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## LENTEN STUDY WITH

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# 40 Days Living the Jesus Creed

*Fr. Kevin Maney*

**R**ead each day's reflections in *40 Days Living the Jesus Creed* and then answer the corresponding questions as fully and completely as possible. As with anything else in life, what you get from this study will be commensurate with what you put into it. In fact, consider how your commitment to this study reflects your ability to live the Jesus Creed.

### Ash Wednesday–Sunday (Lent Week 1)

1. Why is it important for us to remind ourselves daily that what is most important in our lives is our relationship with God and to love him? How was this reflected in ancient Israel? (Day 1)

2. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? Cite some practical examples of this love. How is this reflected in your own life? Share at least one example. Commit to reciting the Jesus Creed daily and be ready to report back to the group next week on how you did. (Day 1)
3. Why do you think Jesus amended the Shema? (Day 1)
4. Consider the areas of your life that Scot discusses in Day 2. Then assess how you are doing in these areas when it comes to loving God with heart, mind, soul, and strength. What are you doing well? Where do you need to improve? What can you do (or refrain from doing) that would help you improve the areas of your life you identified as needing improvement? (Day 2)
5. Read Luke 10:30–37. How would Scot’s analysis of ancient Israel’s “love of Torah” (p.14) affect Israel’s call to be God’s light to the world? Does the same hold true for us as Christians today? Why or why not? Who in your life do you need to work on being more neighborly to in the power of the Spirit? How do you propose to accomplish this? What, if anything, is holding you back? (Day 3)
6. Do you agree with Scot’s claim that neighbor-love is unpredictable? Give personal examples to support your argument. What does it mean to respond to needs, not labels (pp. 16–17)? Cite some examples. How are you doing in this area? (Day 3)
7. Consider Scot’s neighbor-love argument as a whole. Is it possible for neighbor-love to be or become unhealthy? If

- so, how? If not, why? Provide some personal examples to support your argument. (Day 3)
8. How can your understanding of the hope and promise of new creation and being signs of Jesus light and love for the world impact your neighbor-love? How are both working (or not working) for you? (Day 3)
  9. What does it mean to see God's face? When you gaze into the face of God, what do you see? When God gazes at your face, what do you think he sees, and how do you feel about that? When others gaze at you, do they see God's face reflected in you or something else? (Day 4)
  10. What are some things that make you want to turn your face away from God? How can looking at God's face bring healing to you? *Make sure you can articulate this!* Why is your understanding of Jesus' death so critical to this gazing process? How might these considerations affect your ability to live the Jesus Creed each day? (Day 4)
  11. What questions do you have about the Trinity? Why would some theologians call it the "dance of the Trinity" (p. 26)? (Day 5)
  12. Read John 10:30, 38. What is another verb for dancing in the context of our relationship with God? How is your dancing with God going these days? What is going well? What needs to be improved? What kinds of things might make you a bad dancer and what might help you improve on your dance step? (Day 5)

## Monday (Lent Week 1)—Sunday (Lent Week 2)

1. What are some ways we can love God, love ourselves, love others, and love God's good world? List some practical examples from your life. (Day 6)
2. What in yourself and your life hampers or prevents you from being God's *eikon*? What are some things you can do to rid yourself of those things you just identified? (Day 6)
3. Read Luke 15:11–32. Scot maintains that while we may give up on ourselves, God never does, and it is this kind of love that creates the Jesus Creed (p. 34). Think back on your life, past and present. In what ways, if any, have you given up on yourself? How has God demonstrated his faithfulness to you? Cite specific examples to illustrate this. (Day 7)
4. Given your answer to question 3, why is it appropriate for Christians to celebrate wildly as part of their faithful living? In what ways, if any, do you party like it is the eschaton (end time)? If you do not celebrate wildly, why don't you? (Day 7)
5. In what ways do you have a Missourian's heart? Explain. Do you agree with Scot that coming to the Table allows us to see God's face (p. 41)? When you come to the Table, do you see or experience God's presence? If so, how? If not, what do you see? (Day 8)
6. When, if at all, have you seen the face of God in others? If you have seen God's face in others, what did you see?

- If others looked at you, would they readily see God's face or something else? Explain. (Day 8)
7. How is God's mercy lurking in the shadows of your life? Share some examples, if you are willing. (Day 9)
  8. How are you embodying God's mercy to others? Cite some examples. Why do we need to first look at Jesus' face before we can embody God's mercy? (Day 9)
  9. Read Genesis 15:1–12. How does this illustrate that God spoke to Abraham in Abraham's day and ways. How is God speaking likewise to you to demonstrate God's faithfulness? When you waiver about God's faithfulness, what Scripture verses do you turn to to help bolster your faith? Share with the group. (Day 10)
  10. Scot argues that self-love is critical to living the Jesus Creed successfully. Does this surprise you? Why or why not? How can self-love become distorted? Assess the state of your self-love. What needs to be affirmed? What needs to be corrected? How do you propose to do that in a biblical way? Explain. (Day 11)
  11. Do you agree with Scot that our inability to forgive ourselves distorts our ability to love ourselves? Why or why not? What are some ways you love yourself? Do these ways help or hinder you from embodying God's love for others? Explain. (Day 11)
  12. Reflect on Psalm 139 (p. 57ff). As you reflect on God's intimate knowledge of you, what do you think he sees and knows about you? What needs to be healed? What needs to be affirmed? Make this the focus of your prayers this Lent (and beyond, if necessary). (Day 11)

13. Consider your family situation, whether it be your interactions with your spouse or children or someone else. How are you living the Jesus Creed with them? What are you doing well? What needs to be improved? Cite specific examples to illustrate your answers. How can you be strengthened to continue to love your family members as Jesus loves you? How can your interactions with family members be improved in a biblical manner? Explain. (Day 12)

## Monday (Lent Week 2)—Sunday (Lent Week 3)

1. As Christians, we are called to give an account of our faith to others (cf. Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15). How would you respond to the list of criticisms in Dan Kimball's book (p. 65)? Resist the temptation to get defensive or self-righteous. How would you give an account to an outsider about your faith and why that person ought to come to your church regularly (or would you)? (Day 13)
2. Assess Scot's defense of the church. What do you find compelling? Not so compelling? Do you agree with him that reciting the Jesus Creed daily can be a balm for what ails the church? Why or why not? (Day 13)
3. Consider the people in your life. Are you missing any of the needy among them? If not, how are you addressing their needs? If so, in what ways can you address their needs? Do our examples have to be as spectacular as the one Scot gave on p. 72? Explain. (Day 14)

4. What are some things that prevent us from using our ears, eyes, and hands as Jesus would to address the needs of people around us? What, if anything, can we do to remove those obstacles? (Day 14)
5. Read Matthew 5:1–16. Do you agree with Scot that the Beatitudes are “a listing of the sorts of people who have found their way into the kingdom vision of Jesus, the sorts of people who love Jesus” (p. 78)? Why or why not? Would you be included in that list? If so, how? If not, what is holding you back? (Day 15)
6. How can loving others who live the Jesus Creed strengthen and encourage diversity in your church? Why is humility needed to do this? (Day 15)
7. Who has been an “influence for Jesus” on you and why? How are you being an influence for Jesus on others? (“I am not” is not an acceptable answer.) (Day 16)
8. Consider Scot’s arguments about good works (pp. 82–84). What is your vision for your church in terms of being Jesus’ salt and light? What must be done to make your vision a reality? (Day 16)
9. Scot’s argument about our good works leading to God is crucially important (p. 84). Assess your own good works using his criteria. How do you stack up? Share as you are willing some concrete examples to support your assessment. (Day 16)
10. Consider carefully Scot’s arguments about greatness in Jesus’ eyes. Then on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the top score, how do you think Jesus would rate your

greatness? What would be the basis for his rating? Provide some concrete examples. Then ask Jesus if he agrees with your assessment. What is he telling you? (Day 17)

11. Read Luke 6:27–36. Assess Scot’s argument regarding enemy love. Is it biblical? Why or why not? What are its major strengths? Weaknesses? What, if anything, surprised you? Share stories of enemies you have loved by God’s grace. (Day 18)
12. Who are the enemies in your life that God is calling you to love right now? How do you propose to go about that in light of Scot’s arguments? Share with the group as you are willing. (Day 18)
13. Why is it essential to balance our good works with personal piety (spiritual disciplines) for successfully living the Jesus Creed? How are you doing with your spiritual disciplines? Where are you strong? What needs to improve and how do you plan to do that? (Day 19)

## Monday (Lent Week 3)–Sunday (Lent Week 4)

1. Read Matthew 6:25–34 and then consider Scot’s arguments regarding a life that is centered on God versus one that is not centered. How centered is your life? What are some tangible signs that it is or isn’t? (Day 20)
2. Read Matthew 7:1–12. Assess Scot’s arguments about judgmentalism. What do you agree with? Disagree with?



What is the difference between using good judgment and being judgmental? Between being judgmental and discerning? What do you consider to be the main antidote for judgmentalism? Explain. (Day 21)

3. Do you find Scot's suggestion surprising that sometimes we should withhold talking about Jesus with others? Why or why not? What are some examples from your life that might support or reject his argument? (Day 21)
4. Do you agree with Scot's definition of freedom? Why or why not? When you hear the words "live in the power of the Spirit," what comes to mind? How exactly do we do that? (Day 22)
5. Scot says that discipline has its place but is powerless to change lives (p. 115). Do you agree? Why or why not? In making this argument, isn't Scot simply arguing for another form of navel-gazing? Why or why not? (Day 22)
6. How exactly can loving others as yourself set you free? Cite some examples. (Day 22)
7. Read Romans 14. What is the difference between tolerance and love? What are some potential practical problems related to Scot's arguments about doing no wrong to the other (pp.118–19)? Think about the person(s) in your life who most irritate(s) you. Then consider Scot's argument that love engages the other. Why is living the Jesus Creed so difficult? (Day 23)
8. Using Scot's arguments about loving others, what are some practical ways you can show love to each other at your church? What might be some barriers or issues that make this difficult? (Day 23)

9. What are some of your memories that impact your current ministries and thoughts about living the Jesus Creed? How can personal memories serve to foster new ministries? Hinder them? Think back to Scot's argument about living in the Spirit. How might the Spirit's work play a healing role when it comes to our own personal memories? (Day 24)
10. Assess your church's treatment of the weak and poor. How are you doing? Provide some examples. In what ways can we improve? (Day 24)
11. What did you think and how did you feel when you read Dawn's story? Have you had a similar experience in which you washed Jesus' feet, either literally or metaphorically? If so, how did it make you feel? (Day 25)
12. How does Dawn's story illustrate the Jesus Creed in action? Do our acts always have to be this dramatic for us to live the Jesus Creed? Why or why not? (Day 25)
13. Read 1 John 4:7–21. When John and Scot talk about loving other Christians, do they have emotions in mind? Explain. Consider the saints of your church. Without naming names, who do you find easy to love and why? Who do you find hard to love and why? What insights about love and loving others does this provide you? (Day 26)
14. Now consider your relationship with God. What are some things in or about you that you think make it easy for God to love you? What are some things that might make it difficult for God to love you? How might this latter consideration affect the way you treat the "rascals" at your church? (Day 26)

## Monday (Lent Week 4)—Sunday (Lent Week 5)

1. Besides reading the gospels regularly (you do read the gospels regularly, don't you?) what are some tangible ways you show your love for Jesus? For others? Cite specific examples to illustrate your point. (Day 27)
2. Think of times when your love for another member of the church or a person's love for you as a fellow member of the church covered a wrong done. Without naming names, how did you respond to that person's love for you (or how did that person respond to your love)? Be as specific as possible about the wrongs involved and how the love shown covered those wrongs. Was it hard to cover another person's wrong? Explain. (Day 27)
3. Read Acts 10. Consider the four principles Scot derives from it and apply them to your life. Have you ever been confronted with the opportunity to show boundary-crossing love? If so, what happened? If not, consider prayerfully what that might say about your ability to follow the Jesus Creed. (Day 28)
4. What are some things that help us keep our boundaries in place? Are there ever times or situations where we should not cross boundaries? Explain. (Day 28)
5. Read 1 Corinthians 12. In light of Scot's arguments in this chapter, why do we need love to drive the other gifts of the Spirit? Build your case on the basis of what Paul says about these gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. What are some of the gifts you share regularly with the

church and how are others benefited by your sharing of those gifts? (Day 29)

6. Consider Scot's argument that, "Real love . . . is what happens between two or more people in concrete reality." To illustrate what he is saying, Scot piggybacks his arguments with Paul's found in 1 Corinthians 13. "Love is patient [with others]; kind [to others]; and not envious [of others] or boastful [in front of others] or arrogant [in the face of others] or rude [to others]" (p. 153). Now assess your own ability to demonstrate love to other members of your church against these criteria. Citing concrete examples, what are you doing well? What needs to be improved? How do you propose to do that? (Day 30)
7. Continuing with his arguments related to 1 Corinthians 13, Scot claims that love orients us toward other people and then he talks about why self-denial is so necessary in this process (pp. 158–59). What would a life that is oriented toward others look like? When you think of self-denial, what comes to mind? When you think of denying yourself and following Jesus, what comes to mind? How are you doing in your ability to orient yourself toward others in your life, especially your church? Cite specific examples to illustrate your assessment. (Day 31)
8. Do you agree with Scot's statement that true love is optimistic (p. 163)? Why or why not? Compare and contrast the qualities of biblical optimism versus the world's optimism. If helpful, use the T-bar on the following page. Which, if any, do you possess more of?

If you don't have a biblical optimism that Scot talks about, what would it take for you to learn to develop it? (Day 32)

Biblical Optimism	Worldly Optimism

9. Assess Scot's argument that because love is the last word, i.e., it never ends, it produces a "love kind of life." What does that mean and what does that look like? How does your love for God and others measure up to this benchmark? Cite specific examples from your life to illustrate your answer. (Day 33)
10. Why must hope and giving logically flow from a life of love? Cite some examples from your life to illustrate your answer. (Day 33)

## Monday (Lent Week 5)—Palm Sunday

1. Consider Scot's arguments about the temporary nature of gifts. Then consider the gifts God has given you. How do you use your gifts to establish that which will remain (love)? In other words, how do you use your gifts to build and nurture relationships, both inside and outside the church? Cite specific examples from your life. (Day 34)
2. When you think about the final consummation of pure Love, what comes to mind? Do you long for it? Why or why not? How might your answer illustrate Paul's assertion that we live in faith, hope, and love? (Day 35)
3. Do you agree or disagree with Scot's definition of faith (p. 176)? Why? What are some things you do that allows the Spirit to help you grow in faith? Assess the state of your faith right now. Consider specifically how it is (or isn't) transforming you in the power of the Spirit? Explain. What are some similarities you see between faith and hope? Differences? Explain. (Day 35)
4. Days 36–40 *focus on providing examples of the Jesus Creed love*. Answer the following questions with this controlling idea in mind. What does it mean to support the work of God? Cite specific examples of how you support Jesus and focus specifically on how you use your money to do that. How exactly does, "Supporting Jesus turn one's love for Jesus and his kingdom vision and for his followers into living reality" (p. 182)? Cite some examples. (Day 36)

5. Consider Scot's arguments about the Jesus Creed and money and then assess your church's stewardship of your money. How is it doing? Explain. (Day 36)
6. Consider Scot's definition of service in this chapter and then consider your own service, both inside and outside of your church. Do you like to serve? Why or why not? How would you rate your service (no false modesty, please)? What do you do well? What needs to improve? What's holding you back from implementing improvements? (Day 37)
7. Do you agree that love must affirm others? Why or why not? Compare and contrast worldly affirmations with Jesus Creed love affirmations (use the T-bar on the following page if that helps you). What are some essential similarities? Differences? (Day 38)
8. Consider Scot's argument that "affirmation requires the willingness to dethrone our own egos" (p. 190) and then consider your own willingness to affirm others. Does your ego need to be dethroned? Why or why not? Cite some specific examples from your life to illustrate your answer. Resolve to affirm someone in your life each day this coming week and then reflect on how well you were able to keep your resolution. Talk about this with someone you trust. (Day 38)
9. Read Matthew 3:1–12. Scot suggests that it was John's love for God that led him to speak of Jesus. Is this what comes to mind when you read these verses, especially his words to the Pharisees and Sadducees? Why or why not? (Day 38)

Worldly Affirmation	JCL Affirmation

10. Consider carefully Scot's arguments about using our voice to point to Jesus. How are you doing in this regard? What are you doing well? What's holding you back? Cite specific examples to illustrate your answer. (Day 39)
11. Do you agree that you need to read about Jesus until the gospels' words about him saturate your bones? Why or why not? Do you do this regularly? Why or why not? If you don't, what is holding you back and what do you need in order to get started? (Day 39)
12. How do you typically fail to live the Jesus Creed. Cite some examples. What, if anything, are you doing about this? Do you struggle to receive grace? Why or why not? (Day 40)
13. Consider the pattern of Jesus Creed grace (p. 202). What can happen if grace doesn't follow rebuke? If grace is offered without rebuke? How are you doing in imitating Jesus' pattern of offering grace to others? In accepting it from others? Cite some examples. (Day 40)