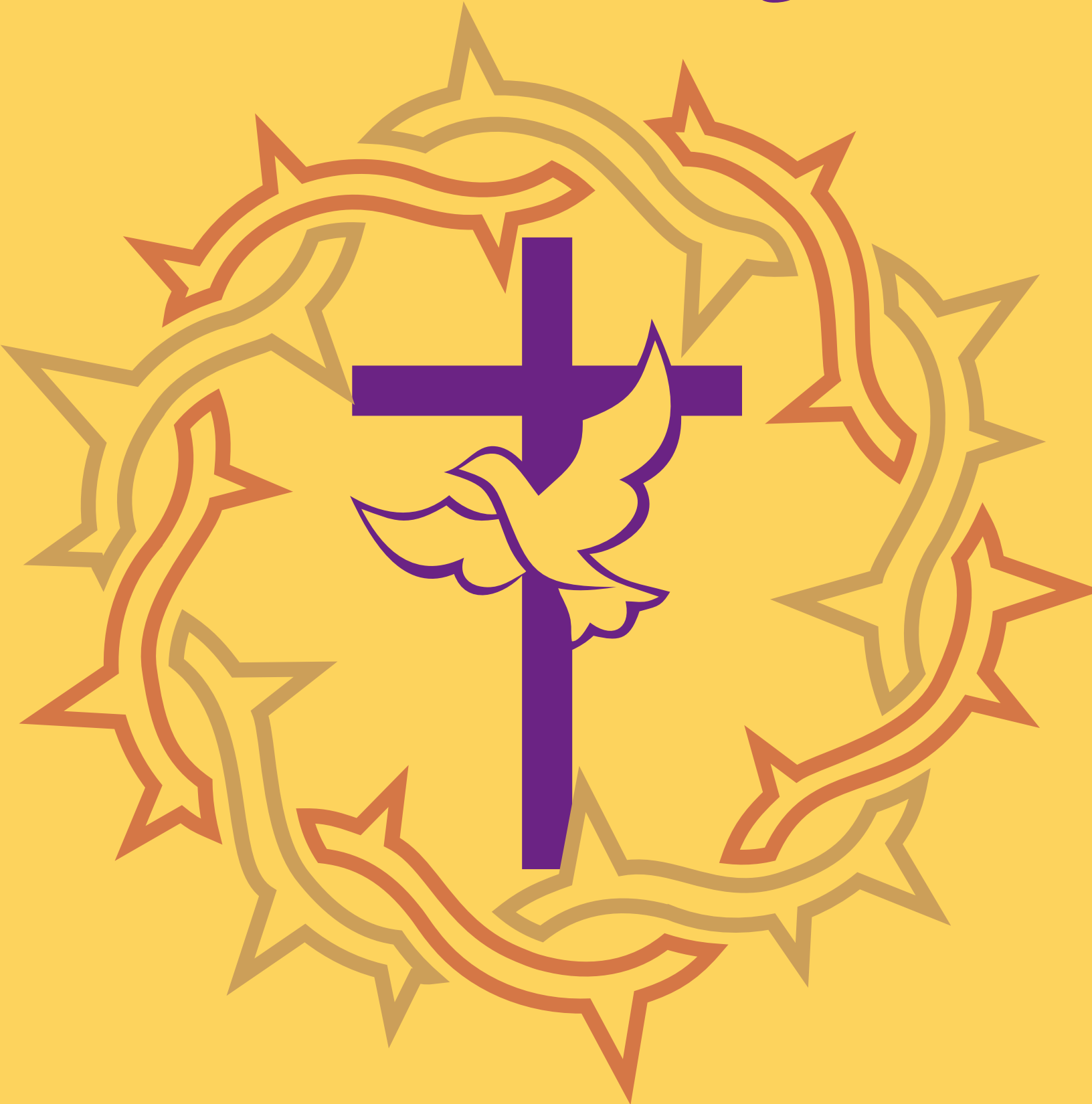


# Lenten Study Guide



Written by the  
Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking

## What is Lent?

Lent is a season of the Christian calendar that lasts 40 days, starting with Ash Wednesday and leading up to Resurrection (Easter) Sunday. As we focus on Jesus' sacrifice for us, we take this time to reflect on our lives, doing acts of charity and making small sacrifices. These sacrifices can be done by focusing on prayer, fasting, or almsgiving. Originally, Lent was only celebrated a few days before Resurrection Sunday, with individuals focused on fasting and prayer. Following the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., the decision was made that Lent would be expanded to the 40-day observance we participate in now. The reasoning for 40 days of fasting and prayer reflects Jesus' days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness. You may be noticing that there are more than 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Resurrection Sunday, and you would be correct. The liturgical calendar you follow determines two things: first, how much of the Holy Week is included in Lent, and second, if Sundays during Lent are included in your Lenten observance. Most Lenten calendars do not include Sundays during the Lent period, as Sundays are seen as a time of celebration and feasting for Jesus' raising from the grave, so it is not a day for fasting. For this guide, we will follow the calendar that does not include Sundays in the Lent calendar.

## What does participating in Lent entail?

There are three pillars of Lent: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer. How are each of these observed and why? Let's take a look.

- **Fasting:** This is usually considered abstinence from food. Typically, for Lent, it is the giving up of one specific food, or food type, for forty days. In the Catholic church, it is required that you give up meat (required days are Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and every Friday during Lent). The Eastern Orthodox church requires that you give up all animal products during Lent. However, Protestants do not follow these specific guidelines. Some do give up meat, but others will give up candy, chips, coffee, or anything that they enjoy eating. Others have gone a different direction with fasting and decided that instead of giving up food, they will give up social media (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), fast food, or online shopping. We encourage you to examine your life and choose something meaningful to you. Why are we fasting? There are a few reasons that we are fasting during this period. The first is to follow the example of Jesus after he was baptized. In Matthew 4:1-17, we see Him led into the wilderness where he fasted for 40 days and nights. We will look at this passage more closely during our study, but we see here that Jesus gives us the example of fasting. While following in Jesus' footsteps is the best thing we can and should be doing, we see many other examples of fasting throughout the Bible and their reasoning. We see King David fasted as a way to humble himself before God (Psalm 69:10). Moses fasted twice for forty days; once was in communion with God as he received and wrote the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28) and the other was in prayer asking for God's forgiveness for the people of Israel's sin (Deuteronomy 9:18-19). Both King David and Ezra fasted to humble themselves before the Lord (Psalm 69:10 and Ezra 8:21).
- **Prayer:** King David also shows us another reason to fast, and that is because fasting leads to prayer (Psalm 35:13). Part of Lent is to restore our relationship with Jesus, and to do that, we need to be in communication with him. Prayer is the main way that we communicate with Jesus. The 40 days of Lent allow us to focus on our prayer lives, communicating fully with God. When we are feeling tempted to break our fast, we should be turning to God. This helps to teach and reinforce turning to God when we are in need. Beyond asking him for help to get past the temptation of breaking the fast, we should be speaking to him about all things and asking Him to speak to us as well. It is the hope that after the 40 days of Lent, one's prayer life will be stronger, and it will continue past the Lenten period.
- **Almsgiving:** This allows us to connect to the world around us and put others ahead of ourselves. It is responding with compassion and care to the wretchedness we see many people suffer. Most

individuals participating in Lent will take the money they would have normally spent on the items they are fasting and give that to the poor and needy.

What does Lent have to do with human trafficking?

One of the main purposes of Lent is to restore your relationship with Jesus Christ. Part of doing that is examining your actions to see where you are sinning, asking for forgiveness, and correcting those actions. It can be easy for us to say that we are not perpetrators of human trafficking. We do not purchase sex. Nor are we a business or employer that withholds the wages of its employees. Nor have we confiscated either the pay or passports from a maid or nanny. Sadly, though, we all contribute to human trafficking through our various actions. Whether it is the clothes we buy, our electronics, or where we buy our groceries, we may be contributing to the problem if we are not doing the proper research to know where the materials we purchase come from and the supply line. (To find out more about your slavery footprint, visit [slaveryfootprint.org](http://slaveryfootprint.org)). We can take this time of Lent to reflect on our actions and the best way to make changes in our lives that will have a positive impact on human trafficking. Using the three pillars of Lent, we can do this by:

- Fasting: Choose one thing, whether it be a food item or activity, that you realize has been contributing to human trafficking in some way, to fast from for the 40 days.
- Prayer: Ask God to show you ways that you can have a positive impact on reducing human trafficking.
- Almsgiving: Consider giving your lent donation to an organization that works to fight human trafficking.

How to use the Lent Guide?

Starting with Ash Wednesday, there will be a daily Bible verse to read, a meditation on that verse, and a short prayer. On Sundays, as we are taking the approach of those before us, that each Sunday is a celebration of the Lord's resurrection, we will do a short introduction to the next week's theme and connect it to Lent and human trafficking. The themes for the guide are sin, temptation, brokenness, darkness, grace, repentance, and the cross. We pray that you will find this guide useful in drawing you closer to God and in having a better understanding of how our actions contribute to human trafficking and how we can counter those actions.

## **Week 1 of Lent**

### **Theme – Sin**

*Introduction to Sin* - The concept of sin is one Christians are quite familiar with. We know that sin was introduced into the world in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil despite being told by God not to. But what is sin? Sin is transgressing against God's law. It is the failure to do what is right, whether unintentional or intentional. It doesn't matter if the sin is more "minor," like accidentally lying to another person, or if it is more "major," like forcing a person to work for you and not giving them appropriate pay or the option to leave the job. When we sin, we are separated from God. When we are separated from God, we are more likely to continue more and more in sin. Then we are more likely to ignore His voice calling us back to Him. There is sadly no escape from sin in this world. This would be problematic if we needed to be sinless to receive eternal life. Thankfully, we have hope in Jesus Christ. This week, we will try to understand that despite our sins, we will one day enter into heaven as He acted as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins to save us.

*Sunday Prayer* – Lord, we know that it says in Romans 3:23, “We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Lord, the verse makes a point in saying we have all sinned. It is easy to separate ourselves from this verse and focus on the sins that have been committed by all of those around us. Lord Jesus, help us to remember that this means each one of us has sinned. We ask that when we think about this verse, we do not just think of other individuals’ sins, but help us to remember our own and seek repentance for them. Lord, help us this week to understand how our sin affects both ourselves and the world. We ask that, as we look more deeply at what you have to say about sin, you also show us what our sins are, especially those that continue human trafficking. Let our hearts be opened to your voice. Then let us seek true repentance from you. Let us rejoice in your saving grace. And we ask that you keep us from sin. Let us seek you when we are tempted, Lord.

**Day 1 (Ash Wednesday) – Genesis 3:1-7:** *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*Meditation* - It seems appropriate to begin a Lenten study with sin entering the world, the entire reason why we need this study, and need the atoning sacrifice and salvation provided by Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. This passage describes the serpent, who is really Satan, as crafty. The word used for crafty can also be translated as shrewd or wise. Wise seems like it does not fit in with the other word options, as we tend to think of those who are wise and wisdom as a positive attribute. However, James 3:14-15 reminds us that there is “earthly” and “demonic” wisdom. What are a couple of ways we tell when it is not God’s wisdom, but the wisdom of Satan, according to James? Because jealousy and self-ambition will be involved. We see this with Eve. She is presented with a chance to be “like God.” She will know good from evil, and she will not die, as God told her. She tried to attain a status and information she could not get. Satan still uses self-ambition, or family ambition, today as a means to try to get us to sin. In a desire to want the best for ourselves and our family, especially in education, we support policies and procedures that benefit our children, yet we ignore how these policies and procedures may be harmful to other children, especially those who are of lower economic status or people of color. From issues of funding school programs to free meals, each one has an impact on a child’s education. Studies show that access to proper childhood education into their teenage years can help prevent human trafficking. When our focus of how policies and procedures will only benefit ourselves or our family, the wisdom to support those policies comes from Satan, not from God. We must work hard to distinguish the difference in their wisdom, as often Satan will try to make it seem like Godly wisdom, leading us to sin.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that Satan uses many different ways for us to go against your word, and one of those ways is through his supposed wisdom. But his wisdom is not your wisdom. His wisdom leads to only our own selfish desires and ambitions. We ask that you help us to become able to truly recognize his wisdom and realize that what he is suggesting is truly detrimental to us. While whatever he is presenting may be beneficial to us, please help us see that it will cause us to sin, and therefore it is truly harmful to us.

**Day 2 (Thursday of the first week of Lent) – Isaiah 59:1-2:** *Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is his ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you that He does not hear.*

*Meditation* - What is the result of us sinning? Isaiah tells us that our sins cause a separation between us and God. The more we sin, the further away from Him we become, and it allows Satan to fill that void. The longer we permit him to be there, the more influence he has over us, and the less crafty, shrewd, and wise he has to be. It becomes easier for us to live in our sins and continue doing them. What is the consequence of living unrepentantly in our sins? As Isaiah tells us, His face is now hidden from us, and He no longer hears our prayers. This does not mean that He ignores us, and our praying is pointless. No. God always hears our prayers, but His answering of our prayers may be slower or take on a more disciplinary turn. If this were the result of our living unrepentantly in our sins, where could we find hope? But Isaiah gives us hope. He reminds us that the Lord's hand can reach across any distance to save us, and He can hear us no matter how quiet our prayer is. We just need to turn to Him, asking for forgiveness and turning from our sins. It does not matter what sin has ensnared us; God will hear us when we turn to Him. From a shout to God for help to a whispered plea, God hears our need and our desire to turn from our sins and repent. We may constantly buy fast fashion items that are made cheaply, normally by slave labor, and made to be discarded and replaced quickly. We may rationalize our purchases, from a need to be budget-conscious, but each time we purchase fast fashion, we employ slave labor and encourage companies to continue to misuse and not pay their workers. The more we buy, the less we have to rationalize our purchases. When we realize that how we buy clothes can fuel oppressive conditions and not caring for those who are vulnerable, it is the exact opposite of how God instructs us to behave, and we have been sinning, we need to turn to God. Ask Him to forgive us for our sins and to help us restrain ourselves from purchasing fast fashion (or whatever the sin is) in the future. He will hear, and He will save us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that when we sin, we separate ourselves from you. We know that the more we sin, the bigger that separation gets, and the easier it is to ignore your Word. Yet, no matter how far away we go from you, you will always hear us when we cry out to you. No matter how loud or soft our plea is, you will hear us when we turn to you for saving and in repentance. We ask that you help us cry out to you, shine your face upon us, and draw us close to you. Amen.

**Day 3 (Friday the first week of Lent) – Romans 3:21-27:** *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting: It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.*

*Meditation* - This section is often relied upon as a passage when doing evangelism, and for good reason. We can recite “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, and assure them that we are sinners as well, just like them. That our salvation only comes because of our faith in God, and Jesus shedding His blood for our sins. Yet how often do we truly meditate on this passage, and what it truly means? Often, we use it to relate to others, focusing on sins such as lying, pride, or greed, and it tends to be in a more

generic sense: “Yeah, I lie sometimes.” How much more impactful would these conversations be if we were truly honest with others and ourselves? What if we admit one of our biggest sins is that our default nature is not to believe the victim, but instead we have a tendency to minimize their experiences or justify the attacker/harasser? For example, do we blame the victim of rape, saying that they shouldn’t have dressed in a certain manner, or that they knew better than being in a certain neighborhood? Maybe we tell them that what was said to them was just a harmless joke, or that it doesn’t matter if you were uncomfortable with how a person complimented you, they were just trying to be nice? What if we were honest that while we knew these types of statements are wrong, and help perpetuate a culture that allows those actions to continue without consequences, they are our first inclination when we hear the stories of sexual assault, harassment, and rape. What if we were honest that we struggled with the same exact sins that they do, sins that we know help create a vulnerability to human trafficking for individuals? We know that these are wrong and harmful, but we constantly struggle and have to fight off these thoughts and accusations. Yet, when we fail, when we do make these accusations or belittle their experience, we do not need to fear for Jesus died on the cross, displaying his grace, to redeem us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you suffered to be the propitiation for our sins. Your act shows your grace to us. We know that we have sinned, and no matter how hard we try, we will continue to sin, yet we know we are redeemed and justified thanks to your grace. We ask that you help us be honest in conversations with others, especially regarding this verse, that we are not generic in listing our sins, but show how we struggle in ways that truly are harmful as well, yet we have hope thanks to Christ.

**Day 4 (Saturday, the first week of Lent) – 1 John 1:8-2:2:** *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*

*Meditation* - What John presents here seems, in a way, obvious. If we say we have not committed a sin, we are lying to ourselves, and God’s word cannot be in us, for all have sinned. When we do this, our actions imply that Christ is a liar. Why would we need his salvation and redemption if we have not sinned? But we have sinned. And we will sin. Even though we should try not to sin, we will. When we do sin, we need not worry, because if we confess our sins, Jesus is both our Advocate and propitiation. God is faithful and righteous, and He will forgive us our sins and will cleanse us. It is the confessing of sins that we have difficulty with. It is difficult to admit when we have done something wrong and gone against God’s word. It is this type of behavior that has helped Christians have a reputation for being hypocritical and self-righteous. For example, we loudly condemn individuals who commit sins we find reprehensible. Yet, we are often silent when it comes to our own sins or the sins of individuals in the church, especially those who are considered respected leaders of our church. For example, do you harshly disapprove of those who identify as LGBTQ+, but dismiss when we make derogatory comments about them, or lewd comments about an individual we find attractive? Do we try to diminish or justify a respected church leader’s behavior if it has been discovered that they have committed adultery or visited a prostitute? How much of our witness would change, and how differently would society view Christians, if we were honest about our sins? That we go against God’s word, but He does save us. That our leadership is not perfect, and they, too, need Jesus as Advocate and propitiation.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are a forgiving and righteous God. We thank you that Jesus is both our Advocate and our propitiation. Lord, we know that we sin, but Lord, we admit that we have difficulty

confessing when we have wronged both you and others. Help us confess our sins, both to you and to those we have wronged with our actions. Let our confession be a witness to your forgiveness, righteousness, and love.

## **Week 2 of Lent**

### **Theme - Temptation**

*Sunday introduction on Temptation* - Temptations are a part of our everyday life; those desires to do something wrong or unwise. During Lent, you will be tempted to give up on your fast or not give your alms to the church, charity, or those in need. Many temptations we face, whether we realize it or not, have an impact on human trafficking. You may be tempted to grab any random chocolate bar for a snack, but grabbing one that is not ethically sourced continues to support child labor to harvest the cocoa beans. Perhaps you are tempted by the thought of doing good and sharing a post that has unverified information regarding human trafficking, but in sharing without verifying it you are helping to spread myths about human trafficking. It is important to remember that being tempted is not a sin, for Jesus, who was sinless, was tempted. However, how we respond to temptation can lead to us sinning, which is what we will examine for the rest of this week.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we know that temptation will always be a part of our lives. We ask that you help to protect us from it and keep us from sinning. We ask that as we go through this Lenten season, you make it clear to us what our temptations are and how, if we succumb to them, they hurt not only ourselves but other people as well. Give us the strength to resist them.

**Day 5 (Monday, the second week of Lent) – Matthew 4:1-11:** *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'*

*Meditation* - We began our study by seeing how Satan tempted Adam and Eve and brought sin into the world. Today, we will look at a very similar scenario involving Satan and Jesus, and see how we should respond to temptation. Adam and Eve were in a garden, surrounded by food. They wanted for nothing in terms of food to eat, yet they still succumbed to the temptation to eat from the one tree they were told not to. Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty days fasting before Satan even approached him. He was still in the wilderness, so unlike Adam and Eve, He had absolutely no food around him when Satan approached Him. He was like the Israelites in the Wilderness after leaving Egypt. Just as God provided them with Manna, Jesus could have provided for himself as well, but knew giving in to temptation would be succumbing to Satan. Each time Satan tempted Jesus, it was with something bigger and grander. Something that each one of us would easily have to. Food, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic

Needs, is a basic need that a person needs for survival. In the second temptation, according to Matthew, Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and says, “Throw yourself down, for you know the angels will protect you.” This is Maslow’s second level in the hierarchy, safety. Once a person is assured that their basic needs of food, water, breathing, and sleep are taken care of, they can focus on meeting their safety needs, including personal safety. While Maslow’s Hierarchy of Basic Needs has five levels to it, Satan skips two levels and jumps straight to the final level of self-actualization. This level is when a person focuses on reaching their full potential. Satan tempted Jesus with this when they were on the mountaintop, and offered him all that he could see, but only if he bowed down and worshiped Satan. Jesus resisted each temptation presented to him by relying on Scripture and what God promised Him. Maslow’s theory was that our behavior is driven by unmet needs. Once we have successfully met the needs of one level, we focus on the next. (The full [Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs](#) chart is located at the back of this devotional.) Just as he did with Jesus, Satan will tempt us as we strive to feel secure at each level. According to Maslow, level three is love and belonging needs, including the sense of belonging to a group. In our desire to be accepted by others, even within our church, Satan may tempt us to espouse viewpoints that sound good but are against God’s word and harmful to others, even possibly leading a person to be vulnerable to human trafficking. Maybe a strong contingent of your church believes that the husband/father’s word, as head of the household, is final. Yes, Ephesians 5:23 calls the husband to be head of the wife, but not as an authoritative leader who is unquestionable. Instead, he is to lead with sacrificial love as Christ leads the church. When we allow the husband so much power, as he is fallible, it can lead to situations like Abraham trafficking Sarah. We may know that the husband should not have so much control, but it can be hard to speak up when you are one of the few, if not only one, who seems to have this viewpoint. You want to find belonging in your church family, and so it can be a temptation not to say anything. But we must resist this temptation to put our sense of belonging before God’s truth. If we honor God’s word and truth, He will provide us with all our needs.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you were able to resist Satan. You relied on God's word and promises to say no to the various needs Satan places before you. Lord, we know that often the temptations we face will lead us to attain our needs through ways you do not approve of. Help us to trust in your promises and word, and you will provide for us.

**Day 6 (Tuesday, the second week of Lent) – Hebrews 4:15-16:** *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence of the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

*Meditation* - The preceding verses to these make it clear that no matter what we do, even our thoughts, intentions, and reasoning for our actions, including succumbing to temptation, are known to God. This, for good reason, can seem scary as we realize we often fail and sin against God and man, even possibly convincing ourselves that we deserve punishment. Maybe we feel we are unworthy to be in His presence. This is when we must remember the verses of today’s meditation. When we are feeling like this, we can take comfort that Jesus, too, had been tempted, and because he has experience with temptation, even though he was able to reject all temptations presented to him, he can sympathize with our trials. Therefore, when we are facing temptations of any kind, we should not fear and run from God. Instead, we are to run to Him, knowing that we can find mercy and grace in our neediest times, since He, too, knows and understands what we are facing. What starts off as fearful for us becomes relief, as we turn to Him to help us resist temptation and sin, knowing that through Him we can not give in. He does not look down on us, nor ridicule us, nor turn us away, because we are tempted, or we have given in to a temptation. No. He sympathizes with us and has compassion on us, bestowing us with mercy and grace

to either fight the temptation or to find forgiveness for giving in. We should find comfort in this. So, when we are tempted to support a politician just because they are a member of our political party, despite knowing they support policies that are harmful to the vulnerable and can enhance human trafficking, we turn to God for the strength to stand in our convictions. When we have given in to our temptation to purchase items we know are made with slave labor because it is easier, we run to Christ for mercy and grace in His forgiveness.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you for the compassion you show on us. While you were tempted and able to resist, you do not hold our failures against us when we do fail, if we run to you. We know that when we are in the midst of sin, it can be difficult to turn to you, but help us to do so. Remind us that it is at your throne that we find mercy and grace, and therefore, no matter what, we should approach it with the confidence that you will bestow both on us.

**Day 7 (Wednesday, the second week of Lent) - Luke 22:39-46:** *And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."*

*Meditation* - Jesus and the disciples were facing two very different levels of temptation here. Jesus knew that he would be arrested and killed soon. One can imagine that he may have been tempted to flee into the wilderness that sat on the edge of the Mount of Olives to save his life. The disciples were told by Jesus (according to Matthew) to keep watch and not fall asleep. Two very different temptations. One may think that it would be easier for the disciples not to give in to their temptation to sleep, but they were the ones who failed. Why? Jesus gave them specific instructions on how to avoid temptation: pray. Yet, it does not seem like they did this, given that he found them asleep multiple times. How often are we like Jesus praying for His help to avoid the larger temptations we face, yet relying on ourselves to resist the smaller temptations as the disciples did? Do we turn to Jesus when we face the temptation of purchasing sex or looking at pornography, but decide we can do it on our own to resist purchasing chocolate made with slave labor? But what happens when we are walking through the store, or standing in the checkout line, and the urge for chocolate hits us? Do we pray, asking for help to resist, or do we just grab one of the bars that is in front of us, not even realizing what we are doing, or thinking one chocolate bar won't hurt? We are much like the disciples at the Mount of Olives when we don't pray and decide we can do it on our own. While it is possible that we may resist the temptation on our own accord, the problem then becomes that then we only rely on ourselves, become prideful, and may think we don't need God at all. Let us not venture down this path, but instead, turn to Jesus when any size of temptation is in front of us to reject it. God will give us the strength to do so.

*Prayer* - Lord, know that you are the one who helps us resist temptation. We may try to do it on our own, and there may be times we succeed, but you, and you alone, are the only one who can help us truly resist any and all temptation that is set before us. Help us to remember this when we face temptation, and help us to turn to you in prayer to resist whatever temptation we are facing. Lord, we know that you can give us the strength to do so.

**Day 8 (Thursday, the second week of Lent) – 1 Peter 4:12-13:** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation.*

*Meditation* - When we are enduring trials, especially those that we are enduring because we are followers of Christ, we will often be tempted to find a way to end the suffering quickly. It can be difficult to hold on to our ethics, morals, and principles when it seems like everyone around us does not adhere to the same standards that we do. It can be difficult to say no to your group of friends while out enjoying a bachelor's party and their desire to go to a strip club or bring a stripper in for viewing. They may call you a "prude" or "vanilla", and argue that it is a part of the bachelor party tradition. Yet, you know that when you watch a stripper perform, you are reducing them to a sexual being, and removing the inherent value that God has given them. Despite this, the temptation to cave to the peer pressure and teasing, can be difficult to endure. Peter reminds us that we should not be surprised that we are enduring any of this, but instead, we are to rejoice, because we are therefore united with Christ and His suffering. This ultimately refers to Christ's suffering on the cross, but He suffered in His daily life as well. He was despised and rejected, especially by the Jewish leadership who did not like, among many things, that He challenged their priorities and who they truly cared for. We should expect the same for us. However, if we do fall to temptation, of ignoring our principles and morals that we hold as followers of Christ to ease the testing we are enduring, we can take heart that we are not alone and then work to do better next time. Let us learn from Peter who was told by Jesus he would deny knowing him three times in the next 24- hours, but Peter was so secure in himself he said he wouldn't. Yet, as we know, Peter did give into his temptation to not be associated with Christ and the fear of what would happen or how those around him would view or react to him. Yet, Peter learned, he repented and he changed. We know this because he loudly proclaimed Christ to others, up until his death on a cross as well. Let us be like Peter later in life. Let us find our confidence to refuse them temptation to deny Christ and how he wants us to live in Christ himself. Let us not despair at the suffering we may endure, but rejoice that as we endure, we are sharing His glory with the world.

*Prayer* - Lord, you know how hard it can be to endure suffering as you endured much during your time on earth. We will never truly understand the level of suffering you endure, but you know that we do suffer, and often in your name. Lord, when we are in the midst of these sufferings, we ask that you help us to endure instead of giving into the temptation to end it earlier or to fit in better with those around us. Help us endure like you did.

**Day 9 (Friday, the second week of Lent) - Matthew 6:9-13:** *"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"*

*Meditation* - Have you ever considered that almost every phrase in the Lord's Prayer, we can use to help us pray to avoid temptation? First, in praying that God's kingdom come, we are asking for God to usher in a time when sin does not reign. Imagine living in a time where we do not have to worry about succumbing to any temptation we may face. Next, we ask for God to provide our daily bread, in other words, our daily provisions and needs. This references more than just the food we need, but all provisions including our spiritual needs. When we rely on what God has provided us, we are less likely to give in to the temptation we face. Then we are to ask God for forgiveness, as His kingdom has not come yet, we will occasionally fail and give in to those temptations we face and sin. Just as God, and others,

show us grace by forgiving us, we must do the same. We move on to the penultimate phrase, the one that truly deals with temptation. Jesus teaches us that part of avoiding temptation is asking God to keep us from it, to protect us from the dangers of temptations as it is easiest not to succumb to temptation if we are never near it to begin with. Yet, we know that there will be times when we will be faced with temptations, and so when we are in the midst of temptation, or worse, give in to it, we need to ask God to deliver us from Satan, the evil one. For example, we may be tempted to think that human trafficking would never happen in our church or schools, and therefore do not need to educate the teachers and leaders of the classes or run background checks on them. Unfortunately, human trafficking occurs in even our most trusted places and sadly, those in charge have been charged and convicted of this crime. We need to not give in to this temptation to not be on guard in these places because Satan will work his hardest to dismantle churches in any way he can to oppose God. We must pray that God protects our churches and us from the temptation of complacency, and we must be diligent in educating those who are working with children on signs of human trafficking and abuse.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are our Father who reigns in heaven. We long for the day when your kingdom does return so we are no longer tempted to sin. We pray that Your will be done here, including us following your Word and resisting temptation. Please give us our needs both physically and spiritually, and let us be content with what you give us. We ask that you forgive us when we do give into the temptations that are set before us, and we ask that we show grace to others who have wronged us the same way you show grace to us when we wrong you. Lord, we ask that you protect us from any and all temptations, but if and when we succumb to them, we ask that you help us to protect us from Satan.

**Day 10 (Saturday, the second week of Lent) - James 1:13-17:** *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God:" for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*

*Meditation* - In the preceding verses James explains that we will endure trials, and those trials are from God to discipline, purify, and strengthen our faith in him. He then continues to warn us that we must be careful not to confuse trials with temptations. God will never tempt us. However, Satan will. He will use our weaknesses to entice us to disobey God. Do we have a desire for wealth? We will be tempted to put our desire to grow our bank account before others. This means we may be tempted to knowingly buy slave-made products to save us some money. Or we may be tempted to oppose policies and proposals that aim to support the needy and poor, as we believe that they do not live in our community as we only see the surface-level and not what is going on behind closed doors, so we do not have to pay more in taxes. James tells us that these temptations themselves are not sinful, it is only when we have acted and given in to the temptations that it becomes sin, and brings forth death. When is it best to stop the temptation? Preferably before it is conceived, but if we do give into temptation, it is easier to stop it right away before it becomes entrenched in our lives. How will we know the difference between a test from God and a temptation? Because God's tests produce fruits of the spirit, and reliance on God, whereas temptations move us further away from Him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you help us identify temptations from Your tests. Help us be on guard against the lusts of our hearts, knowing that Satan will use those desires to tempt us away from you. We know that when we once give in to our temptations it is difficult to stop, and can become entrenched in our lives. And the longer it is there, the harder it will be to stop. Please help us, that if we give into our

temptations, that you help us catch it early on and to reject the temptation. Lord, we know that your tests are good, and will help us grow in You and closer to you. That is what we pray for.

### **Week three of Lent**

#### **Theme – Brokenness**

*Sunday Introduction to Brokenness* - Brokenness is when our self is fractured. We feel damaged and are unable to be who God desires us to be. When we are broken, we are not in the right relationship with God. But what causes this brokenness? It can be from a few different things. First, it can be from sin, whether ours or someone else's. Consider victims of sex trafficking. One of the ways sex traffickers control their victims is by breaking down the victim's self-worth and isolating them. This causes them to feel like the only person they can turn to is the trafficker. In these cases, it is the sins of the trafficker against them that lead to their brokenness. Yet, brokenness may also be the result of the circumstances we are in. Those who are unhoused experience this brokenness because of their circumstances, especially the longer they are without the security of a roof over their head. It can be easy to dismiss this by saying that something they did led them to their circumstances, and while yes, some are there because of drugs, many are there because they had to flee unsafe or abusive living conditions. Their circumstances led to their brokenness. Yet, just because a person feels broken does not mean that they are sinning, and it does not mean that they will always be broken. No. Jesus saves us from brokenness. He is the only one who can truly heal us when we are broken. In His healing us, He brings us closer to Him.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we have all experienced brokenness. Whether it be our sin, sin committed against us, or the circumstances we are in, when we are dealing with brokenness, it feels like there is no way we can be healed and put back together. Lord, we know that is not the case, though. Help us see and understand that only you can truly heal us when we are broken. We pray for every victim of human trafficking who feels broken. Be with them. Lift them up, heal their mind, heart, body, and soul. Let them draw near to you and find rest. We also ask that those who are experiencing housing issues find a safe and secure place to live.

***Day 11 (Monday, the third week of Lent) – Psalm 34:18-22: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.***

*Meditation* - David, the author of this psalm, knew what brokenness was, especially when he wrote this song. He was on the run for his life from Saul. He tried to find safety and refuge in the Philistine city of Gath, but only escaped by feigning madness. When he wrote this psalm, he was hiding in a cave with other desperate men. The despair he must of felt, not knowing if he would be able to go home again. If he would ever be safe again. His spirit was broken, as shown in the psalm. What did he do when he was broken though? Did he wallow in his despair and believe that there was no hope for he and his men? Maybe for a moment. But we do know that he turned to God, and reminded himself (and his men) of God's faithfulness to those who are faithful. He will deliver them out of their despair. David acknowledges, with the phrase "redeems the soul of His servants...none will be condemned" that there is a possibility that how God will deliver a person from their brokenness is to reunite their soul with Him through death. Whether God's delivery for the brokenhearted and afflicted is on this earth, or us being

reunited with Him in heaven, He won't just deliver us, but he will restore us: "He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken." This is all of our hope who take refuge in God. Those who do not though, those who do evil will be brought to justice and condemned. Those are two very different options for us: condemnation or restoration. So, like David did, when we are broken, when we are afflicted, when we are struggling with fears like where our next paycheck will come from and are concerned what you may have to do to make ends meet, we find refuge in God, trusting that he will rescue us from our despair, and one day we will find complete restoration in him.

*Prayer* - Lord, when we are in despair, when we are anxious, when we do not know how we are going to make it through our current struggles, help us find refuge in you. Let us find rest and restoration in your healing arms until you determine to deliver us from the brokenness we are in.

**Day 12 (Tuesday, the third week of Lent) - 1 Peter 5:8-11:** *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

*Meditation* - Peter warns us that we must be vigilant, alert, and clear-headed to the workings of the devil, for he is constantly prowling and searching for his next victim to devour. He uses many means and methods, but one of them is to break us down, making us think that we are in this alone, and no one else knows, or could even understand, what we are going through. The more isolated we are, the easier it is for us to become mired in our brokenness, allowing Satan to devour us, robbing us of our Christian effectiveness and witness. While Satan makes us think that we are alone in our sin and brokenness, Peter reminds us that we are not, that many others are experiencing suffering because of Satan's prowling. We are stronger when we are together than when we are isolated. Satan may not attack us with the same temptations, sin, and isolation, as other believers, but our brokenness is not unique to us alone. And if we share our brokenness with each other, not only does it make us stronger, but it also eases our burdens. It is a difficult thing to do, to share our hurts and pains with others. To share that we are suffering because we know that Satan has lured us into sinning by becoming complacent in the fight against human trafficking, telling that our efforts are having no effect, we are in this alone, so we should just stop our efforts. That is Satan's ploy. However, while we may never see the impact of each thing we do, know that it does, and if we share our brokenness with others, we will find that others are enduring the same brokenness. Then, possibly our brokenness will be lessened.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that Satan is always around, looking and trying to find a way to prey on us, to separate us from you and get us mired in sin and brokenness. While intellectually we know the more isolated we are, the easier it is for him to devour us, we still fall victim to his lies. Lord, help us be alert and clear-headed. Help us remember that Satan is not attacking only us, but each one of Your children is suffering from brokenness. Let us come together to strengthen each other, share with each other, and comfort each other. We know that this suffering is just for a short time, but a day will come when you will call us to glory with you.

**Day 13 (Wednesday, the third week of Lent) – Isaiah 57:15-21:** *For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit. In order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breath of those whom I have made. Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, and he went on turning away, in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far to him who is near,” says the Lord, “and I will heal him.” But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. “There is no peace,” says my God, “for the wicked.”*

*Meditation* - God tells us that he lives in a high and holy place, a place that we cannot reach on our own because of our rebellion and sin. Yet, despite this, He is also with those who are contrite and low of spirit, those who are broken. Why are they contrite and broken though? Isaiah, in the preceding verses, details all the sins the people of Israel have committed recently including practicing sexual fertility rites, child sacrifice, and varied forms of idolatry. Yet, there will come a time when some of these individuals will realize that their actions are defying God, they will be broken by what they have done. Yes, God will for a time be angry with them for rebelling against Him, but He will not be that way forever. He will heal those who are contrite and broken, restoring and comforting them, healing them, giving them peace. And when they enjoy this peace, healing, and restoration, they will praise Him. Those, though, that refuse to realize that they are sinning against God, those who continue in their wickedness, will never experience true peace. When we realize that we have been sinning against God, defying Him in how He wants us to live, it can break us. We may believe that we are not worthy of healing for what we have done. Let us remember though, if God can forgive, heal, and bring peace to the individuals who committed child sacrifice and idolatry, he can do the same for us no matter what we have done. Are we broken because for years you have said to women and girls who share their stories of harassment from men with “boys will be boys,” “that’s just how boys show their interest,” “what did you expect with how you were dressed?” and now realize that those statements were not only diminishing the woman’s experience and feelings, but also continuing the problem? God will bring you healing, restoration, and peace from our brokenness when you turn to Him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are often proud people who are set in our wickedness and ways. But we know in some capacity that we are wrong. Not only are we hurting you, but we are hurting ourselves. Show us our sins. Break us, and in our brokenness bring us back to you. For only in you can we find healing, restoration, and peace. Your peace. Shalom. Please give each one of us that.

**Day 14 (Thursday, the third week of Lent) – Psalm 147:2-3:** *“The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”*

*Meditation* - Psalm 147 is the last of the praise psalms. Four times during the psalm it tells us that we are to praise God, and the many reasons to praise him. We are to praise him because he heals the community, and the physical. Jerusalem was systematically destroyed by the Babylonians, the people of Israel were exiled. They had little to no hope or feeling of belonging or sense of security. Yet, God, using a variety of people from Nehemiah and Ezra to Persian Kings ensured the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt. A place that offered security and safety to His people: the outcasts. Israel had literally been cast out from their city upon its destruction, but now He provided them with a safe place to be near Him. We are also to praise him because he heals their individual and spiritual needs. As mentioned in the introduction, one can be brokenhearted because of the sins they have committed or their circumstances. Whatever

the reason an individual is broken, there are wounds. They can be physical, emotional, and always spiritual. To us, it may seem impossible that these wounds could ever be healed, but God can, and will heal them. He can bind up and heal the emotional wounds we may have from our youth when others may have ridiculed, bullied, or taunted us. He can bind up and heal the spiritual wounds we may have that now has treat others similarly, hurting them as we were once hurt, leading them to think that is what love looks like, or find false love that hurts them in a variety of ways now. We should praise the Lord because He did that for Israel, and He does it for us today.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you so much that you gather the outcasts to you, as each person has been an outcast in some way, whether we realize it not. Lord, we ask that you heal our broken spirit from hurting You and from hurting others. Please heal our wounds, the physical, emotional, and spiritual, that are not only hurting us, but may be causing us to hurt those around us. We praise you that you can do this, and do it fully so that we find complete and total restoration in You.

**Day 15 (Friday, the third week of Lent) – Matthew 5:3-12:** *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way that they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

*Meditation* - How often when we read the Beatitudes that we focus on the end? Blessed are the pure of heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for the sake of righteousness. But do we focus on the first couple? Blessed are the poor in spirit and blessed are those who mourn? Do we ever truly consider that they are blessed? What does blessed even mean? The Greek word for blessed is Makarios meaning happy or well-off. And yes, it does mean happy and well-off, but it is not alluding to the physical world, but it is deeper, much deeper. It speaks to the Kingdom of God, as we see in verse 3. Those who are poor in spirit, those who are broken, depressed, in need are blessed. To us it seems counterintuitive that those who are suffering in this way can be blessed. And most likely, when we are in this state it does not seem like blessings are anywhere near us. Yet, when we are in need is the time when we can be the most open to feeling God’s presence and His mercy in our lives. To understanding how much we need Him, and how He is the only one who can truly heal our hurts. When we mourn, whether it be from a loss or from truly understanding how our sin affects our lives, we can run to God and find comfort. God’s comfort is a blessing and it is healing. It heals our hurts, our sorrows, our pains in a way that nothing on earth ever will. So when we are broken and mourn because we realize we have hurt ourself, others, and God by viewing others purely as sexual objects instead of the person God made them to be with inherent value and dignity, we can find comfort in God’s arms and know that His blessing is on us, and that we can feel it, including in His care for us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that your blessings and comfort are on the most needy and hurt, the ones who are poor in spirit and mourn. We know that when we are at our lowest, it can be the point where we not only need your blessing the most, but we can truly feel your blessings on us and understand it better. Lord, we ask that you help us be open to understanding of how you are not only blessing us and our lives, as well grow us closer to you. Help us feel your comfort and care for us.

**Day 16 (Saturday, the third week of Lent) – Revelation 21:4:** *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will be no longer any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.*

*Meditation* - Yesterday we saw that God blesses those who mourn, for they will find comfort. Today, we see the fulfillment of that comfort. For there will come a day when our pain, brokenness, and mourning will have passed. Every tear will be wiped away with care. Most importantly, there will be no more death. And not just death of the physical body, but more importantly, spiritual death will end. Sin will be no more. The pain that has been done to us by others and the pain we have caused others by our sins will be healed. The pain that we may have experienced from someone judging us, and the pain we have caused others by us judging them. Whether it is because of how we dress, our jobs, how we look, our wealth (or lack thereof), our education, or whatever we have been judged for or have judged others for, the pain will have passed. We will experience Shalom, full peace and restoration. A comfort that we cannot truly know in this lifetime. If we have faith in God, our brokenness will not be for eternity.

*Prayer* - Lord, we praise you that in you we can find comfort and healing. That you will take away our pain and mourning. And because of Jesus, there will be a day when there will be no more death, physical or spiritual. We long for the day when we will truly experience this comfort, healing, and shalom in you. Until then Lord, we ask that you provide us healing and comfort in a way that will allow us to show others your care and comfort, helping to mend their brokenness until you can fully heal it.

## **Week Four of Lent**

### **Theme - Darkness**

*Sunday introduction to darkness* - Typically, when darkness is spoken about in the Bible, it is used symbolically. God is referred to as the light, so darkness is the antithesis of that; it is the anti-God. It represents sin, temptation, death, and the final judgment. When we have fallen away from God, we have fallen into darkness. And it is when we are in the darkness that we find it easy to ignore our sins and justify our behaviors, as we do not see them as we should. The longer that we are in the darkness, the easier it becomes to ignore our sins and justify our behaviors. As Christians, we need to realize that being believers does not mean that we are not susceptible to falling into darkness ourselves. Let us consider how we treat others who have sinned, especially sins that we consider worse than others. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that approximately 26% of LGBTQ adolescents are rejected by their families and kicked out of their homes. When this happens, they are more susceptible to becoming victims of human trafficking. Instead of rejecting the vulnerable and sending them into a more precarious situation, we need to consider the words of Jesus in John 8:7. When the Pharisees brought the adulterous woman to Jesus for condemnation, Jesus responded by saying, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." We are all sinful beings and have our own sins we are struggling with; therefore, we need to be careful when we are dealing with another person's sin. If our response to the person sinning is done in the wrong manner, we, too, may be guilty of sin. Unfortunately, though, we may not see it as sin, just as the Pharisees did not see their actions as sinful, because we are acting in what we believe is righteousness. The more we are deceived by this, the farther into darkness we may fall.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you, our ever-present light, keep the darkness at bay. We pray that you do not let the darkness encroach on us. We know, though, that at times we will find ourselves amid the shadows. Help us so we don't think that living in the darkness is a comfortable thing

and leads us to ignore our sins. Lord, we ask that if we do find ourselves headed into the darkness, you send us your light. Let this be through a friend, your word, a sermon, a podcast, or any other way you choose to illuminate our paths for us.

**Day 17 (Monday, the fourth week of Lent) – 1 John 1:5-7:** *This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

*Meditation* - John makes it clear that what he is saying comes from Christ himself: God is light. Darkness cannot exist in the light, and there is not darkness in Him. If, then we are followers of Christ who are to be in fellowship with God, but walk in darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. Notice that John says “walk in the darkness.” He is not talking about our occasional succumbing to temptation, but he is focused on our pattern of living. If we live in a manner that is not consistent with how God wants us to live, we are walking in darkness. What does this possibly look like? When we do not care for the poor, the vulnerable, the orphan, or the widow, as instructed many times throughout the Bible, we are walking in darkness. How might we be doing this? Like the Pharisees, we may performatively give some of our money to the church and charities in an outward show of righteousness, yet we neglect Biblical justice, mercy, and righteousness. We focus more on condemning sins loudly and wanting punishment for the wrong doing, but ignore that God’s justice is also restorative for the oppressed, poor, and vulnerable. This means that yes, we should be generous with our money, but we must also treat each person regardless of race, gender, identity, economic status, nationality, or any other social category as equal, as Jesus did. It also means that we should advocate for the poor and the oppressed, including giving to them and empowering them. When we walk in darkness, we are not in fellowship with Christ, and we are not practicing the truth, nor displaying the truth to thers. However, if we follow Jesus, walk continually in His light, it allows us to not only have true fellowship with him, but with each other as well.

*Prayer* - Lord, help us to avoid walking the darkness where we are not being obedient to Your word, and not in fellowship with you and other believers properly. We thank you that you are cleansing us of our sins, allowing us to be in fellowship with you as we are in your light.

**Day 18 (Tuesday, the fourth week of Lent) – Ephesians 5:8-13:** *For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret, but all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.*

*Meditation* - Darkness is what we choose because we do not wish for our sins to be exposed. But You do not want us to be in the darkness, you want us to be saints of the Light and you did this by sacrificing your blood on the cross. Once we have become children of the light, we need to reflect this light to others by reflecting all God’s goodness, righteousness, and truth to others. We are to learn what pleases God and what is a deed of the darkness. And we are not only to avoid these actions of disobedience, but we should expose them when we find them. Therefore, once we accept the truth and reality of both fast fashion and unethically sourced chocolate, we need to educate our friends and family about these issues and how our shopping can make a positive impact on a person’s life. If we find ourselves in a situation where we need to expose another’s sins, we do need to be careful about how this is done, for we are still

children of God and must do this in a loving and Godly way. Whether we expose these disobediences or not, they will one day be exposed as God is light and all things will become visible in His time.

*Prayer* - Lord, thank you for providing us with your Word where we can learn what you say is right, true, and just. Lord, we ask that as children of your light, you help us first, to understand exactly what is right, true, and just. Help us to be a reflection of your light to others around us to help them understand what being a child of the light means, and how they too want to be a child of the light. Lord, when we see actions of disobedience, please help us to expose them. But help us do it in a loving way that best reflects your love and your light Lord.

**Day 19 (Wednesday, the fourth week of Lent) – John 3:19-21:** *This is the judgement, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.*

*Meditation* - Light and darkness cannot exist at the same time. It is just not possible. Light will always overcome the darkness and expose what was hiding in the shadows. Jesus is our light. He exposes our hearts, minds, actions, and motivations for what they really are. That is a scary thought. For God to expose to our own minds and hearts, let alone others, that we have been knowingly complicit in human trafficking by buying the cheaper chocolate despite reading all the reports showing that it uses child and slave labor. And we continue to do it time after time despite knowing this because doing research into ethically sourced chocolate may take too much of our time, we don't want to spend our money on more expensive chocolate, and what does it matter? We know that our actions are making us complicit in the use of child labor, which is a sin. So we hide this and play ignorant because we do not want this to be exposed to ourselves especially, but to others as well. But we know that once it is revealed to the light, making the change will have a positive impact not only on us but also on the children on the cocoa farms.

*Prayer* - Lord, we pray that we do not flee from the light. We understand how and why people would want to flee from your light because it is scary to know that the truth is exposed. To know the hows and whys of our actions and motivations is daunting. And having that exposed to us, let alone others, and you Lord, is a terrifying prospect. But Lord, we ask that you help us come into your light and not flee into the darkness. We ask that we embrace your light because while our sins may be exposed, we also realize that is where we will find your truth, love, grace, and mercy.

**Day 20 (Thursday, the fourth week of Lent) – John 8:12:** *Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness but will have the Light of life."*

*Meditation* - Jesus clearly states who he is in this verse. He is the "I am" and by stating this is saying that He is one with God. He goes on to say that He is the Light of the world. He alone is the one that illuminates the world from the darkness. No one else but Him can be the light for the world. In order to enjoy this light, we need to follow him. And by following Him, it means that we will no longer walk in darkness, but instead, He will give us the Light of life. This light shines brightly to show us the way so we do not stumble, and we can avoid those sins that have tempted and plagued our lives. And this should also serve as an enticement to others as well. That by following Jesus, we will have life with Him. Not just life on this earth, but eternal life where we will find redemption and full restoration.

*Prayer* - Jesus, we are so thankful that you are the “I am.” That you are one with God. We are so thankful that you are the Light of the world. That there is no other one but you. That all we need to do is seek you out and follow you. And when we do that, you save us from darkness, bringing us into the light. And by being in the light we will have the Light of life. We have eternal life, and most importantly, we have you.

**Day 21 (Friday, the fourth week of Lent) – Proverbs 4:18-19:** *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; that do not know over what they stumble.*

*Meditation* - Yesterday we saw that Jesus is the light. Today, we see that as His followers our path is one of light as well. By having this light, we can see what sin may be a stumbling block to us, helping us to avoid it. And we should pray that His light should shine on those all others and be a beacon to others. Especially to those who are not followers of Jesus. Because in their current state, they do not see what is causing them to stumble. They are in the dark. And while in the dark, they justify and rationalize all their sins because they do not truly understand what is causing them to stumble. But we can help educate them. When in a discussion with a friend and they mention that they have purchased an item from a store that practices “fast fashion” and then more than likely uses child labor, we can lovingly enlighten them to that fact. Most, just see a cheap price on clothing and do not think about what causes it to be so cheap.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask that you keep us in the light. We ask that you illuminate our ways so that we can see anything that may cause us to sin, Lord. We ask that we do not get caught in the darkness where we do not understand what causes us to stumble, Lord. And we ask that our light shines bright enough that it can shine a light on those who are in darkness so that we can begin to understand what is causing them to stumble.

**Day 22 (Saturday, the fourth week of Lent) – Psalm 23:** *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff comfort me. you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

*Meditation* - David, most likely the author of this Psalm, knew exactly what a shepherd did and provided for his flock as he spent his youth doing the same. The shepherd did not just provide food and water for his sheep, but he had to make sure that the paths he led them on to the fields were safe. He had to protect the sheep from predators. He had to make sure that the flock knew that they were safe otherwise they would wander off into possible danger. The same is true of the Lord for us. He is our shepherd. He is the one who provides for us: our food, our water, our shelter, our safety. He has given us His word to help guide our lives to live righteously. He has given us examples of Godly and righteous men and women to help show us how to live our lives in a Godly and righteous way. He has given us these things because we will spend a good amount of our lives in the valley, surrounded by darkness and searching for the light to lead our way out to safety. Satan uses that darkness to tempt us to stray from the path that we are on, the path of righteousness. He will convince us that what we do when we are alone is fine, so go ahead and look at that pornography as it harms no one. But the reality is that when we watch porn it distorts our view of sex, and we no longer view those individuals with dignity that God wants us to view all people with. Or maybe Satan will convince us that no one in our church would do

something as heinous as trafficking children, so we don't need to have training for our children's church staff to educate them on signs of what to look for. The sad reality is that traffickers and abusers can be found every place, even in the church and we all need to pay attention and know what signs to look for, and most importantly how to respond properly when we suspect something. But even while we are in this valley, surrounded by darkness, fearing that we may succumb to temptation and sin, we do not need to fear for the Lord is with us. He does not leave us, even when it feels like He is not there. No, He will guide us back to the light. And He gives us His rod and staff, His judgment and mercy, to provide us comfort. We have the assured hope that no matter how many valleys we must traverse, His goodness and lovingkindness will be with us all of our lives.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are our shepherd. Thank you for providing our food, shelter, and safety. We know that there will be times when our life will not seem to be full of your lovingkindness and goodness. There will be times when the darkness encroaches on us as we are passing through a valley. We know that sometimes the journey through the darkness will be quick, but some will be a long time. And Lord, we know that while we are in the valleys our nature will be to be afraid. Afraid that we will stray from the path we are on. Afraid that Satan will tempt us to sin, harming ourselves, our relationship with You, and harming others. Lord, we ask that when we are in these valleys, fearing for our lives, metaphorically and possibly literally, that you make your presence known to us. Help us remember that you are our guide, our shepherd. That we can rely on you, your word, and the example of Your people, to help us navigate the valleys successfully. Lord, but even if we fail, we thank you that you provide us comfort through your judgment, your rod, and your mercy, your staff. Please be our shepherd.

## **Week Five of Lent**

### **Theme - Grace**

*Sunday introduction to the theme* - The fourth Sunday of the Lent season is called Laetare. Laetare means to rejoice, and it comes from the Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic traditions, where at the opening of the Mass, Isaiah 66:10 is read. The first word of the verse in Latin is Laetare. This Sunday marks a change in the focus of Lent. You will notice that in the previous weeks, the themes have been more sorrowful and focused on the problems of the world: sin, temptation, brokenness, and darkness. These will always exist in the world. And if there were no way to overcome these problems, it would be depressing. But we know that Jesus came to overcome these things. And so, with that, we look forward and our themes turn hopeful. This week, we will examine grace. Grace has two meanings in the bible. First, in its simplest form, it is an undeserved favor. There is no action that we can take to save ourselves, but it is God's grace for us that has provided us a way to be saved, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Grace, though, is also an attribute and characteristic of God, which provides us with practical means to persevere in times of need. This week, we will try to understand how we need both. We will see our need for grace in God's redemption of us, and we need his grace to persevere. God's grace is limitless, and we must rely on it each day. And not just rely on it, but draw from it, for it is His grace that helps us to resist temptation and say no to sin. It is His grace that gives us the confidence to face opposition and speak up when we see evil and wrongdoing. This includes drawing on His grace to inform our friends that their actions may be contributing to human trafficking. This includes using His grace to inform them that their intolerance towards individuals or groups is wrong, harmful, and may contribute to their becoming a victim of human trafficking.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we are grateful that you are a gracious God. We realize that we have done nothing, and can do nothing, to deserve your grace. Yet, you bestow it on us daily. Lord, we ask that we receive

your grace, empowering us to help us resist temptations, to stand for what is right, and to help us understand what You want us to do.

**Day 23 (Monday, the fifth week of Lent) – Titus 2:11-14:** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*

*Meditation* - It is God's grace that all people may receive salvation. It is not something that you must work for or attain, but something that is given to you and you receive it. It is this grace that instructs us deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and instead to live sensibly, righteously, and godly. What does Paul mean by living sensibly, righteously, and godly? It is inward living as we are to be sensible and live with self-control. It is an outward living as we live righteously and rightly towards and with all other people. It is a spiritual right living as we live for God, in awe, respect, and fear of Him. How does God's grace instruct us to do this? It is much like a parent teaches a child through teaching, encouragement, correction, and discipline. His grace Has provided us the materials to learn how He wants us to live including studying His Word, learning from others, and being in fellowship and discipleship with other believers. It is His grace that teaches us each person is created in His image and therefore has inherent value and dignity, therefore no matter their race, gender, religion, socio-economic status, job, education, or any other social grouping/identification, must be treating with respect and love. It is His grace that teaches us that when we fail at this, when we treat someone as purely a sexual object (viewing pornography or going to a strip club), when we do not respect an individual because of their race, religion, or any other identification, we are to not repent, just as David did when Nathaniel confronted him about compelling Bathsheba to come to him. It is by His grace that we are daily to live sensibly, righteously, and godly lives while at the same time looking forward to the hope of Christ's return, in which we are able to enjoy as he redeemed us from every sin and lawless deed we committed, purifying us to be His.

*Prayer* - Lord, first, we thank you for the gift of salvation that you have offered to us, and we have received. We also thank you for your grace, which not only teaches us on how to live sensibly, righteously, and godly lives, but also corrects us when we do fail prey to ungodliness and worldly desires. We ack that your grace continue to instruct us, helping us to live daily sa you want us to live, but also looking forward to the hope we have to be in your glory one day thanks to Jesus redeeming us.

**Day 24 (Tuesday, the fifth week of Lent) – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10:** *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

*Meditation* - Paul was doing the good work and had gained great notoriety as a follower of Christ that could have easily allowed him to become boastful in the wrong things and conceited. Just as with Job, God allowed Satan to torment Paul, giving him a "thorn in his flesh," as Paul mentions in the preceding verses. What this thorn was, we don't know. It has been speculated that it was a physical ailment that could be seen by all, but some also say that it was the constant persecution he faced. It is not important what exactly the "thorn" was but how Paul responded to this daily issue. Paul does not say that he just prayed but that he pleaded with God to take this suffering from him. The term "three times" does not mean that he only prayed three times, but multiple times. Despite Paul asking God for his suffering to be removed, God responded by saying no. Why? Because God's "grace is sufficient" and His "power is made

perfect in weakness.” It is through God’s grace we can endure suffering we can face, and it is by relying on God to endure our weaknesses that God’s power is displayed. Like Paul we all have thorns. We all face insults, hardships, and persecutions. Perhaps you have been called a controlling and untrusting parent when you have said that you have parental controls and location-sharing on your children’s phones and computers. Or maybe you were ostracized at church because you supported a person who accused a respected, maybe even a leader in the church, of harassment, assault or exploitation. We may be tempted to change what we are doing when others attack, insult, or accuse us but we must be like Paul. We must pray and plead with God to ease and remove these hardships from our lives, but we need to also rely on God’s grace to endure for God’s power to be displayed to ourselves and others.

*Prayer* - Lord, we fervently seek and implore for the removal of any thorn that may afflict us. While we wait for your answer, and especially if your answer is no, it will not be removed, help us to rely on Your grace as we do know it is sufficient. Thank you for the example of Paul to help us remind us that it is. We pray that as we endure these sufferings and hardships that Your power is displayed. We ask that it is an example to others and they wish to be surrounded by this grace and power.

***Day 25 (Wednesday, the fifth week of Lent) – Isaiah 30:18: Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him.***

*Meditation* - There is a saying that says “Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don’t deserve.” The phrase puts justice and mercy as antithesis of each other. But Isaiah says differently. God is a just God. Being just is a part of His character and He can never be unjust. Therefore, everything He does is just and right. This means that His grace and mercy to us is part of His justice to us. We must be careful though to think that just because mercy and grace are a part of the Lord being just, does not mean He will not discipline as necessary. The Bible is full of stories of His discipline. Adam, Abraham, and David all experienced His discipline for their sins. But these individuals also experienced His grace and mercy, even in His discipline. We must remember this when we are deserving of the discipline part of His justice. When we have disregarded the vulnerable, maybe by treating refugees, asylees and migrants, as less than, and unworthy of having a stable job or home in a safe environment. God’s discipline may happen shortly after our disobedience, as happened with Adam and being evicted from the Garden of Eden. Or it can take longer, as happened with David. He will discipline us. Yet, He longs to show us grace and mercy, but to do that we must be an active participant in it as well. We, like Adam, Abraham, and David, must accept His discipline is right and just, and we must do the same. And, like Adam, Abraham, and David, we must also wait on Him. Trust in Him. For when we wait on the Lord, that is when we will truly experience His mercy and grace.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are a just God. We understand that you take no joy in disciplining us, but you do it for our good. We ask that you help us live according to your will and ways, so that you do not need to discipline us. But we are thankful that mercy and grace is also a part of your just ways. We thank you that you do bestow those on us each day. Help us to wait on you, and trust you, so that we can be a full recipient of Your mercy and grace.

**Day 26 (Thursday, the fifth week of Lent) – Ephesians 2:4-9:** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*Meditation* - Here we are told that prior to accepting God, we are living as those who are dead. We are dead spiritually because as it says in Romans 6:23 “the wages of sin is death...” What is interesting about what Paul writes to the Ephesians is that he says that we are dead in both our “trespasses and sins.” The Greek words used are *paraptoma* and *hamartia* which cover both intentional sins, as well as mistakes and errors. Paul tells us that there are three things that we will continually fight against: the world (“walked according to the course of this world”), the flesh (“we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh”), and the devil (“according to the prince of the power of the air”). We see this fight daily for example in sex trafficking as we are told that prostitution should be legalized (the world), our desire to appease our lusts through pornography (the flesh), and telling ourselves that we can’t do anything to fight human trafficking (the devil). While we were once dead, thanks to God’s mercy and grace, we have been made alive in Christ. We will one day be raised up to be seated next to Christ in heaven overcoming death, but only if we accept Jesus as our savior.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for your mercy and your grace. We know that we do not deserve it, yet you have bestowed it on us. Lord, we know that our sins separate us from you, so much so that we were dead in our sins. Lord, we ask that you help protect us from the world, the flesh, and the devil. They are constantly trying to get us to sin, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Lord, we ask that you help protect us from the prince of the air who wants us to follow him. Lord, let us constantly seek your face. We are so thankful that you made us alive in You and we look forward to sitting with you in heaven.

**Day 27 (Friday, the fifth week of Lent) – Romans 5:12-21:** *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned - for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ.*

*Meditation* - Just as we inherited various things from our biological parents, like eye and hair color, we also inherited from Adam, the father of the human race. Unfortunately what we inherited from Adam is sin and death. When Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, the sin they

committed affected not only them but all of us. Sadly, no matter how hard each of us tries to stop the infection of sin, we can't. There may even be times when we think we are doing the right thing, but we are sinning. We think we may be doing the right thing by volunteering at our local homeless shelter, but if we treat the individuals who need that shelter as lesser and beneath us, and not getting to know the individuals who need the shelter, we are sinning. When we refuse to help someone in need because we do not agree with their identification (such as LGBTQ+), we are sinning. It seems so hopeless if this was the end of everything. But it isn't. Because while one man, Adam, brought condemnation to us all, one man, Jesus Christ, brought righteousness and justification of life to us all. Through His obedience to the Law and to God, and by giving Himself about as a sacrifice for our atonement, we can find eternal life through Him. No matter the sin we have committed, each person can find and experience this grace of eternal life.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that sin and death entered the world through Adam. Due to his actions, we cannot avoid sinning ourselves, no matter how hard we try. And due to the sins that have entered the world and our sins, we will face judgment. We realize that the death of our bodies is part of your judgment of this world. If we only focused on that, we know everything would be depressing and hopeless. But Lord, you are full of grace. You provided a way for us to receive eternal life. Thank you, Lord, for sending Jesus Christ to this world, so that he was able to obey the Law. That he was willing to be our atonement so that we can be justified and receive eternal life.

***Day 28 (Saturday, the fifth week of Lent) – Psalm 103:8: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.***

*Meditation* - In times of sin, sorrow, and pain, it can be difficult to remember that the Lord is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness. Yet, those are the times we need to focus on it the most. That is why individuals from Moses to Nehemiah to David repeated it. In David's stating of it though, he takes time to remind himself of how God shows this to individuals and communities. Instead of dealing with us according to our sins, he has pardoned them and removed them far from us. He heals our bodies and our minds. He provides our needs for us. He has redeemed us from death. He provides justice to the oppressed. David has seen each one of these things accomplished in his life. And we have as well. We must be thankful that when we have sinned by buying clothing made by slave labor, that God does not punish each and every time we do it, that his anger is slow, and he is compassionate and gracious to us to let us repent and change our buying habits. As we struggle with sin, pain, and sorrow, let us focus on the good things that God has done for us. Let us remember that it is because he is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness that we can praise the Lord, and He can renew us.

*Prayer* - Lord, we bless you that you are compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness. We thank you that each and every day we are benefactors of your goodness. We know that when we sin, you could show your anger to us and give us proper punishment, but we ask that you do not. Please help us to see the error of our ways, and remove our transgressions from us. Help us to fully repent of our sins because you are a gracious God who longs to redeem our lives from death.

## Week six of Lent

### Theme - Repentance

*Sunday introduction to the theme* – Repentance is not only leaving behind what God prohibited and returning to Him, but it is coming to God and confessing our sins and seeking forgiveness for those sins. Jesus began His public ministry, as recorded by both Matthew and Mark, by calling people to “repent.” This shows that repentance is a key part of the Christian faith. Repenting of our sins brings us back into a proper relationship with God. One of the church Fathers tells us that “a sign of true repentance is that, in the midst of sadness and regret, it carries inner peace of the soul.” What this means is that when we realize we have done something wrong, for example, buying the latest cell phone model each year despite knowing that slave labor is used to mine the materials for the batteries in them, it is not enough to ask God for the forgiveness of our sins. It means we must also change our habits and put off buying those new electronic products (anything that uses lithium batteries), like cell phones, for a few years until it is needed.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you not only allow us to repent for sins, but you desire that we do so. We ask that, as we go through the study this week, you help to make those sins that we have been harboring clear to us, and that we seek your repentance for our sins. Lord, we are so thankful that we do not need to do any action in penance for our sins, but we only need to turn away from our sins, confess them, and return to you. Lord, we ask that as we repent of our sins, it will bring us closer to you. And we ask that when we repent of our sins, it is a true repentance that will bring inner peace to our souls.

**Day 29 (Monday, the sixth week of Lent) – Psalm 51:1-4:** *Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.*

*Meditation* - This psalm is an example of knowing the context to help us relate to what David wrote. We tend to think of David as a servant of God, one who was always faithful. But we know that is not true. David gave in to his lustful desires for a woman, Bathsheba, who he sees on a rooftop, and has her brought over to his palace. Like David, we too may succumb to our lustful desires by either looking at pornography or paying for sex making us feel broken and separate from God. Especially if we are confronted with our sin, like the prophet Nathan confronted David, we, like David, need to acknowledge that this is a great sin that’s caused a great separation between us and God. Like David, we too are broken spiritually and emotionally as we are separated from God and seek to restore our relationship with Him. David realizes that once he is purified, his relationship with God will be restored. This restoration will lead to a renewed steadfast spirit, returning to God’s presence, the Holy Spirit returning to him, and a renewed joy of God’s salvation. We too should seek the same. Once healed from this brokenness, one cannot help but joyfully share with others about God’s salvation and righteousness.

*Prayer* - Lord, we first pray that you help us to remember that the only person that ever lived on this earth that was perfect was Jesus Christ. Help us to remember that those who we call “heroes of the

faith” all sinned, but also let us recall that those sins did not define their lives. Lord, help us to remember that when our own sins leave us broken and separated from You. Lord, when we sin, help us to recollect that it separates us from You. Help us to think of that when we are alienated from You; it leaves us broken. But Lord, when we come to you in repentance and You cleanse us of our sins, You renew a steadfast spirit in us; Your presence returns to us; Your joy overwhelms us so much that we must sing and tell others about Your salvation. Lord, help us to consider all of this when we are tempted to sin, and help us to reject that sin, so we are not broken and separated from You.

**Day 30 (Tuesday, the sixth week of Lent) – 2 Chronicles 7:14:** *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

*Meditation* - While God spoke these words to Solomon in a dream after he consecrated the temple, they ring true for us to today, as well. Instead of reading this as the physical land being healed, we can understand this in light of what we explored yesterday, how we as followers of Christ are members of his kingdom. The “land” that God needs to heal is ourselves, because everytime we sin we are hurting ourselves in some way. There may be a physical or emotional element to this hurt. No matter what though we suffer a spiritual hurting, as we separate ourselves from God and mar our relationship with him. True healing of our spiritual pain can only come from God. For that to happen we must first humble ourselves, admitting to God that we thought we knew better than Him and His ways, yet we were wrong. Next, we must seek God’s face. When we seek His face we are actively wanting God’s presence in our lives. When He is actively present in our lives, we then reflect that change He has made in us, and reject the sins we were committing. As we grow closer to God, we are healed spiritually. How many times have we heard someone, or maybe we ourselves have justified what we are doing because it doesn’t hurt anyone, so it is ok. Maybe it was justifying looking at pornography of any kind, with the justification that it doesn’t hurt anyone. We may not be physically or emotionally harming another person, but we are harming ourselves. Yet, even if the person who is in the pictures or video is doing it of their own volition, you are violating God’s word, as we are not to lust over a person who we are not in a relationship with or covet another person. In addition, we have removed all dignity and value from the person in the clip and view them as only good for sex. And the more we watch pornography, the more it distorts our view of sex. In doing this, we have harmed God’s “land” and we need healing. And we can find that healing when we seek God’s face, and repent of our previous ways.

*Prayer* - Lord, we recognize that we are constantly hurting our relationship with you. Whether it is because we judge them for their actions, we discount their needs, or we view them only as a sexual being, we have hurt ourselves spiritually because we have removed ourselves from you. Help us to seek your face. Be present in our lives. And when you are present it will help us to reject our sinful ways. Restore our relationship with you, and heal us spiritually.

**Day 31 (Wednesday, the sixth week of Lent) – Acts 17:29-31:** *Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man’s design and skill. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.*

*Meditation* - Paul is telling us that the Divine Nature of God cannot be made or represented in any form made by man. It does not matter what the image or idol is made from – stone, silver, or gold – there is no creation of man that can truly and accurately represent God. And there was a time when we were all

ignorant, where we had not heard of God or the Gospel, but that time has passed. There was a time when we were ignorant, thinking the acts we were doing were good, but in reality they were sinful. Maybe you believed, and even advocated, that your church's children's program didn't need to have human trafficking training for its workers, reasoning that the church is the last place trafficking would happen. While in one sense there is a goodness that you want to trust all the people in your church, the reality is that we need to protect the children and trafficking has been reported and found in a variety of trusted locations, including churches and schools. We sinned in our ignorance. But our ignorance is not an excuse to sin. We must constantly be growing in God and repenting from our actions from when we were ignorant. For God has declared to the entire world that all men should repent for there is a coming day where He will judge the entire world. This is a righteous judgment because God appointed, or sent a man, Jesus, to be proof to all peoples that he would die and be raised from the dead. We must repent so He can judge us righteously and fairly.

*Prayer* - Lord, we know that there are many things that we are ignorant about, and do not understand. And this ignorance leads us to sin. Lord, please help us to grow closer to you, understanding Your ways and Your truth. Help us to overcome our ignorance that leads us to sin. And help us then repent of those actions.

***Day 32 (Thursday, the sixth week of Lent) – Proverbs 28:13: He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.***

*Meditation* - Last week we looked at God's grace. His grace is a part of His just ways, and He wants to bestow grace on us. However, in order for us to truly receive His grace, we must be honest that we have sinned. But more importantly, we must turn away from that sin and reject it from our life. Those who sin, and refuse to acknowledge them, especially to God, will not prosper. It may seem like they are while they are here, but in the end, their refusing God in their lives and letting Him change them, will lead to their downfall, and experiencing the ultimate pain of being separated from God. Consider Judah's life (Genesis 37, 38, and 43). Judah was one of Jacob's twelve sons. It was Judah who convinced his brother's to sell Joseph to passing traders on their way to Egypt, because they were jealous of him. Judah also had sex with a woman who he believed to be a temple prostitute, who was actually his daughter-in-law in disguise and he didn't recognize. When it was found out that she was pregnant, Judah's response was to have her killed. When she confronted him with his sin, that he was the one to get her pregnant, he not only confessed, but renounced his ways. We see this clearly when the brothers are in Egypt and unknowingly meet with Joseph, who requests that they go home and bring their youngest brother back with them. When Jacob initially refuses to let Benjamin go, Judah tells him that he will take all of the blame and guilt if he dies. Judah clearly admitted his sins and changed his ways. Instead of being selfish and concerned about his father's favor, he was willing to live the rest of his life with his father hating him. In God's mercy, Judah did not have to suffer that fate. Is there a sin that you have been concealing? Maybe something simple like buying fast fashion, or something more complex like hatred or resentment towards a specific group of people, and maybe even supporting policies that target them. No matter what the sin is though, from supporting slave labor through the products we buy to making people more susceptible to trafficking by making it harder for them to procure jobs or homes, once we realize we have been sinning, we can confess our sins, change our actions, and receive God's grace.

*Prayer* - Lord, it is tempting to sin. We see others doing wrong, harming others, and seeming to profit from what they are doing. Intellectually, we know they are wrong. But their lives seem so much better than ours. Yet, we know that if we follow their lead, we are possibly hurting others, but we are hurting ourselves and our relationship with you. We ask that you show us when we are wrong. Help us

acknowledge our sins and wrongdoings. And we ask that you help us reject those sins in the future. Living a life full of profit on earth is pointless if we are not with you in eternity.

**Day 33 (Friday, the sixth week of Lent) – 2 Peter 3:9:** *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

*Meditation* - God's promises are true. He will deliver all His promises to each one of us. When people hurt us, when they sin against us including belittling us and judging us, we often want quick judgment and retribution. Often though, we feel like God's judgment is slow. But God does not experience time as we count slowness. And despite our human desires for quick judgment, it is good that God's timing is different than ours. First: God desires that each person on earth come to repentance. He wants each one of us to be in a good relationship with Him. Second: we need to be thankful that God's timing is different from our timing. We need to remember that we are sinners as well and we have sinned against other individuals. Just as others have belittled and judged us, we have done the same to others. Whether it was because of the way they talked, their economic status, how they dressed, or anything that you view as wrong, making them feel as if they don't belong or a part of your group. We would not want the quick judgment that those we have sinned against would be seeking. Instead, we want to have time to right the wrong we created. We must be thankful that God's timing is different than our own, and we have time to repent and restore ourselves to Him. But we also need to remember that if we do not repent, God's judgement will ultimately come for us. The Kings of Israel and Judah sum up this entire passage well. The majority of the kings refused to follow God, and were given the descriptor "did evil in the sight of the Lord." God longed for them to repent and change their ways. He refused to destroy them for a time, because He did remember His promise and covenant with David. Yet, in His timing, He did ultimately see His justice done. We should be thankful that it is His grace that He is slow in His judgement to all people.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are thankful that our timing is not your timing. That you are understanding and patient in the hopes that we will turn to him and repent of our sins. We know that we deserve judgement for our sins. We have oppressed, belittled, judged, and not shown mercy or grace to those around us. But we are thankful that you are slow to judge us, so that we do have time to repent of our sins. Lord, please remember your promises, that you will give us new life in you when we repent of our sins and have faith in you.

**Day 34 (Saturday, the sixth week of Lent) – Acts 2:38:** *Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

*Meditation* - Before we get to Peter's statement, let us examine who he is talking to. The disciples, including Peter, had just experienced Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit descended on them, filling them, and they were able to speak in languages that were not their native tongue. A huge crowd gathered, some amazed and believing and some mocking what was happening. It was this crowd Peter preached to explaining the prophet Joel foretold of this event, just as David foretold of one who will die and rise again. He explains that they saw Jesus, the miracles He performed, and how by the people of Israel's demand He was nailed to the cross but was raised again three days later. After Peter finished, the crowd was convicted of their sin and their unbelief, thus they asked "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37.) Today's verse is Peter's response. They need to first repent. Repent of their sins and their unbelief. Peter

explained earlier that it was they who handed Jesus over to be put on the cross. It doesn't matter if they were a part of the crowd that told Pilate to crucify Jesus or not. Each one of us put Jesus on that cross due to our sins. We need to acknowledge why He was on the cross in the first place and ask forgiveness from Him for our part in His suffering for us, and our continued actions. And Jesus will forgive our sins if we repent. Here is the most amazing part of this story. There are three festivals that the Law required the Israelites to journey to Jerusalem for, two of them are Passover and Shavuot. Jesus was crucified at Passover. Shavuot, or the Festival of weeks, is what is celebrated when Pentecost occurs. So it is very possible that when Peter told this crowd "you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" there were individuals who were a part of that crowd before Pilate. How guilty must they have felt? But if we look at Acts 2:41 we see that over 3,000 people did repent and were baptized, receiving the Holy Spirit. If Jesus can be our intercessor so that God can forgive the sins of the people who were part of the mob that led Him to His death, we then know that our sins too can be forgiven. So when we treat another individual as a sexual object or justify another individual doing the same, we have the knowledge and assurance that our sins too will be forgiven.

*Prayer* - Lord, we ask forgiveness for our sins. We know that each and every sin that we have committed is why you were on that cross. We thank you that you were willing to be our sacrifice to purify us. Lord, we ask that you open our hearts to the guiding work of the Holy Spirit. Please let Him fill our hearts and beings, and guide us in your righteousness.

## **The seventh week of Lent**

### **Theme – The Cross**

*Sunday Introduction to Theme* – We end this Lenten study with a look at what the entire season is leading to: the cross and resurrection. This is how we know that our faith is true. We will see the fulfillment of the prophecies that show that Jesus would die on the cross, but while he died one death, he would overcome death and be raised again. We will see that the power of death has no control over Jesus Christ. We will see that by Jesus dying on the cross, he took all our sins on Himself. It does not matter what sins we have committed. Whether our sins were intentional or unintentional. Whether we have watched pornography, patronized a nail salon that uses human trafficking victims, bought chocolate made with child labor, or purchased fast fashion, not knowing if they use slave labor or not. He served as an atoning sacrifice for each one of us. We no longer need to go to the temple with a physical sacrifice to atone for our sins, as His death did that for all. And that is what we celebrate on Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

*Sunday Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful for the cross, for your actions on the cross. We know that it is only your divine nature and your understanding of what your death would mean for all of us that led you to be willing to sacrifice yourself on the cross. Lord, we will never fully understand what you have done for us, but we are so thankful for it and what it means for each one of us. We thank you that you were willing to sacrifice yourself for our sins, no matter if we commit them intentionally or unintentionally. We are so thankful that death cannot hold you, and that you have overcome it. You have victory over death. Lord, help us to understand what this truly means for us as we head into this next week.

**Day 35 (Monday, the seventh week of Lent) – Acts 2:22-24:** *Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know - this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, put an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held by its power.”*

*Meditation* - Peter summarizes Jesus’s life in during his sermon during Pentecost in these few verses. The people of Israel knew that Jesus was who he claimed to be as they had seen the miraculous works that He had performed. Yet, even though they were witnesses to these signs and wonders, they had him crucified and killed by godless men. Peter explains that yes, they are responsible for His death, but it was also known to God and part of His plan for the power of death was not strong enough to hold Him. In his being raised again, He has put an end to the agony of death. The agony of death that Jesus endured was not just the physical suffering of his body dying, but it was the extreme suffering he endured in being seperated from God. It was a necessary separation, as he would not just conquer death for himself in raising again, but he would conquer it for all those who believe. As we have discussed throughout this time of Lent, each time we sin, we sepearate ourselves from God. Yet, thanks to Jesus having victory over the grave, there will come a day when we will no longer suffer from any seperation from him. Later, in Peter’s sermon, he instructed the same people here who he knows not only witnessed Jesus’s good works and miracles, but also sent him to his death to repent and find forgiveness for their sins. We may not have sent Jesus to the physical cross, but each time we sin, our sin is being born on that cross, and therefore, we like the individuals who sent Jesus to the cross, must repent and find forgiveness. When we repent and seek forgiveness from Jesus for excusing the behavior and men and boys poor treatment of women and girls because it is “culturally appropriate” and “boys being boys,” our sin is on that cross with Jesus. When we seek repentance and forgiveness, we are reunited with God, and know that one day any separation we endure now, will end, and we will be united with Him in heaven.

*Prayer* - Lord Jesus, we thank you that you endured much suffering in your life, from how individuals treated you to enduring the final and ultimate suffering of death and being separated from God. Yet, your suffering was not in vain, and you overcame death. Not just for you, but for all of us. Lord, we know that each and every time we sin, we separate ourselves from you. We ask that you forgive us of our sins. Help us be truly repentant and follow your word. We long for the day when our suffering and separation from you will end, and we will be united with you in Heaven.

**Day 36 (Tuesday, the seventh week of Lent) – Matthew 16:24:** *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”*

*Meditation* - Jesus told His disciples exactly what would be expected of them if they were truly His followers. First, He makes it clear that it is each person’s choice to follow Christ, it would not be forced on them. They need to want to do it. Once they make this decision, the next step is to deny themselves. What does this mean? It means that we are to reject the desires of our flesh and worldly desires. These are any sins or temptations we may face from purchasing fast fashion to buying unethically sourced coffee to visiting illicit massage parlors. When we start to deny our own fleshly desires we stop living a self-centered life and we start living an other-centered life. This is how Christ instructed us to live when He told us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are to look outward to make sure our actions benefit those around us instead of benefiting ourselves. Finally, following Christ means that we too will take up our own cross. The cross meant death. Death to self, which is what we do when we put others first, and death of our physical bodies, which we will all face. Jesus’s death on the cross is the ultimate

example of both of these things. In His dying on the cross, He put His love for all humankind before Himself by becoming an atoning sacrifice for us when He physically died. Yet, we celebrate that He had the power to overcome death and live again. So we too, must be like Jesus, put to death our own needs and live for others until our bodies die whatever death we will endure till one day we live again with Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we choose to follow you. We ask that you help us to do that. Help us to deny ourselves and put to death our earthly desires. Lord, we want to be like you and live our lives other-focused as you lived your life, even in your death. Lord, we know that it will not be an easy road, that it will be a burden and difficult road. That one day this road will lead to our death. But we have hope in you, Lord, that the death of our bodies, while horrible, is not the end. We rejoice that we can look forward to beyond death.

**Day 37 (Wednesday, the seventh week of Lent) – Philippians 2:5-8:** *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

*Meditation* - Paul instructs us that we are to have the same attitude toward ourselves that Jesus Christ had. And what attitude was that? One of humility. And how did he do that? First, he disregarded his equality with God as something that he did not have to hold on to. That is an attribute of humility. Second, he emptied Himself. This does not mean that He gave up His divinity, because He could never give up His true divinity, but instead He gave up the “appearance” of that divinity so that one could not tell that He was a divine being. That is an attribute of humility. Third, what did he empty himself into? He emptied himself into a “bond-servant.” What does Paul mean by this? A bond-servant is another phrase for slave. Humans, in our fallen nature, are slaves to sin. Therefore, God emptied himself into a vessel that he knew the nature of. He himself did not sin, but it would be assumed by all around Him that He too would be sinful because every creature in that form has been sinful. He is the one exception. Knowing all of that, he still did it. That is an attribute of humility. Fourth, as a divine being, even on this earth, he did not have to die the death that a human had to die. But despite that, he still suffered death in obedience to God. And His death was not a glorious death, but one that was meant to humiliate a person and cause them to suffer, dying on a cross. This is an attribute of humility. And Paul calls on us to have the same humility that Christ has. While we are not able to give up something so great as divinity, we can give up our possessions, wealth, time, and many other things to follow God’s plan for us. We may not be called to die a humiliating death like Christ was called to, but it does not mean we shouldn’t be ready to give our lives for Christ nonetheless. What it does mean for sure is that we need to humble ourselves and follow God’s will for our lives and use Jesus as an example of that.

*Prayer* - Lord, thank you for showing us what true humility looks like. We can never fully grasp what you gave up in your divinity to come to this earth, but we know that it was a lot. Lord, we thank you that you become like us so that we can see how we are to truly live with our fellow man. And Lord, we are so thankful that you were so obedient to God, knowing His full plan for you to be one of death, that you still followed His plan to fulfillment. Lord, we ask that you help us to be like Christ. We ask that you help us to be humble. That we are willing to give up what is being asked of us by you and to give it up willingly. Lord, we ask that we have obedience for you wherever your plan for us leads. We know that you are our guide, and your plan is the ultimate plan. And we know that even if it is a plan that leads to death, the reward with you is a great reward.

**Day 38 (Thursday, the seventh week of Lent) – John 16:32-33:** *“Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”*

*Meditation* - Jesus spent much time towards the end of his earthly ministry preparing the disciples for what was coming. This verse is one of those times. He knows that the disciples do not understand what is happening, but Jesus is doing His best to prepare them. They may not have understood his words when he uttered them, but they would be able to remember His words when they were amid tribulation and take comfort. And what a comfort these words would be to them once they truly understood them. Jesus knows that the disciples will face tribulation and troubles, but it is his desire that they will have peace. He has spoken these words so that they will know that peace. That when the tribulations they will be facing come they will have courage. They can have courage because Jesus has promised that He has overcome the world. Notice as well that he says “I have overcome the world” before He was crucified and rose again. He knew exactly what His actions meant, so much so that even before they happened that He could speak of it as past tense. He had already overcome the world. Any tribulation they face cannot stand against Him in the long run. And we can take heart from this as well because Jesus did accomplish what he came here to do. When we are in the middle of a tribulation, such as feeling like we are losing the fight against human trafficking, we are to find peace in Jesus Christ knowing that He has overcome the world, and one day His justice will prevail.

*Prayer* - Lord, we are so thankful that you care so much for your disciples and that you tried your best to prepare them for what they would be facing. Lord, we ask that you do the same for us. We ask that we have peace in you because we know that you have overcome the world. We ask that you give us the courage to face any tribulation that we must face because you have overcome the world. Lord, we know that we can face anything because you have overcome the world. Satan may think that he has won but we know the truth. You have overcome the world and we take courage and peace from that.

**Day 39 (Good Friday) – 1 Peter 2:21-25:** *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

*Meditation* - As part of this passage, Peter is reminding his audience of what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53, which we read two days ago. He is reminding his readers that despite Christ being the savior and ruler of this world, we are to live as He lived. We will never reach the perfection that Christ was able to live of a sinless life, but nonetheless, we should still live a life that is true and honest, attempting our best to not sin. When those opposed to Jesus spoke falsely of him, seeking to malign him, how did he react? Did He resort to name-calling and seek to malign those accusing him as well? No. His responses were full of truth and honesty. And at times, he was silent. We should do the same. Do not respond with vitriol, but with truth, honesty, and kindness. Christ also did not respond with threats against those who threatened him. He could have easily threatened them with facts of impending judgment and doom, but instead, he said nothing and entrusted his life and death to God, the ultimate judge, and the only true righteous judge. Peter also knew that we would not be able to live the sinless life that Christ live, but that does not mean we shouldn't try to not commit sin. But we know that Christ died on the cross nearing our sins so

that we will one day die to sin and be able to live in righteousness. For sin mars and hurts our body, but Christ's wounds on the cross heal those hurts. And today, of all days, Good Friday, where we focus on His death, is the most important thing. That Christ died so that we can live again in Him. And while we may, and will, stray like sheep, we should and return to the "Guardian of our souls", the Good Shepherd, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you provided us with an example of how we are to live. We know that we will most likely never face the persecution that you faced, but that does not make it any easier to deal with. Lord, help us use your life as an example of how we should face those who attacked you. Let us not return kind for kind, but return words of truth and honesty, remaining silent if that is the best option. But today, we are most thankful that you gave your life willingly and entrusted it to God, the ultimate and most righteous judge. We are thankful that you bore our sins when you were on that cross so that we can die to our sins and instead live a righteous life with you. Lord, we are so thankful for that. Lord, we know that we will sin, and we will continually stray away from you. But Lord, we are thankful that you are our Guardian and Good shepherd, that you will always look for us and accept us when we return. Lord, please help us always to return to you.

***Day 40 (Holy Saturday) – Romans 6:1-10:*** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our Body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*

*Meditation* - For followers of Christ, when we sin God shows grace to us in having forgiven that sin. Yet we are not to continue sinning, and even sinning more, to receive even more grace from God. No. Being followers of Christ means that we are to stop living in habitual sin. For just as Christ died on the cross for our sins, we too are to put to death our sins. He sacrificed His body on that cross to atone for our sins, so we too should sacrifice ourselves, and put away our sinful desires. And just as Jesus rose from the dead three days later conquering death and bringing new life to all who follow him, we are to live a new life in him, conquer sin, and live instead in Him. In our previous life, we were, as Paul says, slaves to sin. Sin was our master. It ruled our lives and controlled us. It hurts us emotionally, physically, psychologically, and spiritually but kept telling us it was for our good. It is this master who tells us that we can and should want the best education for our children, but we don't have enough money to donate to organizations that are providing educational resources and materials to those in need. This not only hurts those who are being denied resources and makes them susceptible to human traffickers but also hurts us spiritually as we damage our relationship with God. This is what living in sin does to us. It damages us. But when we live in Christ, sin is no longer our master. We have been freed from him. And we have new life in Christ.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you have shown us grace in forgiving our sins. That you died on the cross to be a sacrifice for us and mastered death and brought us new life. We thank you that in doing this

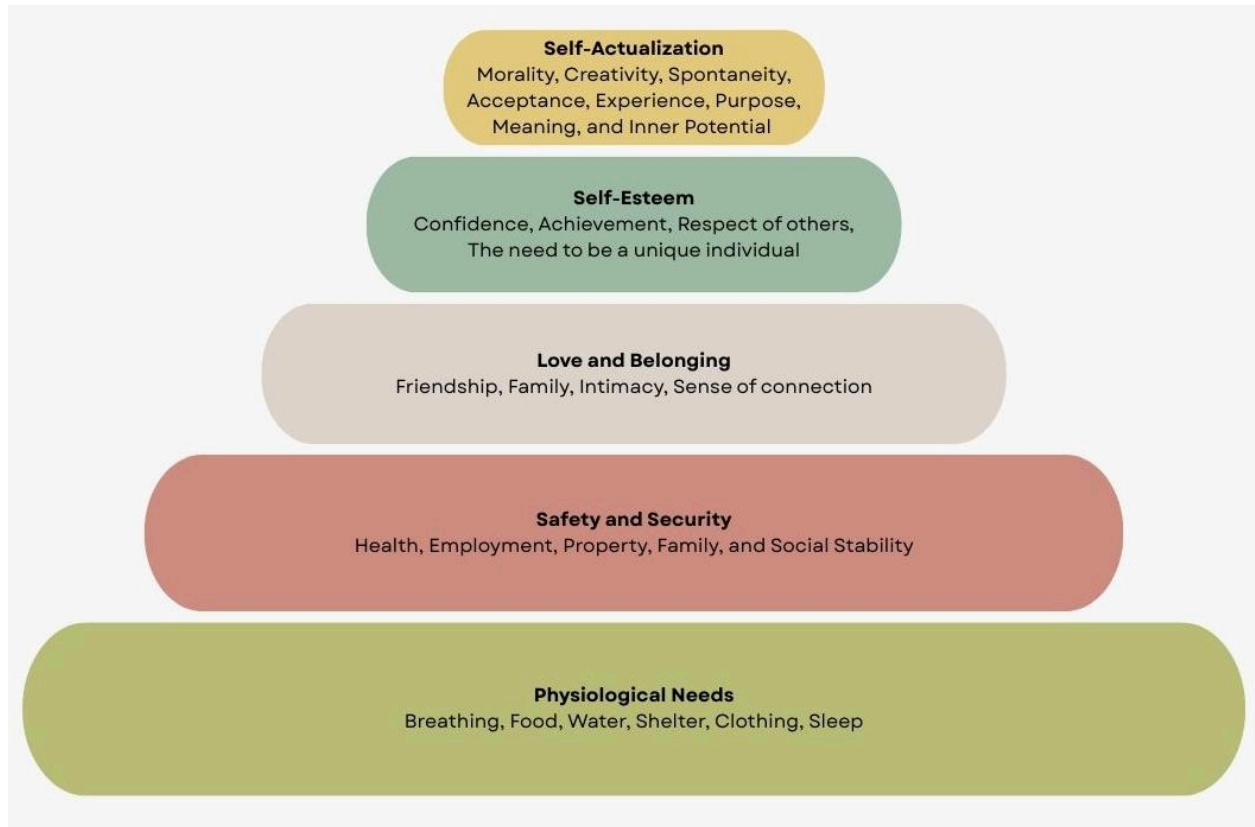
you have freed us from our master of sin. Lord, help us to live a life that is free of sin. Help us to sacrifice ourselves, our sinful desires, and live a new life in you.

**Resurrection Sunday – 1 Peter 1:3-5:** *Blessed be the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

*Meditation* - Yes, God deserves to be praised, for it is because of His great mercy that we are saved, being born again in Christ, and have the living hope of the inheritance that we will one day be with Him. Often we think that a person's sins, or maybe our own, are too great for God to forgive and redeem. But consider who is writing this letter. Peter. He is intimate with the knowledge of God's mercy given that he denied Christ three times. Still God forgave him, and he can speak with confidence of the living hope that we have through the resurrection of Christ. This hope is living, it cannot die, spoil, or fade, for those who are in the faith. We have the confidence, just as Peter did, that our inheritance of being restored and living with Christ in heaven will happen. If Peter who can have faith in God's mercy and His salvation, then we too, can have that same confidence. It does not matter if we have bought sex from a prostitute or promoted false information regarding human trafficking on social media, God is a merciful God. He will forgive us our sins. And just like Peter we have the living hope of an inheritance that one day we will be with Him.

*Prayer* - Lord, we thank you that you are a God of mercy. That you do forgive us our sins, no matter what they are. Just as you forgave Peter for denying Christ, you will forgive us for our sins if we come to you with a contrite heart. We ask that you forgive us our sins. And we cling to our living hope that we find in the resurrection of Christ, that one day we will receive our inheritance of eternal life with you.

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



# FAAST Members



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