. If you don't yet have a place where you can gather with others to share, sing, and live the Word together, I pray you find it. God did not design us to follow Jesus alone. When His Word fills a room, it shapes the people and sends them out changed.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, and for showing us that faith is meant to be lived in community. You created us to gather, to worship, and to be shaped together by Your living Word. Open our eyes to see You at work when we share, sing, and grow together. Stir in us a hunger to gather with Your people and to give thanks in all we do. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

## Even the Stones Cry Out

AUTHOR: Dave Ruch

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSES OF THE DAY: LUKE 19:37-40

“When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Many of us have had the enjoyment of encountering personal heroes. It might be remotely - think of watching Tiger Woods or LeBron James during critical matches and championships. Or closer to home- how about last year’s performances from Tyrese Halliburton and his fellow Pacers. More recently, think about the College Football National Championship with Fernando Mendoza, Curt Cignetti and the Indiana Hoosiers. But with the College Football National Championship behind us, donning IU hoosier apparel and talking about Fernando’s heroic late game touchdown has decreased. But that’s the natural trajectory of these kind of events and heroes. They generate tremendous excitement and support from many people, but also that the excitement decreases with time - we are always onto the next game, next season, next hero, etc.

Now imagine that an individual and event arises that surpasses any of these. And not because of a particular performance or event, but because the hero is bringing fundamentally life-changing Good News to all those who are present, the kind that does not fade with time or distance. This scenario is what we see in Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Crowds thronged the streets, laying palm branches and coats on the road to honor Jesus’ entry on a donkey. They waved palm branches and hailed Jesus as their king.

Imagine the overwhelming excitement, the noise, the joy that people experienced as Jesus rode in, offering forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This was not just the hype and enjoyment of a championship game, but the fulfillment of peoples’ deepest desires to be blessed by, and in the presence of, God himself. In fact, the excitement and noise and adulation of Jesus was so great, the sinful Pharisees, who rejected Him as God and wanted to eliminate His threat to their religious leadership, told Jesus to rebuke his disciples. Jesus answered them: “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” (Luke 19:40).

This “fan base” was so wide, it included not only people, but inanimate objects! Can you imagine a championship basketball game where the very walls of the gym could cheer? But it was true because this was and is the most amazing championship in existence, that of Jesus’ triumphant victory over sin and Satan. And this was not a championship that faded, but is available to all of us!

*Heavenly Father, please help us to remember Your entry into Jerusalem and into our lives to offer us forgiveness and salvation, the best gifts possible. Help us to continually worship and offer praise for Your holiness, this Palm Sunday and every day. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Born to Die, So We Might Live

AUTHOR: Ellie Jones

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: JOHN 1:14

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

When we picture Jesus’ birth, we think of soft hay, glowing starlight, and wise men standing awkwardly around a baby. It’s peaceful. Sweet. Comforting. Christmas wasn’t the beginning of a nice story. It was the beginning of a rescue mission. Jesus wasn’t simply born to live a good life, inspire people, or set a good moral example. He was born with intention, a purpose, a destination. From His very first breath, His life was aimed towards the cross.

The wood that held him as a baby foreshadowed the wood that would hold him as our Savior. The manger was never meant to be separated from the cross, rather it was meant to point directly to it. In Deuteronomy, we see how serious sin really is: “anyone who is hung on a pole is under God’s curse” (Deuteronomy 21:23). That curse was meant for us. A consequence for choosing sin over God.

And yet, Jesus hung in that place willingly. He lived the life we couldn’t live and took on the curse we couldn’t bear. Nothing about Jesus’ death was accidental. Every miracle, every conversation, every act of obedience moved Him closer to the cross. He knew exactly where the road led and walked it anyway. Not out of obligation, but out of love. Here’s where the wonder really sinks in: the moment that looked like defeat was actually victory at the cross, the curse was broken, sin was paid for, and new life became possible. Jesus’s death didn’t end the story. It opened the door for ours to begin. Because He was born to die, we are reborn to live.

As we journey through Lent, we’re invited to worship a God whose plan stretches from the manger to the cross and beyond the empty tomb. And that’s Good News for us: Jesus took what we deserved so that we could receive what He earned.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus with such purpose and love. Thank You that from His birth to His death, Your plan was always to bring us life. Help us to marvel at the depth of Your grace into worshiping You with joy and gratitude. Teach us to rest in the hope we have because Jesus bore the curse for us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

## Tempted, So We can be Victorious

AUTHOR: Matt Lovell

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 26:38

“Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

After eating the last supper with his disciples Jesus took them to the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that there He would be betrayed, arrested and then go on to suffer humiliation, beatings and death on the cross.

Gethsemane means the place of oil crushing. Oil was an essential ingredient to life in the first century. It was used in food, burnt for light and used to anoint kings. Its production involved picking and then crushing the olives under stones to obtain the oil.

In this place, Jesus felt the crushing weight of the sins of the world and the knowledge of the torture that He was volunteering to take in our place. The mere thought of the physical beatings, whippings, thorns and nails would cause severe dread, but the mental anguish of knowing that those disciples closest to Him would desert Him in his time of pain added to the suffering. He also knew that He had the power to stop it all. He could call in angels to defend Him if He desired. So great was the pressure on Him that His sweat was like drops of blood. He knew that about 700 years earlier the prophet Isaiah had written about this day and said, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) He knew his Father’s plan. He didn’t like it, but He knew that He had to follow through with it. He had to let Himself be crushed, so that we would not be crushed.

The temptation to do something different, to say forget these pathetic creatures who keep failing and doing evil, must have been enormous. Instead of crushing the evildoers, Jesus allowed Himself to be pierced and crushed. He saved us by volunteering Himself to be crushed. Just as the heavy stones are used to crush olives and a pure oil is obtained, Jesus' voluntary suffering and death purify us and allow us to persevere through trial and temptation so that we can be pure. Let us also see the hard things that we are called to do and not give in to the temptation to take the easy path.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus and His willingness to follow through with Your plan. Thank You that He overcame every temptation, remained perfect and willingly gave himself as the sacrifice to save us. Help me to resist the temptations in my life. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

**Bound, So I Could be Rescued from Bondage**

AUTHOR: Megan King

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: MARK 14:46**

“The men seized Jesus and arrested him.”

This year, I have embarked on something I have never done before, reading through the whole Bible. Encouraged by my small group Bible study ladies and guided by The Bible Recap, everything was going well... until Job. Job, Job, Job. What felt like a long narrative between Job and his “friends” left me struggling to understand what God was revealing to me. All I could see was Job surrendering—yielding to suffering, loss, and unanswered questions.

Surrendering feels a whole lot like losing to me. It feels like giving up, like being buried under trouble rather than pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Surrender feels like a weight placed on your shoulders. Surrender feels like bondage to hardship. This bondage can feel like shackles we carry everywhere: shame, guilt, sickness, conflict, unanswered prayers, death, and sin. The weight is heavy. But Scripture does not define surrender as defeat.

Jesus knew what bondage was. In His crucifixion, He accepted the bondage of the world, and to those watching, it appeared that He had lost. When Jesus was seized and bound, it felt like the end of His story—His surrender to injustice, evil, and death itself. Yet with the gift of hindsight, the Holy Spirit, and God’s Word, we know His surrender was anything but loss. By willingly submitting Himself to bondage, Jesus broke the chains of sin that bind us. What looked like defeat was victory. Through His death, He won, granting us the eternal gift of everlasting life with Him.

So maybe Job wasn’t losing after all. And maybe I’m not either. Maybe in the wake of my suffering and my loss I’m not losing, I’m surrendering. I’m trusting. I’m submitting. Let’s see what happens in the next four days.

*Dear Heavenly Father, when sin entered the world, creation fell under the weight of bondage. Yet we hold fast to the truth that our Redeemer lives. When that bondage feels heavy—when the troubles of our lives press in and the cost of the debt feels too great to bear—we remember that our Redeemer lives. Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son, Jesus, who willingly surrendered Himself and conquered sin and death. Thank You that we do not have to pay the debt ourselves, but are invited to walk with You, held by the promise of eternal life. Holy Spirit, draw near to us. Lift our burdens, break our chains, and comfort us in our sorrow. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Betrayed, So I Might Know Faithfulness**

AUTHOR: Austin Perry

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: MATTHEW 26:46**

“Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Jesus rises and stands firm.

In the Garden, Jesus takes three of his disciples from the others and tells them He is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, and asks them to stay awake and pray with Him. Jesus prays three times in anguish, asking God to take away the coming suffering, all while His disciples fell asleep after He had asked them to stay awake and pray. Under the weight of sorrow and prayer, Jesus knowing of the suffering and betrayal ahead, chooses not to hide from it, protest against, or fall back, but He goes to meet it face on.

What makes this so remarkable is not only the pain that lies ahead, but who brings it. Jesus' betrayer wasn't a stranger, but a close friend and disciple of His whom He spent a formative amount of time with. Judas walked alongside Him, learned from Him, but when his faithfulness was tested in times of little hope and despair, Judas betrayed Him.

Human faithfulness falters in times tested by fear, cost, and loss. When it is hard to stay loyal, we often choose to retreat, ignore the necessary sacrifices, and exhibit our human selfishness. Our flesh is very weak and vulnerable. Jesus knows this about us and yet He still goes forward.

In Jesus's steady resolve, His faithfulness is unwavering. While His friends scatter, Jesus and His purpose does not. While loyalty collapses around Him, His loyalty to His Father stands firm. Betrayal could not affect Jesus, as He walked straight into the path of abandonment so we as children of God would never be abandoned again.

As humans our faithfulness will fail many times. When obedience is too much and silence is easier, we will fail. When the refining fires of testing come, we will fail. When friends, that we have spent formative time with, betray us, we will fail. But Christ never does. Jesus rises and stands firm. Jesus was betrayed, so that I might know faithfulness.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for all the blessings You have given us in life. On this day I ask that in times our loyalty is challenged and we are close to falling into betrayal, that we hold firm in You, just like Jesus did before He died on the cross. Lord, I know that I have failed and failed again, so thank You for not abandoning me and loving me unconditionally. Help me continue to be a light in this dark world. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

## It Is Finished, So I Can Begin

AUTHOR: Matt Scholl

## DRAWING NEAR



### VERSE OF THE DAY: JOHN 4:34

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

Robert Byrne, a renowned chess Grandmaster, ironically once said, "There are two kinds of people, those who finish what they start and so on".

I tend to be one who loves finishing things. I love finishing projects around the house. I enjoy doing puzzles like crosswords, Wordle, or Connections. I get a sense of accomplishment from repairing old Lionel trains and seeing them run again. Once I start a book, I have to finish it no matter how boring or tedious. For the most part, I try to be a finisher.

What do you enjoy finishing? A good meal? A deep conversation? Traveling to and exploring a new place?

Our Verse of the Day comes as Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman at a well. You may recall the story. Jesus stopped at a well to rest. He spoke with the woman about living water, her husbands, and true worship. Just as He reveals to her that He is the Messiah, the disciples join Him. They try to get Him back on track saying, "Why are you talking to her?" and "Here, have something to eat." And Jesus answers, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus was a finisher.

Today is Good Friday. As Jesus hung on the cross, with His last breath He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). There was nothing more to be said or done. There was no more pain or suffering to endure. The work the Father had given Him to do was finished...and He did it all for me. Jesus was a finisher.

But Jesus' finished work wasn't the end. Jesus finished His work so I can begin. First, I can begin to live free of sin and guilt (John 1:29). The fancy church word for this is expiation. It means my sin and guilt have been removed. They have been taken away and placed on Jesus. Second, I can begin to draw near to God (Romans 5:10-11). Because of my sin, I was separated from God. But Jesus' finished work reconciled me to the Father. Third, I can begin to experience God's favor (Romans 3:25-26). God loves us eternally, but when we sin, we incur God's wrath. Like Adam and Eve hiding in the garden, all I feel is fear, guilt, and shame. But Jesus' finished work frees me to realize His purpose is to do good to me every day. These aren't things I can do or complete on my own. But thanks to Jesus' finished work, I can begin.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus to do Your will and finish Your work. Thank You that in spite of all the pain, in spite of all the ridicule, in spite of all the suffering, Jesus was a finisher. Help me begin to live free of sin and guilt. Help me draw close to You and experience Your favor. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



**Known by His Scars, So I Can Carry My Cross**

AUTHOR: Brad Vacketta

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:10**

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

Throughout life we will be asked to do things we wouldn’t volunteer to do, but because we know we should, we agree to do it. The writing of this devotion seemed like one of those times for me. This was humbling. I’ve never thought writing was my strength.

As I studied the Scripture and tried to put my thoughts to words, I found myself describing how everyone else should act more “Christian” because I had it figured out! The second humbling moment for me was God convicting me of my own arrogance.

In our Verse of the Day, Paul is describing the difficulties and suffering we may go through in our journey knowing that God will never abandon us and that the life He promises will be revealed in us.

Following Jesus is difficult. We will get bruised and scarred...but it is worth it. God’s promises are real and are not subjective to our performance. God will use our testimony. He does expect us to share His promise with others that don’t know Him. I wish it could be easier, but we have been asked by God to participate in His plan to bring Him glory.

I challenge you to consider how open you have been to God’s prodding and pulling. Is the comfort of your current level of participation too comfortable? It sometimes is for me. I truly believe that He will not put us in situations that we can’t survive, maybe with minor bruises and scars, but nonetheless we will be triumphant with His help.

2 Corinthians 4:4-5 states that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake".

The god of this age, social media, blinds our minds that possessions, status, and comfort are the way to a happy life. But owning is empty. Our God wants us to experience life by managing His gifts through generosity, and sharing our gifts in service, affecting lives by revealing the life of Jesus in us.

*Heavenly Father, I pray that we will be vulnerable and honest, unafraid to show our scars. We need your help and healing. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

**He Rose, So I Can Experience Life With Him**

AUTHOR: Veronica Clark

**DRAWING NEAR****VERSE OF THE DAY: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:14**

“By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.”

Jesus’s resurrection was like an echo of an already exemplary life that would crescendo into the years and centuries beyond it. The morning of His resurrection those closest to Him doubted His rising, but He was not angry. Instead, He gently guided them to realize the truth as subtle as His empty tomb. His disciples loved and believed in Jesus, but their own human doubts made it impossible to grasp the divine realities until He gently pulled the wool from their eyes and they saw Him.

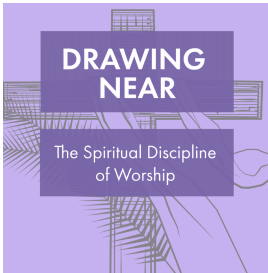
Today, we also cannot hear past the noise of the world to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. We know what we believe, but faced with secular pressure, we often cave to the popular crowd. Easter gives an opportunity to come, humbled and contrite, to see the empty tomb and realize the truth. It is not just that Jesus was born that is befuddling to us. There have been many good men and women who have been wise and left their mark on the world. The miracle is His rising. He is not just a prophet, but the true Son of God. Wise, kind, loving and wonderful is the Bridegroom; but also, more powerful than any man in this world will ever be.

His message is clear: “come to me”. So simple. Yet how often does the noise stifle the purity of it? If only we believe and are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we will rise with Him. It is the quiet that is the hardest part of our faith. How many songs do we have for His birth? Christmas resounds through the world crossing religions and cultures. Yet, Easter is something different. We must still ourselves to find the truth. We must walk through the darkness to find the light as Jesus did. We must accept His death to know His rising.

On Easter, we must ask ourselves do we believe not only in the man, but in the God He truly is? Do we believe Jesus is the Son of God, risen from death? We cannot ask this question amidst the noise of jobs, cars and TikTok feeds. We must seek peace and simplicity. When we confess Jesus as our Risen King, we will rise ourselves and live within the glory of His kingdom. Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

*Heavenly Father, please guide my soul to stillness so I may hear You. Your Son died and was raised for my sake. He offers His hand to me. Give me faith to take it so I too may rise with Him. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*

## UPCOMING WORSHIP



### ASH WEDNESDAY

February 18 at 12:15 PM and 7 PM

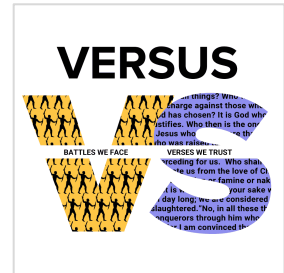
Imposition of Ashes & Holy Communion

### WEDNESDAYS OF LENT

February 25–March 25 (7 PM only)

### WEEKENDS IN LENT

February 22–April 5



### PALM SUNDAY WEEKEND

Traditional, Sunday, March 29 at 8am

Contemporary, Saturday, March 28 at 6pm and Sunday, March 29 at 10:45am

*(Note: There will not be a worship service on Wednesday, April 1)*

### MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 2 12:15 PM & 7 PM with communion

### GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 3 *(school and church offices closed)*

Traditional at 12:15 PM & 7 PM

Contemporary at 5 PM in the sanctuary

*(Note: There will not be a worship service on Saturday, April 4)*

### EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 5

Traditional Sunrise at 6:30 AM

Traditional at 8 AM and 9:30 AM with communion

Contemporary at 11:15 AM with communion *(new time)*

*(Note: There will not be a worship service on Wednesday, April 8)*

### WEEKEND AFTER EASTER

Saturday, April 11 at 6 PM with communion

Sunday, April 12 at 8 AM

Sunday, April 12 at 10:45 AM with communion

Wednesday, April 15 at 7 PM



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