



LOOK

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL FOR LENT



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A LENT DEVOTIONAL // 2016

What is Lent, you ask? Lent is a manmade tradition where Christians take the forty (non-Sunday) days leading up to Easter to focus on repentance from sin and obedience to Jesus. It is a season of self-denial, cross-bearing, and Jesus-following. Now obviously, all of life should be about those things, but Lent is a special time as we prepare our hearts for the gravity and meaning of Good Friday and Easter.

Some Christian traditions fast from certain comforts during Lent. Historically, most fasted from meat-- a rare and expensive luxury in most cultures. But, in our culture, the fast has expanded to include other things like chocolate, Facebook, sex, or entertainment. The fast's purpose is simply to remove something good from your life in order to consciously connect with God, the true Good. That is the purpose of this devotional.

16 members of the Calvary family have banded together to bring you a LENT DEVOTIONAL based on the "Last Supper" in John 13-17. In this section of John, Jesus prepares His disciples for His departure by delivering some of His most important lessons, promises, and commands. So we want to draw near to Jesus and His teaching this Lent, follow in His footsteps, let ourselves be covered in His dust, and be changed while we do so.

We hope you enjoy this Lent devotional, written by Calvary, for Calvary. Check it out on our Facebook page and share the daily posts with your friends. And most importantly, we are praying that you see and become more like Jesus by the end of this journey together.

February 8 // Day 1

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love. (John 13:1 NIV)

The events of this chapter took place hours before Jesus would be brutally tortured and crucified. Imagine knowing that was just ahead and not running for your life! How did Jesus do it?

HOPE (He would soon see His Father) and LOVE ("He now showed them the full extent of His love") empowered Him to persevere through the crushing agony He would endure.

If I'm not careful, suffering tends to feed my selfishness. It tempts me to focus on ME. Hope enables one to look past the pain to joy on the other side. True love focuses us on others rather than self and empowers us to embrace pain if it will benefit others.

Ask God to show you how your painful circumstances could provide an opportunity to do something loving to help someone else today. Decide on two loving things you could do in the next 24 hours.

Make a list of five things God promises for you in the future. Thank Him for them and look for a chance to share them with someone today. (By Pastor Bill Rudd)

February 9 // Day 2

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:2-5 ESV)

Pastor Howard Sugden referred to this unforgettable lesson in humility as "God with a towel in his hand." The Sovereign God of the universe becomes a servant and washes his disciples' feet. His actions rebuke our selfishness and pride.

It certainly illustrates what Paul wrote years later in Philippians 2:1-16. Peter must have recalled the event years later when he wrote his first epistle and urged us to "Be clothed with humility," 1 Peter 5:5.

Every year at commencement at Taylor University in Indiana, each graduate receives their diploma and a small terry cloth as a reminder to go out into the world and serve others. This act of Jesus washing the disciples' feet is symbolic of Jesus' one time sacrifice, suffering, and humiliation on the cross. Greatness in God's kingdom comes from serving others. If you are discouraged today and feel like quitting, don't throw in the towel! Look to Jesus! Pick up that towel and serve one another! (By Bob Davies)

February 10 // Day 3

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13:6-9 NIV)

Unless we allow Jesus to wash the "dirt" away, we can't be close to Him. This is a video (<https://vimeo.com/32098046>) we used in children's ministry last year. It reveals the kind of love and humility our Servant King shows us and wants us to imitate. (By Carrie Albright)

February 11 // Day 4

Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." (John 13:10-11 ESV)

Have you ever considered how you would have felt, had you been there that night? Would you have been adamant, that you would never betray Jesus? Or would there have been part of you that wondered, "Could I do this?" Or perhaps knowing what you had already done (like Judas did), would your question have changed to "how could He know"?!

I wonder if that's similar to how you come to God today. "God, I will never sin against you!" Or "God, I think I could sin against you today, so I need your help." Or "God, no sin to report today, but I do have some other sinners I want to report." But no matter how we approach the throne through prayer, if we are truly listening, something will happen. The still small voice of the Holy Spirit will begin whispering "areas of betrayal." And then we are faced with how we will respond. Will we deny and dismiss what we heard? Will we try to question and reason our way out? Or will we acknowledge the God who knit together our hearts, and choose to repent? And remember that repentance isn't confession. Confession is part of repentance, but it goes much further to preventative measures. So in your repentance if you don't change the people you are with, or the places you visit, or how you spend your time, then you've only confessed. God desires true repentance; a physical turning in the opposite direction and a striving to not repeat that same thing again.

So my challenge for you today is: Decide now that the areas of betrayal God reveals to you today will not be left alone. Decide now that you won't deny them, won't try to talk yourself out of them, but will take the steps necessary to repent of them. And then share it with another believer, asking them to hold you accountable. Only then will the growth you've been desiring actually take place in your life. (By James Bean)

February 12 // Day 5

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:12-15 NIV)

We often think of Christ as that piercing blue-eyed, long flowing hair, and perfect white robe, you know, that image we put under glass and hang on our walls. We, in our so perverted way, have made Christ into this image that is so untrue. He was not like a Greek god or some kind of celebrity, no, far from it. He is Lord, Creator, Son of God who gave up all title and position to come and die. You can almost hear him bend over, as his tired knees and back bend to kneel and wash his disciple's feet. A Greek god would not wince at the pain that Christ must have felt that night, he knew his time was very short. You would think that he would of gotten up on a chair and shouted with great passion some epic speech with all the fire and brimstone that Hollywood could produce, lightning bolts, thunder, a deep booming voice to the few that would soon tell the world of his plan to save man and restore all of creation to its original state. But no he removes his outer clothes bends over kneeling at each of the disciples' feet and washes them with very few words, no pomp or circumstance says "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." So, like the lamb he was, gets up tired, sore. You can hear his breath.

They still do not understand that night before he saves the world and crushes the serpent's head. He came as a lamb, lived with us in all its trials, hardships, pains and he died for them knowing some would not understand until they saw him ascend up to his Father in heaven. He lived and was tested in every way. The very night before, he knew his fate, he washed their feet. Can you hear the water dripping, his breath as he bends and rises, can you see the pain in his eyes as he is tested yet again and yields the power of all heaven and earth to become that lamb yet one more time for them (and you). The picture that hangs in my mind's eye now is that of a Lion and his return to take what is rightly his. "He got up, put on his clothes and returned to his place." (By John Grasley)

February 13 // Day 6

"Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.' "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." (John 13:16-20 NIV)

He is going to send them very shortly because they are clean and fit to be sent, right down to their feet. Beautiful example of how they are clean all over but should wash each other's feet as they walk a man's journey through this world picking up its sinful nature on their feet.

When He says "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" later on in John 17:4, he is saying that the task that He was given...to disciple the ones He chose...is done. Christ is sending them but not all of them because Judas was not clean or fit. In fact, the devil had already prompted him to betray Jesus. The disciples don't get it even yet, yet they are learning, and one is not qualified at all.

Amazing to think that Christ--the best teacher, the best evangelist, Lord of all--did not spread the good news by Himself, for He knew that He was leaving soon but used this band of ordinary men to do so. Christ knew that when the eleven remaining disciples created disciples as He did that the multiplication factor would spread the good news much, much faster. It's so not about the number of "apples" we have in our church but rather the number of "seeds" in each apple. This was Christ's plan to send the ones he chose clean...and washed, with all authority and power to create disciples clean and fit to do the same, until the last one believes. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Know and do, blessed are you. (By John Grasley)

February 15 // Day 7

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. (John 13:21-30 ESV)

This passage reads almost like a mystery story with Jesus giving clues to the upcoming betrayal and the disciples--true to form--not getting it. With our clear 20-20 vision of the events to follow we want to say to the disciples "how can you not see that Jesus is saying Judas is the betrayer?" So many times

it seems the disciples are not on the same track as Jesus and what he says goes right over their heads or they misconstrue it. In my foolish pride I have thought that if I had been a disciple I surely would have understood what Jesus had been saying. But yet would I? Do I even hear his voice today or is it drowned out in the cares of this world? If I did hear his voice would I really understand what he was saying to me or would my agenda and presuppositions slant my comprehension of what he was saying so that it fit nicely into my world and did not upset my plans or comfort? I am humbled by these admissions.

And now a word about grace. We know we are saved by God's grace and that is amazing, wonderful, unmerited, etc., and here is grace given from the most worthy person on earth to one of the least worthy people on earth. Jesus simply says to Judas "What you are about to do, do quickly." It is like he is saying "Judas for your sake get this over with fast". He does not throw Judas out in contempt or anger, he does not verbally abuse him or embarrass him. He honestly answers the disciple's question in the most graceful way possible. The disciples didn't even realize Judas has been identified as the betrayer because Jesus is so gracious about it. Now I am not saying this is saving grace toward Judas, but it is a graciousness that certainly contrasts my sinful nature to Jesus. For so much less an offense I have vented so much more wrath on others. Haven't we all? This is a reminder to me that as people who have been saved by great grace so should we also be gracious in our daily walk to those who cross us and sometimes even seek to destroy us. This cannot be done in our flesh but by following Jesus the giver of Grace. (By Mike Barnhart)

February 16 // Day 8

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times." (John 13:31-38 ESV)

When you really stop to think about it, it's amazing that this is what Jesus says will be the mark of his followers. If I was Jesus and I was kicking off a world-changing movement - I'd be more inclined to have miraculous signs and enlightening speeches be the signs of my disciples. But not Jesus. No, Jesus knew that love was the only thing that was lasting enough, countercultural enough, and life-changing enough to characterize His people. So he lays it out plainly for his disciples, essentially saying, "I'm not going to be here forever. So here's the plan, guys: Love one another. People will recognize you as my followers if your relationships are characterized by love. You can continue what I've started, and this is the way." I love Peter's response. I can imagine him jumping up and declaring, "What do you mean you're leaving and going somewhere I can't follow you? I'll follow you to the grave, Jesus!" Bold words - there's no question there. But Jesus knew that that's all they were - just words. In fact, he knew Peter would do the opposite - he'd deny he ever even knew Jesus. Not once - not twice - but three times. Take a moment to consider how you're doing in light of this. Are your relationships characterized by the love to which Jesus has called His followers? Or is your commitment to follow Jesus mostly just bold words and empty promises? Right now, spend a few minutes in prayer, asking God to give you an opportunity to follow through on your commitment to Jesus today. And then keep your eyes open, because those opportunities are always there. (By Jeremy Sandison)

February 17 // Day 9

Do you worry about traveling before you have left home? Are you a planner and want to know every detail of a trip before you leave, or are you an adventurer willing to see if there is a place for you, not knowing what it will be like when you get there? What if you are in a relationship where one person is a planner and one is an adventurer and each gets to plan a trip? The anxiety the planner would feel going on a pure adventure trip could be incredibly intense. They may completely miss out on the rest and relaxation at hand since they don't know what will come next. The struggle an adventurer would have being on a purely planned trip--feeling everything is scheduled--will drive them past boredom. Now, what if you have a friend that is preparing everything for you. Not just any friend, but your best friend. Someone you trust with your life. This is where we see Jesus with his disciples in John 14:1-4. Jesus calms and reassures his friends by reminding them of the truth that they already knew but were yet to fully understand.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:1-4 NIV)

Would this answer satisfy the planner and the adventurer? Is there anymore assurance that we need in order to fully trust Jesus when he says he will come back for us too? A lot of us plan trips with our family, so if you would like to get your kids involved today lookup on youtube "OCFKidz Big House." Then to show them how old you are, look up the original 1993 edition by Audio Adrenaline and let your conversation begin once the laughter dies down. (By Aaron Rosema)

February 18 // Day 10

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. (John 14:5-11 NIV)

When God spoke the first time, planets started spinning and the sun and moon took their place. When He spoke the second time it was to let us know about who He is, about His heart, about His love for us and what that means for our lives here on earth. God came to earth to communicate with us that He is the antidote to all that ails this world, not laws and practices. That He is all we need. Nothing teaches us more about the "Word that became flesh" than His interactions with and words to His friends. In John 14:5-11, Jesus has just finished trying to give His friends some comfort. He tells them not to worry, that they know where He's going and how to get there...because He has shown them! But these words lead to more questions about Him, even from those He cherishes most. Just like those closest to Jesus, we just can't seem to accept that our practices and works and efforts and knowledge won't lead us closer to God! We can't seem to listen.

The God who spoke oceans into existence is speaking just as clearly here, calling His friends, and us, to an existence based on knowing Him! Knowing ME is the only way. The Father is in Me. I am speaking His very words to you! Have you not heard Me? You've seen what I've done! He has spoken

now...stop trying to find the way, stop looking for signs & methods. He is the way, the sign, the truth. Enough said. (By Jill Young)

February 19 // Day 11

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:12-14 ESV)

Did you know you are on a mission today? A mission every day? You are an agent, a special agent! Today, again, you are reminded of your assignment in this passage. You have been trained by example and you are equipped with authority to accomplish your tasks. What is your mission? (You may want to see also John 20:21). Who trained you and how do we learn what to do? How does He empower you? Pray for your mission today and accomplish it! (By Russ Albright)

February 20 // Day 12

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:15-18 NIV)

Jesus Christ will give you, as a believer and follower of Him, the Holy Spirit and will come to you through the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you will know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” So after Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins and His resurrection and ascension to Heaven, He sends the Holy Spirit to you (Acts 2:33).

“Paraclete” is the Greek word for the Holy Spirit variously translated as Comforter, Counselor, Helper. The word paraclete is connected to the Latin word “fortis” meaning brave, strong, and courageous. So the Holy Spirit fills you with the Spirit of power and courage to make you triumphantly cope with life--to be able to stand on your two feet and face life. So the Spirit strengthens you with the enabling presence of Jesus. The word “parakalein” was used above all to exhort the troops who are about to go into battle.

In The Lord of the Rings trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, the King of Gondor does just that as he gives the rallying call to his troops at the battle of Minas Tirith: “This day shields will be broken; we will fight, and we will win,” etc., as he urges his troops to victory. The Holy Spirit helps you cope with life and strengthens you with the presence and power of the Risen Christ Jesus! (By Bob Davies)

February 22 // Day 13

“Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:19-21 ESV)

My wife was gone for several hours on a recent weekend. She was at a mom-to-mom sale, making a little money to finance our baby #3 by selling some of our old stuff. Since I was grateful for her hard work to make the little one affordable while simultaneously clearing stuff out of storage, I decided to do something nice for her. I tried to think like her as I cared for the kids and kept the house clean. I put away my daughter’s birthday decorations and made beds. I kept the dishes moving through the

dishwasher as opposed to letting them pile up in the sink. I kept the counters wiped clean and floors swept up. I handled all the meals and the baths (Granted, she had already picked out the outfits my kids were to wear. She doesn't trust me in that regard yet.) Why did I do all of this? Keeping house is not exactly my gift or passion. But my beautiful wife is. And since I couldn't wait to see her, I put that energy to use, in the meantime, by doing things she would appreciate when she returned.

Likewise, there is a deep connection between longing to see Jesus in the future and obeying Him now in the present. In only a few sentences, Jesus mentions several massive ideas: leaving his disciples, returning to them, and our fellowship with the Trinity (see yesterday's passage for context), obedience to his commands, our love for Him, The Father's love for us, and His love for us. Entire doctrines are formulated and whole books are written about just one of these ideas! But Jesus ties them together neatly to describe how we are to follow Him in the "meantime." (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

February 23 // Day 14

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (John 14:22-24 NIV)

Merriam-Webster claims that the word "Obedience" popularity is in the lower 40% as far as usage. In fact, according to Google's Ngram viewer, the usage of the word obedience in books has declined significantly since the 1800's. Granted, this tool is not without its issues, but the fact remains: Nowadays, it is evident that we are less concerned about being obedient to God's authority than we ought to be. Having faith in God is something that we are proud at times to proclaim, but truth be told, how much validity is brought to our faith statements to those around us, if not backed with obedience?

Even God Himself is not fooled, for God knows the unbreakable and intimate relationship between faith and obedience. Think of how God Himself spoke of David. When Paul preached in the synagogue to the religious leaders of Pisidia Antioch, he outlined for them the events that took place in order to gain Israel a leader as they had requested. Paul reminded them of what God Himself had testified, when God referred to making David their King. God said concerning David, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do." Quite often, I think we tend to stop after the word "heart", and never really finish out the passage as intended in order to truly understand the connection point between faith and obedience. In this case, God has made it very clear. If we want to seek after the heart of God, shouldn't we trust in His authority and be obedient to His fathering and instruction?

We all have opportunities to be faithfully obedient to our Father. In the time to come, be in prayer while requesting for God to reveal our shortcomings and our opportunities to serve and obey Him as He has designed and prepared for us to do. After all, is it not our deepest desire to be considered by Papa to be children that seek after His loving heart? Don't we desire for the world to see this incomparable and eternally joyful purpose of the life that we have been created for? Seek His heart. Seek to obey Him...always. (By Shawn McPherson)

February 24 // Day 15

I love these verses. How amazing it is that the God of the universe sent the Holy Ghost as a comforter and guide to be with us.

When I was in middle school I remember stressing out the night before a test and my dad very calmly saying "Tanya, God will bring back to your remembrance what you studied." That gave me comfort and then I wondered if I had done enough on my part. I knew that, if God promised to do His part, he would follow through. I wanted to make sure I followed through with my part.

I think about that a lot. I know that the Holy Ghost will bring scriptures back to my remembrance to help me with my daily life.

When I'm not feeling good enough...Psalm 139:14...I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

When there is more month left after the money is gone...Psalm 81:10...I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth and I will fill it.

When my kids need more than I feel I can give...Matthew 11:28...Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

When my friend passed away too young...Psalm 34:18...The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

But he can't bring them back if I don't first put them there.

These are a few scriptures that have helped me over the years. I encourage you to find the ones that God has for you.

Lord, I thank you for your word and all the many promises and lessons in it. Help me to bury your word in my heart that when circumstances come up, I will have the scriptures/ammunition to fight against the enemy. (By Tanya Peoples)

February 25 // Day 16

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now; let us leave." (John 14:27-31 NIV)

Shell-shocked. Bewildered. Confused. Discombobulated.

Jesus just told the disciples he was leaving and they had to be feeling something like this. Their worlds were being turned upside down. The popular thought of the day was that the Messiah was going to come and restore the Jewish kingdom, some of the disciples had to be thinking this as well.

But Jesus was going to die. The disciples would scatter. Death and Destruction would be ever-present. And there would be an apparent victory by the evil one.

I have felt this way before. I expected God to work in a very specific way in my first marriage simply because he was God. I subscribed to the popular thought that just because God hates divorce that he wouldn't let it happen to me. But my first marriage ended. There were many wounds by all involved. Death and Destruction was ever-present. And there was an apparent victory by the evil one.

Jesus words here are powerful. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." "Do not be afraid." "The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me."

Jesus was calling the disciples then and us today, to a deeper level of trust. It is an invitation to see what He could see. There is a promise of victory over popular thoughts, tunnel vision, death and destruction, and ultimately the evil one. And just like the disciples we are being asked to believe that God has a plan that is more triumphant and victorious than what we can imagine.

Father, I am tired of death and destruction, it hurts me and the ones I love. I want to see your victory. Please help me to see what you are up to. Please help me to see beyond my immediate situation and to believe that you are in control. I want to trust you more. I want to give you my worry. I want to have the peace only you can give. I praise you today for the victory that is coming. I thank you today for bringing me closer to you through the dark times of my life. You only are worthy. Amen. (By Rob Peoples)

February 26 // Day 17

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." (John 15:1-3 NIV)

Have you ever stopped to consider whether or not you're bearing fruit? It can be a humbling experience. Take a moment to think about whether or not you look more like Jesus today than you did yesterday? A month ago? A year ago? Are you more patient when things don't go your way? Are you more generous? Would people say you're more honest and loving in your relationships? Feel free to be honest - nobody's going to judge you. If the answer is, "no", you may not be bearing fruit. If the answer is 'yes', then you're probably bearing fruit. God wants His vine to be healthy and fruitful. His desire for each of Jesus' followers is that we would be thriving, healthy and productive branches all connected to the vine, Jesus. And God tends to the branches like a gardener. The branches that are dead or have stopped bearing fruit - they get cut off. And the ones that are healthy get pruned as needed. If you think you might be a dead branch, take some time today to ask God to breathe new life into your life so that you can begin to bear fruit - and then take some steps to move in that direction. And if you think you are a healthy branch, pray that God might open your eyes to the things that He is trying to prune out of your life so that you can continue to grow healthily and bear more and more fruit. (By Jeremy Sandison)

February 27 // Day 18

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5 ESV)

From our reading today, the phrase "...for apart from me, you can do nothing..." should remind us of our inherent need for connection with God. It is not just that we should do good things. We must do them while connected to the vine! C.S. Lewis wrote the following in *Mere Christianity*:

"God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there."

Without that connection, we are not only ineffectual in our works and service but we are also without purpose. We will be left disappointed and unsatisfied and as C.S. Lewis reminds us, if we fail to be part of the vine we fail to be what we were designed to be. (By Russ Albright)

February 29 // Day 19

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:6-8 NIV)

Throughout all of life, there is one thing that is constant. Jesus and His love for you. However, one of the most difficult things to do is keep the faith through every trial and tribulation you encounter. You can start to doubt who God is, if He is really there, and even if He really does care for you like He claims to. These thoughts can lead you to choosing to rebel or to walk away from the faith. Jesus doesn't want us to choose that path though. In this passage, He says that walking away from the faith or not remaining in Jesus is like us breaking off from the vine and being thrown in the fire and burned. I don't know about you, but to me that sounds painful, uncomfortable and lonely. I don't want to be the one thrown into the fire and burned because I decided to doubt God when He was always right there carrying me through everything.

A passage that encourages me whenever I begin to feel discouraged or feel like life has become too much is Psalms 91. The entire chapter describes how God is there to protect you when you face hardships and the images David creates makes you feel empowered and invincible. If we remain in Jesus, He will do whatever we ask of Him. Even defeat our enemies in epic ways just like He did for David.

Do you have a passage that encourages you when life is full of trials and uncertainty? Jesus and the love He has for you is the only thing that will be consistent throughout your entire life. Seeking out the truth and clinging to Jesus may take a lot of faith, but with Him comes hope for a better tomorrow and unexplainable joy. (By Aly Rosema)

March 1 // Day 20

"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:6-8 NIV)

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truth and clinging to Jesus may take a lot of faith, but with Him comes hope for a better tomorrow and unexplainable joy. (By Shawn McPherson)

March 2 // Day 21

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:12-15 ESV)

In John 15:12 Jesus Christ, who is love itself, commands us to "love each other". Many years ago, a "Back to the Bible" broadcast from Lincoln, Nebraska clearly identified the meaning of "real" love. The world talks about it, sings about it, and even brags about it but really doesn't understand what love is. The world asks, "How do you feel?" If it "feels" good, "do it". That's not real love, it's simply nonsense. God does not use this word in this manner, not even once when He mentions "love".

When God talks about love toward another person He refers to the respect for their highest good regardless of how you feel. It's not an impulse but an act of your will. How you "feel" is irrelevant. When referring to your love for God or for another individual, He says, "What will you do?" God's command to love is not a command to "feel" a certain way. It's a command to "do" loving things. Loving followers of Christ are His "friends" who let His life flow through them. The highest expression of love is self-sacrifice that doesn't spare life itself. What will you "do"? (By Harold Emmons)

March 3 // Day 22

Have you ever had just one last conversation with a friend or loved one? Maybe before they died, or went away for some reason. The information and emotion shared can be so important...so meaningful. Before He goes to die on the cross, Jesus talks with His friends...and with us. In John 13-17, He comforts them, admonishes them, encourages them and tries to tell them again, who exactly He is and what they are to do in His absence. In John 15:16-17, Jesus leaves some amazing words for His friends.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. (John 15:16-17 NIV)

I CHOSE you. Out of all of the people on this whole planet, I chose you to build my kingdom. I was there in the beginning creating whales, but for this moment in My Big Story, I chose you. Those are amazing words for fishermen, tax collectors and like. And they are amazing words for us. We who are chosen to be a part of His big story as well! And what are we to do with this extraordinary calling? Love each other. That's it. The God of all time and space has chosen you...now, love each other. Those are some of His final words until we meet again. Love each other. (By Jill Young)

March 4 // Day 23

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin,

but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'" (John 15:18-25 ESV)

This is a sobering message that I need to hear again and again. Just like the foolish Israelites yearned for Egypt when they were being led by God's firm hand in the desert heading to the promised land or like the Jewish nation yearned for the idols of the nation's, God drove out from the promised land to make room for them to live in peace so does my foolish heart yearn for this world. I so easily trade the glorious promises of God for the present tinsel of this world. Do I want riches? YES! Do I want fame? YES! Do I want to be loved by this world? YES! Do I act out on these desires openly? NO! I am too proud to admit my pride! Selfishness and pride raise their ugly heads relentlessly in my life. But wait, before you smugly look down your nose at me, I am sure I'm not the only sinner on this planet, right? We are all sinners and if we look at ourselves honestly I think we can find more pride and selfishness than we care to talk about.

So what to do about this problem? First of all we need to stop being comfortable with this world, Jesus explained it is because the world does not know God that that it hates Him and by our association with Him hates us. We need to toughen up to the fact that everybody isn't going to love us. Sides have been drawn, there is a battle fighting here on earth and we can't get caught collaborating with the enemy. It never fairs well for those guilty of treason and treason is a good title for the act of loving the world. The world has been judged by Jesus and its sin is exposed just from his existence and his actions. We know who the winning side is in this battle and we don't want to end up on the losing side. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul says he takes control over his body so that he does not fall into the sin of this world and thereby making his ministry useless. If we want to be on the winning side, if we want to receive the glorious gifts promised to us, if we want to keep from ruining our chances to be tool in God's hand, then we need to lose our infatuation with this world and let them hate us for our association with Jesus. It is enough to be loved by Jesus, we don't need His enemy's treacherous love. (By Mike Barnhart)

March 5 // Day 24

"When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father--the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father--he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27 NIV)

Isn't it wonderful to know we have an Advocate, a Helper, an Ally, a Protector, a Friend, a Counselor (you get the idea) promised to us?! He is part of Jesus, part of God the Father. He is part of the holy Trinity, and He has come to encourage and teach us in whatever weakened state we find ourselves. Some of our fellow brothers are being physically tortured for their testimony, but the Holy Spirit comes alongside them to bolster them up. Some of us might be struggling with understanding what the Bible is saying and what it means for our life. Again, it is the Counselor who comes alongside and lives within us to teach us what our simple minds can't grasp. Whatever our situation at this day and time, we are not without hope. We are not without a Friend who understands where we are and what we need. (By Carrie Albright)

March 7 // Day 25

"All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their

time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you..." (John 16:1-4 NIV)

Read also Luke 12:8-12, 2 Timothy 3:10-12 and John 15:21. Jesus doesn't pull any punches here with his disciples. He is saying what happens to the Master will also likely happen to many of his disciples, in fact all but one dies for proclaiming Christ. They will need to know, as do we, that Jesus had warned them so they won't be overly discouraged when it does happen. Amazingly, Jesus' concern in the face of his own death is his disciples' preparation for facing similar struggles. Jesus wanted them to know that they are not alone and that what they face was something expected. Jesus warned them about it before he returned home to heaven. He did not tell them this from the beginning because he was with them. People will always cast stones at things that shine, and Christ knew that when he was gone the disciples would be the next target. Think of the war that must have been constantly about them. Perhaps Christ protection was not only his being with them but also a deterrent because he held all power. For us today that proclaim Christ, we have the same promise. "When men bring you into the synagogues before the leaders and other important men, don't worry about what you will say. At that time the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say." (Luke: 12-12 ERV) Learn to listen to the Spirit that lives within you. (By John Grasley)

March 8 // Day 26

"But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:5-7 ESV)

Who is your most important mentor in life? Who is that man or woman who has "taught you everything you know"? That voice of wisdom and guidance you can always count on? Now, imagine that they left you, all of sudden, with very little warning. You'd be lost, wouldn't you?

Aren't you glad Jesus didn't do that to his disciples and to us?!?! Jesus knew His disciples would struggle emotionally with His departure, so he went out of His way to prepare us for His departure and even give us a great gift in His absence--the Holy Spirit.

But if you read the above passage closely, you are probably profoundly confused over something. Jesus says, "...it is to your advantage that I go away..." How can that possibly be? Don't get me wrong: The Holy Spirit is great. But He can't possibly be better for us than Jesus Himself--God in the flesh--right? Actually He can, and tomorrow's text will reveal why Jesus said we would benefit more from the Holy Spirit than from Him. (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

March 9 // Day 27

"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (John 16:8-11 ESV)

At this very moment, some 2,000,000,000 people are experiencing Jesus' promise in this passage.

In yesterday's passage, Jesus promised that His followers would be somehow better off with the Holy Spirit in their lives than with Himself on the planet. In today's passage, Jesus explains why: the Holy Spirit is going to be able to make a GLOBAL IMPACT. The text says, "He will convict the world." The Holy Spirit is going to make a difference across the entire planet--very different from Jesus' local ministry in and around Israel.

Specifically, the Holy Spirit will continue Jesus' work to reveal sin (the brokenness in our hearts and world that comes from choosing ourselves over Jesus), righteousness (the beautiful life of love of truth lived out by Jesus, whom we are to imitate), and judgement (the grand hope we have that Jesus will destroy Satan, sin, and death and make everything new and good again).

But how will the Spirit do that? Through Jesus' disciples. Once Jesus leaves and the Spirit comes, the disciples will be unleashed to help people love and obey Jesus.

Did you know that, if you love, obey, and hope in Jesus, you are part of this same movement of the Holy Spirit in the world? You join over 2,000,000,000 people on the planet today who say they belong to Jesus. And His kingdom is slowly advancing through them, His global church, in whom and through whom lives God Himself, the Helper, who is leading them to turn from sin, follow Jesus, and hope in His victory.

If you aren't sure that you know Jesus and have joined in the greatest movement in history, talk to a Jesus-follower you might know or message us through our Facebook page. We would love to connect with you and help you follow Jesus. (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

March 10 // Day 28

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." (John 16:12-16 NIV)

Read John 16:12-26. These verses include two wonderful promises Jesus gave His apostles: the Holy Spirit would enable them to write the books of the New Testament and they would experience fulfilling joy through receiving answers to their prayers.

Pain and sadness are all too familiar in this broken world. Jesus said that grief is unavoidable, but it can be turned into joy (16:20). I need to connect with God and experience His joy every day by feeding my mind with a portion of Scripture and asking God to guide and help me with the specific things that concern me.

What are the things that give you grief today? Tell God how you feel about each of them. Ask Him to intervene in His time and way even if it isn't what you would choose. Thank God for a specific thing that touched you in your Bible reading, and tell Him what you plan to do about it. As often as possible through the day, mentally review the "nugget" from your Bible reading, and send some sentence prayers to God. (By Pastor Bill Rudd)

March 11 // Day 29

"At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." (John 16:17-20 NIV)

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to have Jesus as your teacher? Did you notice that Jesus immediately sensed that his disciples were confused? I imagine, like the perceptive, caring

teacher he was, he could feel the doubts and the fears welling up in them at the thought of him leaving. And so he spoke. He didn't wait for them to understand fully. He didn't wait for them to ask the right question. Instead, he met them where they were with an honest, but comforting answer. Do you have doubts? What are the questions that keep you up at night? Did you know God knows about those things? Just like Jesus knew his disciple's worries, God knows about yours. And He wants to meet you right where you are with an honest, but comforting answer: The grief, the worries, the doubts that you have right now - someday soon, I will turn it all to joy. (By Jeremy Sandison)

March 12 // Day 30

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. (John 16:21-24 NIV)

I remember the birth of my first child like it was yesterday. I'd never experienced anything quite like it. If I didn't know any better, I would have guessed labor was the worst thing to ever happen to my wife. And then our son arrived and, like the flip of a switch, all of the pain and the tears of anguish turned into pure joy. Nine months of worry-filled anticipation finally culminated in one moment. And in an instant, my wife's tears of pain turned into tears of joy as she held her baby for the first time. All of those doubts and fears were gone because our hopes had been realized. In the same way, our time right now is often filled with worry and grief. But Jesus promises to come again. And when that day comes, we won't have worries or grief any longer, because our hopes will have been realized in His presence. But what about the here and now? Even in this "time of grief", as Jesus said, all we have to do is ask his Father and we can taste of the joy and hope that we'll experience when we see Jesus. Take a moment and ask your Father to replace your worries and your grief with the hope-filled joy that He longs for you to have. "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (By Jeremy Sandison)

March 14 // Day 31

"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." (John 16:25-30 NIV)

In this passage, Jesus is anticipating a pretty significant change in his relationship with his disciples - or more specifically: their relationship with his Father. He knew that, once they witnessed his death and resurrection, a lot of their confusion would go away because they would finally see the fullness of what Jesus had been up to all along. In addition to that new perspective, their relationship to the Father would change because of their belief in and love for Jesus. They would no longer need Jesus to ask things of God on their behalf. Instead, they would be able to go directly to their Father in all matters. It's truly remarkable to think that, if we believe in and love Jesus, we have been given free access to his Father. Years later, the apostle Paul would write that, because of Jesus' work, God has chosen to ADOPT up into His family. What a beautiful thing. Sometimes praying and asking things of God can be intimidating - other times you might pray and wonder if God really even cares enough to

listen to you. Friends, listen to Jesus words here: "No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." Because of Jesus, you have a Father who loves you more than you could ever comprehend. Like any good father, He loves to listen to His children. (By Jeremy Sandison)

March 15 // Day 32

"Do you now believe?" Jesus replied. "A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:31-33 NIV)

Did you know Jesus never promised life would be easy for His followers? Actually, He did the opposite. In John 16:33, He says in no unclear terms, "In this world you will have trouble." Jesus knew that the world is broken. Sin has done a real number on it. It's full of fear, hate and death - and those things aren't exactly a recipe for a life of peace and joy. Jesus knew this. So when his disciples claimed that they believed in Him, He knew that their faith wasn't done being tested. He knew that a time was coming when they would be scattered, scared and hopeless. He knew that a time was coming when peace would be a distant hope. He knew they'd have moments that felt like defeat - where just giving up and calling it quits would be easy. "In this world you WILL have trouble." BUT. Thank you, Jesus - there's a 'but'. He doesn't leave them hopeless. He doesn't leave them in despair. He says, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." He's saying, "Yes, life IS going to be hard for you. You're going to feel lost and hopeless. You're going to feel defeated and broken. BUT TAKE HEART! Don't lose hope! You can still have joy! Because I have already won. You don't see it yet, but this battle you're fighting is already over. I'm far greater than all the darkness this world can throw at you." We all have times when we feel like giving up - like the odds are stacked against us, like everything's an uphill battle, like we don't have the strength to keep fighting off the darkness that is constantly trying to overwhelm our lives and our hearts. Are you living as if you're fighting a losing battle? Or are you living like Jesus has already won? Take heart, friend. Jesus HAS overcome the world. (By Jeremy Sandison)

March 16 // Day 33

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." (John 17:1-2 ESV)

Scripture is clear that Jesus' main purpose on this earth was to come and live a perfect life among mankind, and then, as the perfect one, be the payment for our sins that could make mankind able to come before the Father again. Jesus knew his purpose, and knew his purpose was to glorify the Father in Heaven.

When I rush through this I see the statement as setting up the description of eternal life (tomorrow's reading) but when I slow down and meditate on just these two verses I see something different, something more. I begin to ask myself, as somebody who claims and wants to be like Jesus, "In what ways can I be glorifying God in my life today" and "How I am glorifying God with the big picture of my life?"

St Irenaeus of Lyons, a very early church theologian, has been quoted as saying "The glory of God is man fully alive." That quote helps me pray the following:

God please show me my full purpose. Help me to dream the dreams you have for me, that I can fully glorify you. Please show me where the enemy has deceived me into settling for something less than being fully alive. I want to be like Jesus. I want to glorify you. Amen (By Rob Peoples)

March 17 // Day 34

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” (John 17:3-5 NIV)

Many of us have circles of people we know. The largest group is general people we hang out with but may have never really talked to. You may recognize a face here or there but not remember their names. The next circle is acquaintances. You probably know these people's names and may send them Christmas cards but probably don't hang out with them regularly. The next circle is friends. You know their name, their wife and kids' names, hang out, go to dinner a few times a year. You know a fair amount about them but not everything about them. The final group is your close friends. These select few people know everything about you and you know everything about them. You know the joy and the pain that they feel and they know yours.

It is this final group of close friends that Jesus refers to in John 17:3 as he explains eternal life. Eternal life is that we know God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent. Not that we know God as an acquaintance or just a friend, but as a close friend who knows us as well as we know Him. This is what Jesus did in his ministry here on Earth. He explained God to us. He clarified what God is like. He showed us how much God loves us, even before we loved Him.

Give praise to God and Jesus Christ for the work he finished on earth and the love that he showed us in making us close friends. (By Aaron Rosema)

March 18 // Day 35

“I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.” (John 17:6-8 NLT)

Mine! Mine! Mine! If you've had or been a kid in the past decade or so, you may be thinking of the annoying and selfish seagull flock from the award-winning children's film Finding Nemo. These infamous waterfowl are burned into our cultural memory because of their single-minded service to self...and their all-too-familiar line: “Mine!”

What I love about this part in Jesus' prayer to His Father, is that He says, “You, Your, and Yours.” In Jesus' mind, His message was not really about Him, His disciples were not really His disciples, and His mission was not really for Himself.

Now obviously, we know that the Father and the Son are one, so whatever belongs to the Father belongs to the Son and vice versa. But despite how worthy He is, Jesus continues to be all about His Father. Jesus has made this the foundation of His life, and it will be the foundational of His death. “It's not about me; it's all about You.”

What parts of your life have you made about you? Perhaps you feel entitled to your money because you earned it or proud of your achievements because you worked for them. Perhaps you have relationships, hobbies, or habits that are really about you and not surrendered to God.

Father, all I have is Yours. I have no power in myself or right to keep anything to myself--my stuff, my relationships, my influence, my talents, even what goes on in my mind. It's all for You. Amen. (By Keith Sandison)

March 19 // Day 36

"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are." (John 17:9-11 NLT)

I hate dropping my daughter off at kindergarten every morning. I just want to stay by her sweet, vulnerable, little side all day long. But I know I can't. She needs to take steps toward maturity and independence, and my presence would hinder that. All I can really do as I watch her walk to her class each morning is pray, "God of all, watch over and protect my girl's heart today."

As I write this even now, my eyes fill with tears, thinking about my baby girl being without her daddy to protect her. If I feel this way, how much more does Jesus as he prays this prayer for his current and future disciples? You can feel the earnestness in His prayer. His heart is full and eager and hopeful for His disciple's future. Yet, I also sense a bit of worry and fear and sadness in this prayer. Jesus is no naive fool; He knows we will be attacked and stumble. This breaks His heart, but He begs God to protect us anyways.

What sort of protection does Jesus specifically pray for? He prays for unity and against division, for love and against hate. Wow. Jesus wants His disciples to be so close to God's name--to His heart--that it generates divine love in our human relationships. When we become a community that is loved by God and mirroring His love in our own relationships, the Father is answering Jesus' prayer. Be a part of that! Show someone love today, friends. (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

March 21 // Day 37

During my time here, I protected them by the power of the name you gave me. I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold. (John 17:12 NLT)

Only minutes after praying this, Judas will betray Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. After watching and hearing God for three years, how could Judas stab Jesus in the back? Is this Jesus' great and only failure as a disciple-maker? Was Jesus a bad leader because He let one get away? Wouldn't we expect the God-man to bat 1.000 in His leadership development program? No, we shouldn't.

In this part of His prayer, Jesus expresses His confidence in both His work and God's plan. Jesus has done a masterful job of crafting and molding the character of His disciples through His servant leadership. But He knows one won't make it, and it was not by accident. In some translations, Jesus refers to Judas here as "the son of destruction." It was His destiny! Jesus says that God's Word saw this coming. There is no surprising plot twist here for the Father and Son. This is how it must be.

This is perhaps one of the most challenging yet comfort themes throughout John's Gospel. Even the great evil of Judas' betrayal of Jesus is part of God's plan to glorify Himself and save the world. Jesus must suffer the worst sin can muster, and anyone who has ever been betrayed can attest to the pain of the experience. It hurts deeply, but it's a step to making all things new. Jesus would have never been nailed to the cross had He not been betrayed in the garden.

In this moment of betrayal, God graciously steps down to identify with us in this painful sin. Whether you've been hurt by a cheating spouse or a backstabbing friend, Jesus knows. He felt the betrayer's

kiss on his cheek. He cries with you, hurts with you, and, because this is all part of the plan, fully intends to restore you. If you hurt from betrayal, confide in someone mature today who can pray with you and help Jesus' grace heal you. After the garden, comes the cross, but, after the cross, comes resurrection. (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

March 22 // Day 38

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." (John 17:13-19 NIV)

As Jesus prayed for His disciples just before His arrest, He was obviously very concerned about how they would do when He was no longer physically present with them 24/7 as He had been for the previous three years. To them it would feel like someone they deeply loved and totally depended had died, divorced, or abandoned them.

Clearly Jesus knew that one of the best things He could do was to pray for them as He did in this chapter. Prayer is one of the most effective things we can do to benefit people we care about. Prayer should be our first response, not our last resort. When someone says, "All we can do is pray," it suggests that they believe that their own efforts, now exhausted, were more powerful than prayer.

Jesus indicated that He had given His followers God's WORD (now recorded for us in the Bible) to guide and protect them in this hostile world and to help them to be sanctified (made like Jesus). If the apostles who spent three years living with Jesus were so much in need of God's Word, how much more do you and I need it? If I truly want to become more like Jesus and do right in this hostile culture, I must continually refill my thoughts with the Bible.

Spend time praying for people you care about, believing that God will hear and respond to your prayers. Review the verses you read from John 17 and copy one on a piece of paper you can look at throughout the day. You may find it to be a spiritual "energy bar" that will keep you going. (By Pastor Bill Rudd)

March 23 // Day 39

"I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are, I in them and you in me. Then they'll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence that you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me." (John 17:20-23 The Message)

How awesome is it that right here, in these verses, right before Judas betrayed Jesus that you and I were on Jesus' mind as he prayed? "For those who will believe in me because of them" THAT IS US!

And what a lofty goal Jesus is praying...for us to be of one heart and mind just like Jesus and the Father.

I am reminded here that if I am going to be taking on the heart and mind of Jesus and moving in unity with others, I have to lay my agenda down and consider others. To take on the heart and mind of Jesus means I have slow down so I can focus. To take on the heart and mind of Jesus I have to be

willing to let others win. To take on the heart and mind of Jesus I need to be willing to let my dreams die and take on God's dreams for me. To take on the heart and mind of Jesus I have to swallow the bitter truth that I am not my own savior.

For as awesome as it is to have Jesus pray for me, it also humbles me, thankfully softening my heart and changing me.

What does taking on the heart and mind of Jesus mean to you? What would you lose? What would you gain? What relationships need to change as a result of taking on the heart and mind of Jesus? What changes do you see in your business practices, your financial habits, or the way you spend your time?

Father, please be gentle with me as you probe my heart today. Take away my selfishness and replace it with the unity you desire with others, you, and Jesus. You create; please create lasting changes in my heart. I confess that I have not had the heart and mind of Jesus by (name the sin that God is prompting). Please renew my mind, and make me more like Jesus, willing to love others in its truest form. I want to see your Kingdom come. I want your glory to be known. Amen (By Rob Peoples)

March 24 // Day 40

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:24-26 ESV)

In this passage, Jesus closes His "high priestly prayer" (We refer to Jesus' prayer in John 17 as the high priestly prayer because Old Testament priests regularly offered prayers for the people to God before offering God a sacrifice on their behalf. In John's Gospel, Jesus offers this prayer for His disciple's right before He offers Himself to God as their sacrifice.) With one final, amazing petition. He wants us. Did you hear that? He wants us! If you're at all like me, you're visualizing looking behind you at someone else because you know that there is no way Jesus wants you. Except that He just said He does. He wants us to be with Him where He is. He wants us to finally and fully see Him as He was before He became flesh. He wants us to drown and come alive in the great love between the Father and the Son.

But frankly, I think He knows we are not ready to see Him. Our sin prevents us from really getting Him, so He must do something about it. This is why He re-commits Himself to "continue to make [Your name] known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." I think Jesus is referring to the cross here. He must first deal with what divides us, bearing the result of sin--death--and giving us the Holy Spirit who day-by-day readies us to see Him.

I think we often have this picture of running to Jesus at full sprint when we first see Him. That's probably true. But this prayer kind of makes me think that, when He first sees us, He will be the one sprinting to us. Not because we are so awesome but rather because He is. And He can't wait to let us see Him, all at once satisfying every hunger and thirst we've ever had with His glory.

Father, we desperately long to see Your Son like He longs to see us. Continue the work in us that ends in that great eternal privilege. Show us Your love. Show us Your Self. Amen. (By Pastor Keith Sandison)

March 25 // GOOD FRIDAY

"It is finished!" (John 19:30) Join us at 6p as we worship and wonder at what Jesus achieved on the cross--payment for our sin.

March 26 // EASTER IS COMING

“He must rise from the dead.” (John 20:9b) Jesus was in the tomb, a cold, breathless, corpse. But God had made a promise. And nothing would stop Him. Tomorrow at 10:30a.

March 27 // EASTER SUNDAY

“...that you may believe...that by believing you may have life...” (John 20:31) At 10:30a, we will gather around the breathtaking truth of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Join us. Believe. Be changed.

THE DAY AFTER

Lent, Good Friday, and Easter may be a year away now, but their significance should continue to change you every day. If Bible study does not lead to action, it wasn’t Bible study. Take a next step today. Maybe you need to join a LIFEgroup, commit to reading the Bible more regularly, volunteer in a ministry to Calvary or Muskegon, or begin giving money to support Calvary’s efforts. Maybe you need to be baptized or go to LAUNCH (new member lunch) or get some help for a sin or struggle in your life. Whatever it is, please contact someone you know at the church or ministryteam@calvarymuskegon.com. We want to help you follow Jesus.