



SEASON OF *Lent*



BROOKSWOOD
CHURCH

How to Use This Devotional & Prayer Guide

This Lent Devotional and Prayer Guide begins with an introduction to Lent, to orient ourselves to what Christ is inviting us to this Lenten season. Next, it includes Prayers in Preparation for Lent to seek God for how He is specifically inviting you to observe Lent this year. We recommend doing this before March 5 (the first day of Lent).

The rest of the guide contains daily devotions and prayers for the forty days of lent, starting March 5 until Easter Sunday. Dates are provided at the top of each page. Each daily entry includes:

- An opening prayer for stillness and a time of silence to become present to God
- Scripture passages from the Gospel of Mark for daily meditation, as we 'walk' with Jesus through His life and ministry to the Cross; this includes *Lectio Divina* prompts, an ancient Christian practice for meditating on Scripture that encourages us to enter the text, ponder it, and encounter God through the Scriptures.
- A psalm to read/listen to, along with a devotional and a closing prayer inspired by that psalm. John Calvin called the Psalms 'an anatomy of all parts of the soul' - "they contain the whole range of human emotion - from grief to joy, from hatred to compassion, from doubt to praise. Meditating on the Psalms will help us ponder our humanity, grieve our sinfulness biblically, give thanks for Christ's gift, and bring our whole selves before God."

These daily devotions and prayers can be divided into morning and evening prayer or done all at once - lean into what works best for you. The important thing is to slow down and commune with God in Scripture and prayer, allowing Him to speak to you, love you, and form you, day by day. If listening works better for you than reading, you can access free audio Bibles on BibleGateway.com and by downloading the Bible app.

We encourage you to keep a journal as you move through Lent, to have somewhere you can write down what you discover and experience of Jesus, what you feel the Holy Spirit speaking to you, to help you reflect on the Bible passages, to write out your prayers, to record your experiences and what God does in you during this season, or all of the above. This practice (or something similar) will also help you slow down, hear God's Voice, reflect more deeply on the Scripture passages, and testify to God's faithfulness by the end of this season.

For more information on Lent and *Lectio Divina* visit:
BrookwoodBaptist.com/Lent

The content of this guide has been curated from the following sources:

Introduction & Devotional Content:

The Good of Giving Up: Discovering the Freedom of Lent by Aaron Damiani

Faithward: <https://www.faithward.org/daily-lent-devotions-based-on-the-psalms/>

Cornerstone Church: <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-Lent-Devotional-Prayer-Guide.pdf>

Prayers:

Bible Study Tools: Uplifting Prayers to Embrace Lent:

<https://shorturl.at/uVbYK>

My Prayer Item: 10 Power Prayers to Get Closer to God:

<https://tinyurl.com/mtet3k4h>

I Believe: 10 Prayers to Pray When You're Waiting on God:

<https://tinyurl.com/43sck5zh>

Knowing Jesus: Prayers for Worship: [https://prayer.knowing-](https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Prayers-for-Worship)

[jesus.com/Prayers-for-Worship](https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Prayers-for-Worship)

Hallow: Lent Prayers <https://hallow.com/blog/lent-prayers/> and *Easter*

Prayers: <https://hallow.com/blog/easter-prayers/>

Introduction to Lent (read before March 4)

“Lent is a forty-day spiritual pilgrimage with Jesus preparing for Easter where we become like Jesus in the process and we grow closer to His Church as well, not only locally but around the world. It is a gracious, ancient invitation to walk with Jesus in a tangible way for forty days. It is not a forced march of works-righteousness, but rather good medicine for our autonomy, self-indulgence, spiritual independence, and the painful split between what we know of God and what we experience of Him.” (from Aaron Damiani, *The Good of Giving Up*)

Lent traditionally includes fasting from something, ‘giving something up for Lent;’ however, this is *not* the core focus, but merely a tool (an extremely effective one!) in God's hands to make us like Christ. Dallas Willard wrote that "Spiritual formation starts not with the means, but with the vision." Our first question, then, is not 'What do I give up for Lent?' but rather, 'What is Christ's invitation to me this year? How is He inviting me to become like Him this year?' Aaron Damiani encourages us to consider what we are seeking to gain from Lent as a season spent walking with Jesus: do we seek freedom from something? Deeper communion with God? Or simply being ready for Easter such that we can fully enter into the celebration of Christ's Resurrection?

Damiani continues, "Then we each have our 'inner rebel' that resists becoming like Jesus. This we need to acknowledge, confess to Christ, ask His forgiveness *and His help.*" This does not mean what we do for Lent will be something we inherently dislike... but it will probably be uncomfortable. All growth is uncomfortable in some way, but there is no health or even life without growth. Thus, the traditional practices of Lent include:

- Fasting from something (determined by Christ's personal invitation to you this Lenten season) - this is an opportunity to break a pattern, reflect upon that pattern, and then decide if it is a pattern you want to re-establish or not. As we give up what we do not need, we gain Christ and our true selves in the process.
 - and (perhaps) once or twice a week fasting from a meal.
- Daily Prayer (often Psalms) with prayers of lament, regular confession, and praise to develop genuine intimacy with God (included in this guide)
- Generosity (traditionally known as 'almsgiving'); this can include donating the money that would have been used for those one or two meals a week we are now fasting, serving those in need, feeding the hungry, donating to organizations that help those who do not have enough, etc. This is an outpouring of the love of God continually pours

into us and an act of worship and submission to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:31-46).

Damiani writes: “It is the birthright of every Christian and gospel-proclaiming church to celebrate, feast, and exult in Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. We are invited to participate in the stirring worship depicted in Revelation 4-5, giving honor and thanks with a loud voice to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Every Sunday - and especially on Easter Sunday - we can overflow with hope every time we look upon Him whom we have pierced. He is not only seated on the throne, but is also healing our marriages, breaking our addictions, and uniting races and cultures into one family.

“*Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!* It is all true, gloriously so. Why, then, do we still feel awkward and half-hearted on Easter Sunday? In many cases, it's because our imaginations have been malnourished along the way to Resurrection Sunday. We have been secretly snacking on lesser stories - such as politics or our children's athletic success. In theory the gospel is compelling, but in reality we would rather pay attention to whatever Netflix is offering. We are so full on the junk food of our culture that we cannot metabolized the feast on our Easter plates.

“Augustine had a phrase for this: *incurvatus in se*, meaning 'curved in on oneself.' We were made to look upward and outward with our imaginations to behold the beauty of God in Christ. But like a Grand Canyon tourist who would rather look downward at his Instagram likes than outward at the breathtaking vistas in front of him, we have curved in on ourselves. We are called to worship, but we have chosen to fantasize. We have exchanged God's exhilarating and expansive story for lesser stories shaped by our fears, pain, and unhealthy desires.

“The truth is that well before Easter, Jesus can wash, prepare, and fill our imaginations for worship. And this where the practice of Lent comes in. ...Walking the footsteps of Jesus allows [us] to tangibly inhabit His life and ministry. You can breathe the air of Bethlehem, be baptized in the Jordan River, and get your feet dusty on the road to Golgotha. Can you imagine taking a "Holy Land" pilgrimage every year in anticipation of Easter? This is the journey of Lent. Lent is an ancient pilgrimage that the Lord uses to recapture our imagination of and renew our participation in the greatest story every told.

All introductory content from The Good of Giving Up: Discovering the Freedom of Lent by Aaron Damiani, which we highly recommend for more on the practice and purposes of Lent. More on Lent, including why we can and should practice Lent, are available at BrookswoodBaptist.com/Lent

Prepare for Lent (complete before March 5)

In Lent, we remember our Saviour knows every struggle, is able to supply all our needs, cleanses us, renews us, and shows us the way to eternal life. Praying through the Lenten season allows us to draw closer to God and understand better what He has done for us. It is fitting then for us to begin the season of Lent with prayer to seek God for how He would like each of us to seek Him during this time.

As we noted above, begin by asking Jesus, what is Your invitation to me this Lent season? How do You want to form me? This will then inform what you fast from (turn from) during the season of Lent.

Lent is celebrated over a period of 46 days (excluding 6 Sundays, which adds up to a 40-day fast), beginning on Ash Wednesday, **March 5 - April 19**. This number, 40, appears over 140 times in Scripture, symbolizing a period of testing, trial, or probation. Moses endured 40 years in the desert before God selected him to lead his people out of slavery. Jonah warned Nineveh for 40 days. Even the book of Exodus, detailing deliverance from spiritual drought, is 40 chapters.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. - Ps. 73:26

As you seek God for the fast, the sacrifice, that He is inviting you to this Lenten season, use these uplifting prayers (courtesy of Bible Study Tools) to seek His heart and listen for His voice, with humility and gratitude:

Lenten Prayer: A Prayer to Search Me, Lord, This Lent

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know...”
(Psalm 139:23)

Dear God, I confess I may not fully understand Lent's “how” and “why”. I ask You to speak to me now. In the quiet aloneness of my time with You, search me for any selfish motives or sins I cling to that are sapping me of the life You desire. Prepare my heart for what You would have me forgo, and strengthen me to seek You instead. Wake me, Lord, if I am blind to my patterns of self-destruction. Show me what it is that I can live more fully without. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

A Prayer for Cleansing during Lent

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”
(Psalm 51:10)

Heavenly Father, Silence the noise in my soul. Empty me of cravings for things of this world that do not truly satisfy. Fill me with the bread of Your presence and the living water of Your mercy. I have honored the temporal delights of so many unfulfilling habits, and I'm ready for freedom. Wash me of all my addictions, failings, and temptations, even if only minute by minute. Pick me up and hold me, this day, and every day as I praise You for who You are. Remind me that it is Your power in me, not my own, that offers life to others. Wash this vessel, Lord. Prepare me for renewal. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

A Lent Prayer to Glorify God

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”
(1 Cor. 10:31)

Dear God, I know You see me. I know You see that although I know You, I still chase after so many worldly lies of affirmation. I still seek validation of my worth by going along with the crowd or performing. Help me to not boast of my Lent choices, but rather share only when You lead me. Help me to listen for *Your* voice, not mine. I'm not walking through intentional sacrifice to glorify myself and my will. But to remember how much You gave up so that I can offer Your hope to others. Help me to not be a clanging cymbal, or focus on my lack over Lent, but to shine more clearly Your pure radiance from the joy of knowing You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 1 – March 5, Ash Wednesday

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I enter prayer help me pause to be still; to breathe slowly; to re-center my scattered senses and thoughts on Your presence. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 1:1-20** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.


Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 6** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

I have a confession to make: I have a hard time saying, "I'm sorry." Or, perhaps, more accurately, I say, "I'm sorry, *but...*" My acknowledgement of how I have hurt someone or disappointed someone is often followed by my excuse for why it happened. However I don't think I'm unique in this. Perhaps you, too, have a hard time saying, "I'm sorry."

Psalm 6 is the first of seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) frequently used as part of the Christian church's Lenten observance,



starting with Ash Wednesday. The theme of these seven psalms is consistent: the psalmist expresses deep sorrow for his sin, asking God for help and forgiveness. In today's psalm, David itemizes his distress. Both his body and his soul feel overwhelmed with terror. David realizes he is experiencing the consequence of his own sin. He cries out in physical and spiritual pain, knowing that God's discipline is justified for the ways he has disobeyed God.

David's confession before God is anchored in his confidence that God will forgive. He calls out for God's deliverance, convinced that God will hear and answer because of God's steadfast love. In spite of the situation in which David finds himself, he knows that he will not permanently abide in terror and distress because of God's unfailing love. *"Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer."* (vv. 8-9).

As we enter this Lenten season, we can say, "I'm sorry" before God. When we confess before our merciful Lord, we are assured of God's forgiveness. Instead of saying, "I'm sorry, *but*," we can say, "I'm sorry *because* of Your steadfast love and forgiveness." What a wonderful God we serve!

Prayer

Holy One, we confess before You our sinfulness, our brokenness, and our need to experience Your abundant mercy. Help us, each day, to come before You and say, "I'm sorry." In Jesus' Name, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 2 – March 6

Prayer

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, You have brought me in safety to this new day. Preserve me with Your mighty power, that I may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all I do, direct me to the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ my Lord. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 1:21-39** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 1** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

In his book *The Hidden Life of Trees*, veteran forester Peter Wohlleben has written a winsome and fascinating account of what he has learned about trees. His primary thesis is that trees are social - they communicate with and care for each other. Trees planted by streams of water are not a group of individual trees. Rather, through their extensive root system in the ground,



they share vital nutrients with each other when one of them is sick; send something akin to electrical impulses with one another to warn of danger; and take ownership of helping the entire forest grow together in health and strength. And they are not in a hurry. Their slow growth is deliberate and careful, a testament to their resilience and longevity. Wohlleben describes this intricate care and communication system as "the wood-wide web."

As we move through the season of Lent, we are not alone. We do not attempt to shed the old sinful nature by ourselves through sheer willpower. We assist one another. We depend upon the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. We embrace the slow, patient, and deliberate work of soul-craft as we anticipate meeting Jesus.

Prayer

God Almighty, Your strength and wisdom are seen in all of creation. May You enable me, together with all Your people, to embrace the path of patient righteousness and forsake the way of hurried wickedness. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of Your Holy Spirit.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 3 – March 7

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I wait for You. My whole being waits, and in Your Word I put my hope. I wait for You, my Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 1:40-2:12** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 8** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

While a seminarian, I joined a canoe trip led by Dr. Gene Osterhaven into the Canadian wilderness. As stories of French voyageurs were read nightly around the campfire, I remember gazing into the heavens. The skies were so luminous! There were glowing bands of color I hadn't seen before. Away from the light pollution of populated areas, the celestial views gave new meaning to the word *magnificent*. I was left in awe of our Creator. I was humbled to be one of the family of God.

Truly, we *can* be left with a feeling of insignificance in comparison to the wonder of our Creator's celestial canvas. "Yet," the psalmist counters, "You have made them a little lower than [*elohim*] (angels/divine beings) and crowned them with glory and honor" (v. 5). God esteems each and all with royal regard.

As the psalmist continues, God gave humanity dominion over the works of His hands. God calls us to be stewards of life: to use our God-given minds and hearts to further blessings for all.

We're surrounded by people who do follow God's call with their hearts. Today, I'm in particular awe of cancer researchers. As a survivor of stage 4 melanoma, my gratitude for the "fruit" of immunotherapy is foremost. Dr. Jimmy Lin, during Calvin College's January Series, recognized immunotherapy as redemptive oncology, a way of leveraging the natural immune system that God has given us to treat the disease. In my case, it was a lifesaver.

I am humbled by the cooperative efforts of generations of observant, systematic scientists who have reached today's height of cancer treatment. My own vocation seems to pale by comparison, yet the psalmist confirms that God honors the service given by all of us. By our combined contributions, may God's majestic name continue to be known in all the earth.

Prayer

Majestic God, give us eyes to see the wonders of the works of Your hands, from the heavens above to those stewards of Your graces all around us. Inspire us, too, to contribute ourselves to magnifying You as our Creator.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 4 – March 8

Prayer

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 2:13-28** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 13** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

The book of Psalms was a collection of songs for ancient Israel. Of the 150 lyric poems present in the hymnal, 67 are psalms of lament - songs that cry out to God in complaint. This is the single largest category of psalms. All psalms of lament have one thing in common: the focal point of the song is complaint. For some readers, this may be hard to hear. Complaint! How can this be? There are certainly words of address, confession, trustworthiness, petition, and hints foreshadowing salvation within these songs, but these

elements are not the primary focus. It was suffering, not praise, that inspired these songs of the heart.

Working in an acute regional healthcare system, I have seen much suffering. Surely, the human condition is fraught with illness, decline, anxiety, isolation, fear, confusion, and ultimately, death. It is in these moments that we, like the psalmist, seek God's face. The hiding of God's face mentioned in Psalm 13 may remind of the priestly benediction in Numbers 6:24-26, as could the thrice-mentioned *Lord* and the seeking of light for renew contained in its verses. In these dark times, though the soul still retains its capacity for faith, hope, and meaningful encounter, there is still an urgent need within us to cry out to God in complaint. The hefty inclusion of psalms of lament in the biblical canon assures us that God not only welcomes our complains, but also that these are music to His ears. Imagine that: a God who does not feel defensive when we shout at Him in honest agony! Rather, ours is a God who wrestles with us through pressing anxiety to urgent prayer and, ultimately, to expectant rejoicing as we crave light for our eyes and a turning of God's face toward us.

Lent is a time for wrestling within as we wander through our wildernesses. It is a time of lamenting the felt separation from our Creator. It is also a time of coming to a deeper experience of the One who has called us to Himself. My hope for all of us during this season is that we are able to live honestly before God and find within us the boldness to struggle with God so deeply that at times, only a well-crafted poem of complaint will suffice.

Prayer

May the Lord bless us and keep us. May we see Him this day in new and surprising ways. May we feel His fixed gaze upon us and know His peace.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 5 – March 10

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I come before You today, longing to experience Your presence in a deeper way. I know You are always with me, but sometimes the noise and distractions of this world drown out Your still voice. Help me to create space in my life to simply be with You. Quiet my racing thoughts and calm my anxious heart. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 3:1-19** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 18** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

This psalm is set in the context of war. "War is hell," my late grandfather and World War II veteran once told me. He never said much more than this. War profoundly changes people. How can it not? The ones who survive certainly have reason to sing praises as David did. Many of their stories are remarkable and a bit unbelievable. I have been in war and heard these

testimonies myself, first-hand. The most memorable one was from a soldier who had been shot in the head. It was not as bad as it sounds, though. The bullet hit his helmet and ricocheted off. He was obviously in shock, but he did not have any injuries, not even a concussion or traumatic brain injury. This soldier was so stunned and thankful that he could hardly speak. He just sat there, on the hospital bed, looking down at his helmet. I eagerly watched as he stared and felt the little indent and scratch mark. As a chaplain, it was good to know that another warfighter was safe that day.

As I wrapped up my shift, I rejoiced and said a prayer of thanksgiving for a God who saves people from their enemies. God still saves people from fatal bullets and charging insurgents. God still saves soldiers surrounded in battle with no way out. But God also saves people from less dramatic enemies outside the context of battlefield warfare, from enemies that are a bit more relatable, like divorce, financial ruin, a co-worker who seems to be "out to get them," depression, addiction, and failure. Our God is a God of salvation.

Maybe we cannot relate to the war stories of victory, but this Lenten season, we can all draw near to the God who saved us - and is still saving us - from our enemies.

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for miraculously saving people from their enemies. Thank You for miraculously saving me from my enemies. Teach me to always put my trust and hope in You. Continue to be my strength for the rest of my days.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 6 – March 11

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open my spiritual eyes and ears to perceive You more clearly. Let me feel the warmth of Your love and the peace of Your presence. Draw me closer to You, Lord, and help me to recognize Your presence in every aspect of my life - in nature, in others, in the quiet moments of my day. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 3:20-35** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 25** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Lent is a time for a soul lift. Psalm 25 begins with a declaration of trust in God before going on to name several issues with which we can identify.

"To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ... in You I trust" (vv. 1-2). The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nephesh*, which represents the whole self, not just the soul. As we journey through Lent, it is good to affirm the foundation of our faith, to praise our God who guides us along life's paths that are not always straight and well-groomed.

Psalm 25 is an acrostic poem with the first letter in most lines beginning with succeeding letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and 22 verses to this psalm. The use of the acrostic helps the psalmist paint a broad landscape with pathways that are detoured and overgrown with shame, malicious acts, a troubled heart, entrapment, loneliness, and affliction. Within these paths is written an instructional "ABC's" of God's teachings, forgiveness, and salvation. For every trouble or obstacle, there is an affirmation of God's grace.

The psalmist implores God: "Do not remember the sins of my youth... According to Your steadfast love, remember me, O Lord" (v. 7). This soul-lift moment is filled with confidence and hope. God is reminded, as are we, of God's promise to be merciful and steadfast in love while leading and teaching us along the path.

So, lift up your soul! Give thanks and praise for God's steadfast love and trustworthiness.

Prayer

O God, I lift up my whole self in praise to You because I trust in You. As I look to You for help, be gracious to me. Relieve the troubles of my heart that I may receive Your mercy. All glory and praise be to Christ, our Redeemer. In Jesus' Name, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 7 – March 12

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me be still and wait on You. Teach me to abide in You, to find my rest and strength in Your presence. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 4:1-20** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 22** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

A light-hearted sign hanging in our house reads, "Our children are welcome if invited. Our grandchildren are welcome anytime!!" Don't misunderstand, we get along great with our daughters - they laughed when they first read it. It simply means we adore our grandkids, and we miss them when we are separated from them. I can go about a week away from them, and there seems to be an internal alarm that screams, "You need to find a grandchild and hug them quick!" Separation sucks: for the soldier who leaves

family, for the college student who departs from the semester, and for the child left in the church nursery!

Psalm 22 is about a heart that feels separated from God. It reflects a time when God doesn't feel close. He doesn't seem to care. How we feel often conflicts with the truth we know about God. The lyrics of a Lauren Daigle song ("You Say") share this struggle:

"You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
You say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh, you say that I am yours.
And I believe."

Feelings tell us God doesn't care; faith reminds us of His love. Feelings fool us into thinking God has hidden His face from us; faith convicts our hearts that He will never leave or forsake us. Feelings are fickle and often crush the spirit; faith gives hope.

Jesus deliberately quotes Psalm 22 from the cross, beginning with feelings of separation, but as He suffers, the entire psalm runs through His mind until His heart hears, "He has not hidden His face from Him, but answered Him when He called" (v. 24). Jesus clings to faith, not feelings, in His trials.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, we know that in Your humanity You felt suffering and pain, thirst and hunger. But the feelings did not sway You away from Your mission and call to give Your life away! Help us in our weaknesses to not just focus on how we feel. May our commitment to live for You be unwavering. May all lies be silenced. May we live knowing You are a strong tower, a deliverer, a refuge, our strength!

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 8 – March 13

Prayer

Lord, help me to wait for You with hope and eager expectation, knowing You are always with me and working all things for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 4:21-34** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 23** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Let's be honest: life can be full of so much *noise* - so many distractions, so much busyness - and the temptation for many can be to just get swept away by all of it. There are meetings to be at, functions to attend, demands to be met, and if we're not careful, we can be in danger of drifting away from our Lord. Though we live in a society that seems to continually clamor in both speed and noise, our passage today reminds us of a bygone era when the

pace was a bit slower and the noise was a bit less. The psalmist's words invoke an image of peace, rest, and tranquility taken next to a stream of quiet beauty - an image that has resonated with souls over millennia.

I count myself blessed, having experienced in nature my soul being rejuvenated next to peaceful pastures and streams of quiet waters. And though I don't always have the means of picking up and physically traveling to a location where this image can be experienced, I do have the ability of reading the passage, closing my eyes (wherever I am), and imagining myself in this place Scripture reveals. On many occasions, even in the midst of the busyness and distractions of life, I have recalled the words of the psalmist, imagining myself in this place of tremendous beauty and peace, and there I center my spirit and quiet my soul.

I encourage you, in this season of Lent, to take a moment today and ask our Good Shepherd to lead your spirit next to a place of green pastures and quiet waters - so that He may restore your soul.

Prayer

Good Shepherd, today would You help quiet the noise and limit the distractions so I can hear Your still, small voice? Lead me in the way of green pastures and quiet waters, and guide me in Your paths of righteousness - for Your kingdom and Your glory.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 9 – March 14

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I come before today help me to trust in Your plan and let go of my anxieties, my concerns, and my urge to control. Help me remember that because You are good, all wise and all loving, I can put my trust fully in You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 4:35-5:20** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 27 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

On a recent trip to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, I visited Gallery 901 of the Modern and Contemporary Art section. On a near left wall, seven 11-by-23-inch panels, entitled *The Seven Deadly Sins*, caught my attention. To me, these paintings by American artist Paul Cadmus seemed surreal, garish, showy. Rather than works to be pondered and admired, they gave rise to a feeling of distaste, even revulsion.

The description adjacent to the paintings told of the artist's 1945-1949 egg tempera on Masonite renderings of a subject common since the Middle Ages - deadly sins. The account detailed Paul Cadmus's interpretation, his being prone to excess, vulgarity, and gore. Then the narrative ended: "Of the series, Cadmus explained, 'I don't appear as myself, but I am all of the Deadly Sins in a way, as you all are, too.'"

Wow! The frank words confronted and challenged me. Immediately, I seemed faced with my own sinfulness. I thought, gluttony? Don't tempt me with freshly popped mushroom popcorn, coated with melted butter and salt - I'll consume it uncontrollably. Greed? It takes all the willpower I can muster to bypass a Costco-sized pack of Cheez-It Grooves (sharp white cheddar), the crunch snack crackers.

Lent encourages us to deepen our devotion to our triune God. Yes, our hearts can be a "teeming horde of infamies" (John Calvin). A chaos-inducing carnival of sinful, intrusive thoughts and desires can be present within each of us. As we discipline our minds, bringing every thought into captivity to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5), explore and celebrate our baptismal vow identity that centers upon union with Jesus and empowerment by His Holy Spirit, and anticipate the Good Friday assurance that God's grace enables our repentance and renewed status before Him, we find that confidence, assurance, and acceptance replaces disappointment, failure, and frustration. We enjoy "Light, space, zest - that's God!" (v. 1) and go forward enriched and refreshed.

Prayer

Generous God, when "vandal hordes [of sin] roll down, ready to eat me alive" (Psalm 27:2), may we take heart and refuge in You. Your Son's victory-defining resurrection and our empowerment by Your Holy Spirit give us supernatural life, strength, courage, and direction. Enable us to stay the course with You this Lenten season and always. In Jesus' sacrifice-offering Name, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 10 – March 15

Prayer

Dear Jesus, give me eyes to see what You are already doing in my life. I pray for a heavenly perspective in my situation, in my relationships, each day. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 5:21-34** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 28** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

When people learn I am a hospice chaplain, what I receive in response is the human version of the Labrador head tilt, usually accompanied by this verbal response: "I can't imagine. That must be really hard." I normally respond with a word or two about how it is also an honor and that I've been blessed to witness many holy moments.



In many senses, my patients are in the pit; what makes them unique is their willingness to be open to all things that make up their pit. A quiet energy fills the room as we talk and open the Word. We feel the Holy Spirit descend as everything is laid out on the table.

God enters into the pit with them and hears their cry to the One, the only One, able to remain firm in their final season of transition. They lift their hands to that same One, and God helps. Their hearts are exulted and they give God thanks.

In this season of examination, no matter the pit you are in, name it and lay it bare before God. Do so and that same One will lift you with strong, protective arms from darkness to light.

Prayer

God, who accompanies me, even into the pit, help me trust that You never refuse my cry. Give me ears to hear You and a willingness to be moved by You. May my song of thanks flow freely from my lips.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 11 – March 17

Prayer

Dear Lord, give me a hunger and thirst for Your Word especially in this season of waiting, and draw me to Scripture that reminds me that You are here in the waiting with me. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 5:35-6:6** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 30** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

To me, Psalm 30 is a song sung outside of time. As I read it, I am transported both backward and forward. I look backward and hear the psalmist speaking to me in the midst of my trials, my moments amidst enemies, and my careening toward the pit. I remember those times when I cried out for help and thought it may never come.



This passage also speaks to me in the moment. It creates within me a sense of hope that my weeping will come to an end and that rejoicing is before me. In this same way, it sends me into the future. I am reminded of those times when I was almost destroyed, but God made my mountain stand firm. And, in this remembering, I am propelled into a hopeful future.

During this season of Lent, when the darkness is gathering, I can often find myself drawing the curtains and wallowing in self-pity or focusing on brokenness. And so, this psalm at this time is perfect because it buoys me up above the waves to see a horizon where my wailing will be dancing, where I will be clothed with joy, where I will sing and not be silent, where I will give thanks forever - even now, in the midst of the diminishing light.

Prayer

God outside of time, remind me of Your continual presence. Clothe me with joy, and fill my heart with gratitude.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 12 – March 18

Prayer

Lord God, thank you for the hope You give me. Help me cling to it in the hard moments of waiting. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 6:7-29** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 32 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Lent is a season of repentance. Today's psalm highlights the blessings in this way of life that searches for those deeds, words, thoughts, even motives, displeasing to God - and owns them mournfully before Him.

The first blessing is forgiveness. The repentant are the forgiven (vv. 1-5). In the psalm, this forgiveness is confirmed by David's deliverance (vv. 6-7). Troubles had surrounded him like mighty waters. It seems then that David doesn't just look for his circumstances to change; he offers himself to be changed through his repentance. And the deliverance he receives confirms

the forgiveness of the guilt of his sin. Would that we all approach our troubles with such priorities! The repentant are the forgiven - and in that forgiveness is our deliverance.

Another blessing in repentance is who David is becoming through it. This is alluded to in verse 8 of our psalm. He is becoming someone intimate with the teaching and counsel of the Lord, growing in His will. I find this to be a source of much encouragement for the life of repentance. Our repentance now has everything to do with who we are becoming for tomorrow. The seeds of your future self are in your repentance today.

This tomorrow that we repent toward includes the age to come, the New Earth. The season of Lent comes to its end on Easter Sunday. In the resurrection of Jesus, we are promised our own future resurrection! Who will we be on that day? We learn from Jesus' resurrection that there is an organic unity between our present and future selves. Just like the crucifixion marks of His resurrected body (John 20:20), the wisdom Jesus gained in learning obedience became part of His future self, a wisdom by which He leads us into salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9), enthroned on high.

Therefore, learning obedience through repentance today, we are being shaped for our future life. Who you are today affects who you will become in the day of Christ's tomorrow. Every confession of deceit today promises a truer you tomorrow, or certainly a deeper enjoyment of your true you!

So let us journey on in the blessed life of repentance. It brings us the assurance of forgiveness and the promise of who we become through it!

Prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart today; try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray. See if there be some wicked way in me; cleanse me from every sin and set me free.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 13 – March 19

Prayer

Dear Jesus, please give me the patience I need to wait with hope and joy. Help me stay on the path You have set for me. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 6:30-44** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 33** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Every quarter, I facilitate a group on "Distorted Images of God." One topic is always the fear of God.

Many come from dysfunctional, violent homes. On the streets, in prisons, and in homes, it is common to fear authority figures. Misuse of power, emotional inconsistency, trying but failing to earn love - all these can lead to a wrong kind of fear, as John writes about: "There is no fear in love, but perfect

love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love" (1 John 4:18).

Yet the Bible tells us to fear God as if it is one of the best things we can do.

I have visited the Grand Canyon several times. Each time is breathtaking. I notice people want to get as close as possible to the edge to peer into the depths. Some even try to climb the barriers for a closer look. They fear falling into the abyss, but they still want to get as close as possible. They know they could die, but they go as far as they dare. Facing something so awesome, their fear makes them respectful even as they're drawn to the dangerous beauty.

This is like the biblical fear of God. Psalm 33 calls us to praise God's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. This is the almighty Creator whom we should fear and in whom we stand in awe (v. 8). The One who judges nations; the One who delivers His people; our just and righteous God.

But never take this One for granted. Always respect God's power. Fear God - our hope and shield against all that the world, the flesh, and the devil throw at us. God who comes to us, invites us to draw as close as we dare to Him - with His awesome power and steadfast love.

Prayer

Your Word says the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And it says that in the end, the greatest thing is love. Awesome and loving God, help us to fear You more than any person or thing. Help us to open ourselves to Your love that surpasses knowledge. Fill us with wisdom and love. Fill us with Yourself.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 14 – March 20

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as I wait for You, help me to cling to You. Help me to trust You and see Your goodness today. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 6:45-56** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 34** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

What is it you desire most? There could be all sorts of answers to that question depending on who you ask and when you ask. "Life" and "many good days" is the promise held in this verse. Even if one doesn't not love life, not many of us would say we don't desire "good days." In fact, if I were asked, I might say, "Yes, what do I need to do?"

The psalmist's paraphrased response is, "What we speak is really important." We choose every day between having our tongues speak evil or praise. And if we choose to keep evil and lies from crossing our lips, we also need to ask forgiveness for the times we have allowed evil and lies to escape. In asking for forgiveness, whom do I also need to forgive? How relentless am I pursuing forgiveness and the forgiving of others?

Pursuit is an active word that suggests vigor. Pursuing peace found only in God delivers us from all our fears. And if our daily newsfeed is to be believed, we have much to fear. Fear is the most natural response to the unknown, and it blinds us to the freedom that we have to pursue peace and seek God. As the old hymn assures us, "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved."

According to this psalm, orienting our life in God's ways - fasting from evil speech and lying lips and turning from evil - promises an abundant and joyful life. It comes to fruition through peace-making - pursuing peace.

Good days. How does one whose very life has been saved by God respond? With enthusiastic joy. Verse one of this psalm answers, "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips."

Prayer

Prince of Peace, thank You for the "grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved." Thank You for the promise of life and many good days. In Jesus' Name, I pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 15 – March 21

Prayer

Father God, by the power of Your Spirit, please teach me to wait on You and quietly rest in Your will. Empty me of my self so that I may be filled with You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 7:1-23** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 37** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Our view of God matters. If we see God as primarily punitive, looking to put heavy loads on us and cause us to slip when we get out of line, then guilt and shame will likely dominate our thoughts. Yet, if we see God as gracious, merciful, kind, and good - all the time - thoughts of security and peace will likely be our default mode. It is inevitable that we will stumble and fall. The real issue is how we discern the divine in such situations.



The psalmist gives us a view of God as the One who delights in us, has us by the hand, has our backs when we stumble or mess up, and is our Source of firm support in difficult times. This is a vision of God who willingly receives our confession, extends forgiveness, and provides what we need.

Prayer

God of all the ages, You have revealed Your grace in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. As we wait patiently on Your mercies, strengthen our steps to live in Your justice, so that with your hands held firmly by You, we may hear and accomplish Your will, through Christ, who lights the way to life everlasting.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 16 – March 22

Prayer

Lord Jesus, make me like You. Teach me to be led by the Spirit. To walk in grace. To seek to do the will of the Father. To wait in patient expectation of You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 7:24-37** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.


Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 40** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

I can't think of a much deeper ditch or thicker mud to be stuck in than to find oneself in prison. To be separated from family and stripped of all the comforts of life is a very painful experience. After 13 years spent working inside prisons as a chaplain, I've witnessed the worst of what humanity is capable of, but I've also seen the best.

Recently, I watched a prisoner stand before a group of 50 other men and publicly ask forgiveness from three men he felt he had wronged. One by one,



the men accepted the apology and came forward to embrace the one seeking forgiveness. Later, I asked him to explain what had happened. He cracked a huge smile and said, "When I was young, I remember being told that God is not complicated, but we make Him complicated. It's taken me a long time to realize what I need to do is simply take daily steps of surrender towards Him. The more steps I take, the better I feel about where I'm headed. I finally feel like I'm breaking out of the shell I've been trapped in."

So it is with us on our journey. A fellow prison chaplain reminded me, "We all move back and forth on a continuum between the two extremes of weariness and wonder." Some days may be filled with wonder as what God is doing, and other days, we may struggle to get out of bed to face life again. With God's help, we can rise up, put our feet on firm ground, and break out of our shell or whatever pit we may find ourselves in. If you're struggling today, I challenge you to take a step toward the God who hears us, lifts us up, and is able to put a new song in our mouth.

Prayer

God of all confined persons, both physically and spiritually, thank You for reaching out in love and lifting me from the mud and mire I sometimes find myself in. Please put a new song in my mouth, so that I may live today fully aware of Your presence. May others see Christ in me and follow You with all their heart.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 17 – March 24

Prayer

Lord Jesus, without You I can do nothing. To You belongs all power and wisdom and majesty and strength. Help me to wait on You and rely on You in all things. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 8:1-21** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 37** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

It seems that in the course of history, we need to be reminded over and over again to stop worrying about people who do bad things. We sloganize and trivialize our propensity to worry, as is demonstrated by the recent resurgence of "Keep calm and carry on" posters. If we could just keep calm, stop worrying, and carry on, everything might just turn out all right. Trivial as it might seem, David is saying just that: keep calm, trust in God, carry on with



your life as a faithful follower, and let God take care of people who do bad things.

David reminds us that there is something more important than worrying about the prosperity of the wicked, and that is focusing on the everlasting faithfulness of God. The psalm weaves back and forth between the action of trusting and waiting for God to act in God's time and the justice that God will serve toward the actions of the wicked. In the end, patiently doing what God calls us to do and finding refuge in following God's ways leads to security and hope in the future.

Lent is a season of waiting and refocusing on God's ways. In this psalm, David reminds us that our words and deeds make a difference. So, set aside worry. Refrain from negative, destructive emotions like anger and envy. Be satisfied with what you have, for it is enough. Trust that God will provide you with eternal security, even if you feel threatened by the evil around you. Care for the weak and helpless and give to those in need, because it helps everyone. Basically, keep calm and carry on speaking words of justice, seeking peace, and following the righteousness of God.

Prayer

Righteous Lord, help us to wait patiently for Your justice. Keep us from envying those who have much because of their wrongdoing. Bend our actions toward the poor and those in need. May Your law live in our hearts, and may our mouths utter Your wisdom. In this time of great anxiety, may we find refuge in You and Your ways.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 18 – March 25

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to be still before You, to listen to Your voice through Your Word and to abide in You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 8:22-33** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 43** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

I would dare say I am not alone when I share that lately I have struggled with feelings of doubt and discouragement. At times, it would appear that deceitfulness and wickedness are widespread and just keep getting worse. Our nation claims to fear God, but behind all the speeches exist actions and decisions that contradict the teachings and commands of God by choosing a path that looks more like oppression and unfaithfulness.

This country is still my home, and yet my heart mourns over how far we have wandered from God. And still, as the psalmist says, there is always hope and a way back. "Send me Your light and Your faithful care, let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy mountain, to the place where You dwell" (v. 3). My mother has a saying: "Keep looking up." God is faithful and that is what truly matters. God will not fail, and I believe God's love is still stronger than all the evil in the universe. God's unconditional love can move the stars, change the world, and heal the human heart. There is always a way back home where rejection ends and God is ready with an embrace.

During this Lenten season, I pray we will choose to look up to God and ask the Spirit to dwell within us to help us believe the world can change. It begins with love, or like it says on the stone in the story "The Old Turtle and the Broken Truth," "You are loved and so are they." Dear friends, take heart. God is still on His throne, and His kingdom will not fail. Peace be upon you, and to God be the glory now and forever.

Prayer

To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 19 – March 26

Prayer

Dear Lord, keep me from fretting and worry; let me learn more of You. Draw me closer to Yourself, keeping me from presumptuous thoughts, and teach me humility of heart according to Your desire that all Your children live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 8:34-9:13** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 49** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

As a hospice chaplain, I have the honor of walking with people as they live out their final months. If we are fortunate, we get to talk about what is most important to them. All patients have wanted to talk about their families - whether still living or deceased. And though I have met some very wealthy



people, I have never once heard them talking about the wealth they had accumulated as what was important to them at the end of their lives.

Psalm 49 discusses how wealth cannot purchase a person's life or buy an escape from decay, but that it is God alone who can - and will - redeem a life from the grave. This Lenten season is one of walking toward the cross with Christ, and I, for one, use it as a time to contemplate the end of my life. I attempt to reorient my thoughts and actions in a way that allows me to die as a person with understanding - a person who relies upon God for redemption.

On the first day of Lent, the ashes are imposed, and I am reminded that I am dust and to dust I shall return. It begins a time of remembering what is important and what is passing. I am reminded to trust in God for redemption, and not for some act or accumulation of wealth or status. I am marked by the reminder that I follow the path of all flesh.

This does not bring me sorry now as it used to. I now count each day as part of my riches, and my understanding expands with each day of gratitude. As we walk this Lenten path toward the cross, let us pray for understanding.

Prayer

God outside of time, grant us the ability to rightfully prescribe import to the people and things that bring us joy and treasures that do not rust. Grant us, too, understanding and gratitude.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 20 – March 27

Prayer

Lord God, as I learn to wait on You and go deeper into Your Word of truth, teach me to bring glory to Your Name in all things. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 9:14-29** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 46** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Uneasiness. Apprehension. Dismay. The journey of Lent invites us to examine these feelings of unrest, express sorrow that we've submitted to such fears, and seek restoration and renewal.

Early this year, I headed to the New York Department of Motor Vehicles office to renew my license. The DMV is adjacent to a distressed section of the city. A sense of reluctance, nearing dread, marked my frame of mind as I entered the crowded storefront-like facility.

With warmth and grace, the uniformed officer by the door directed me to the publication rack and handed me an enhanced license renewal form. A pleasant counter agent looked over my documents, sympathized with my not having correct paperwork to signify "veteran" be stamped again on my renewed license, gave me a ticket number, and instructed me to wait my turn.

The repurposed church pews for seating were crowded full. I took an empty counter stool, feeling content to participate in my civic responsibility along with fellow Orange County citizens. After a long delay, due in part to reduced Thursday afternoon staffing, the new year, and computer rebooting, my number appeared. The agreeable administrative officer processed my documentation and speculated that my veteran status might transfer over. After taking a photo and paying the fee, I needed to sign one final form. With a satisfied smile, the agent pointed to the "VET" designation on the temporary enhanced license. I left the facility with the feeling that the church pews were singing regarding my uplifting experience.

As we are aware of generous, Jesus-shaped love active in our communities and give thanks for evidence of God's grace, we release fear, tension, and strain. Composure - a state of rest and balance - is restored. Quiet joy returns as we realize "the Lord our God is with us" and with our world.

Prayer

God of angel armies, in one moment in history - Your Son's death on the cross - the sinful powers of the world were robbed of their power. Enable us to see signs of Your kingdom, evident in lives, institutions, and the expansive world around us. In the Name of our crucified Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 21 – March 28

Prayer

Dear Jesus, help me to step aside from the business of the day to spend time simply waiting upon You. You promised that those who wait on You will renew their strength, they will mount up on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint. I want Your strength, Lord. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 9:30-37** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 51** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

In Psalm 51:6, David says that God desires truth in the inward being, and he prays that God would give him wisdom in his secret heart. Among the truths God desires for us is to know who God is and who we are. We may learn truth from external resources, but God also desires that we learn and assimilate truth deep within ourselves. God desires that the truth that we



know and understand with our minds be also in our hearts. David refers to the heart as "the inward being," and "secret heart," the place where God is truly known.

Our digital-information society provides us with access to knowledge instantly. However, the accumulation of knowledge does not equal wisdom, which is the ability to apply knowledge to life's circumstances. When we find ourselves in a crisis or need direction to make major decisions, we may need wisdom.

The heart of the matter is that God desires to teach us truth and wisdom in the inner person. This requires that we take time to be mindful of what is going on in our hearts. The result may be that we will discover wisdom and joy in our hearts from being renewed by God.

Prayer

God of my salvation, You desire truth in my inward being. Cleanse and renew my heart and teach me wisdom in my secret heart. In Christ Jesus's Name, I pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 22 – March 29

Prayer

Father God, too often I try to do things in my own strength until I am weary. Help me consciously abide in You now and cast all my cares upon You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 9:38-50** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 62** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

She had been an indomitable woman! She was strong, independent, wise, determined, and faithful. She was a woman I knew from the community, long before she became a resident in the nursing home where I serve as chaplain. I had incredible respect for her. At least a generation older than I was, she demonstrated for me how a strong woman could manage in a world that didn't always respect her gifts. I learned a lot from her.

Then dementia invaded her life. It began to undermine her independence. It eroded her wisdom. It depleted her strength. In spite of her determination, she became less and less able to navigate the daily activities necessary to survive unaided, until she finally needed residential care for her safety. This was overwhelmingly distressing to her and to many who had known her self-sufficiency.

But her faith remained intact. We would talk about God - her rock and refuge, her hope and fortress. And as so much was stripped away by dementia, her faith remained. Until. Until dementia took her ability to speak. Until dementia eliminated every shred of her personality, and she spent her final months unable to respond at all, unable to give any indication she was even aware that others were around her.

Even in the silence of profound dementia, God never stopped being her refuge, her hope, her rock, her fortress, her salvation, her deliverance. She waited in silence for a God who never forgot her. And those who loved her kept vigil, waiting for God to call her home.

What was true for her is true for us as well. Whatever our struggle, whatever our trouble, "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" (v. 8). In silence - or in speech - God is our only hope!

Prayer

God, our refuge and deliverer, we come before You acknowledging our deep need. Help us trust in You at all times, regardless of our circumstances. In Jesus' Name, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 23 – March 31

Prayer

Loving Saviour, show me what it truly means to wait on the Lord and abide in You moment by moment. Help me to surrender to Your will, Your timing, and Your love. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 10:1-16** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 69** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

In my yard during Lent, the snow melts, and I take stock of my outdoor plants. It isn't pretty. The voracious mint patch has choked out the salvia my mom planted two falls ago. The lilacs close to the house bow low with buds, but the lone one at the edge of the yard shows no signs of life after a late frost.

The season of Lent invites us to take stock of our spiritual lives as we wake up from the dormancy that sets in after the Christmas season. What bad habits have crept up, choking out life-giving intentions? What has died and needs to be cleared away? Where have forces outside your control caused hurt?

The author of Psalm 69 (let's call him David) takes stock of his life and speaks the misery he finds - rejection, hatred, and harm by people who are supposed to love him. Why? Not because David has forgotten God, but precisely because he is trying to live a faithful, authentic life (vv. 9-12). The hurt runs so high and so deep that he feels like he's drowning (v. 2). I've been there. Have you?

If David were standing in my Lenten garden, I imagine he would identify most with the lone lilac, isolated and barren. We might be tempted to keep quiet, but David does the most faithful thing: he speaks it before God, raw and honest. While speaking his pain, he finds the energy to pray for himself: "Rescue me from sinking in the mire" (vv. 13-14). While praying for himself, he finds the energy to remember the goodness of God: "I will praise the Name of God with a song" (vv. 30-33). While remembering the goodness of God, David begins to come to life again.

Prayer

Oh God, remind us that Your shoulders are big enough to handle our hurt, anger, and pain. Give us the courage to speak these things to You and others. Thank You for bringing new life out of death.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 24 – April 1

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I desire to learn how to worship You as You deserve. Help me to grow into the sort of worshipper that You are seeking, one who worships You in spirit and in truth. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 10:17-31** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 71** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

It was during our morning staff meeting that one of our team members blurted out, "I feel marginalized." The term was new to me, but, as we stunned chaplains listened attentively, we learned that our colleague felt unrecognized and unappreciated, and from that day forward, we endeavored to let her know that she was a gifted chaplain and a viable part of our ministry.

Personally, I had not been plagued with that feeling until I retired. Then, I learned what it felt like to be marginalized, for as the phone quit ringing and the beeper quit going off, I felt like I was no longer needed; there was a void in my life. So, I turned to my go-to psalm, namely, Psalm 71. It was there, interestingly enough, that I found comfort - yes, in the Scripture itself - but also in the margins, in the notes I had made, especially as I was moving in to my older years.

Let's start with verse 16: "I will go in the strength of the Lord God," which brought to mind the notation about God's protection when I took a 6,768 mile Harley fundraising ride at the age of 71, for our hospital's new Memory Care Facility. Then, in verse 18: "Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation." This brought to mind my notation, "Yet to preach? Would God bring me 'full circle,' to where I started?" Finally, in verse 9, at the age of 78, I read: "Do not cast me off in the time of old age." As I find myself pastoring a small church part-time, even serving as the youth minister, I reflect during this season of Lent, that if one is willing to remain a willing servant, and as health allows, God will see to it that we will never be marginalized.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that there always will remain sources and resources of courage and encouragement for the journey, most often from our daily Bible readings and the notes we make in the margins, for You are, indeed, our hope and trust, from our youth, keeping us young in spirit.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 25 – April 2

Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach me to walk in all of Your ways, to worship You with all of my being, and to love You with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.
Pause to come present to God in silence.

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 10:32-45** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 74 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

I write this devotion for when the lights of faith have gone dim. Enough of the day has been experienced to know that it is now night. And you cry out, "How long, O God?"

For we can no longer find You in the familiar, routine places where we have always found You. We go to church and You are not there. It feels like someone has hacked into pieces (v. 5) all the memories and symbols of our faith. There is no longer a word spoken (v. 9), at least that we can now hear and



understand. The church used to be filled with worship and Word and sacrament. Now it is filled with the inner emptiness of our hearts.

Yet, Yours also is night. God is with us in this dark valley. The psalmist reminds us, "You have fixed all the bounds of the earth" (v. 17). You know how this spiritual darkness descended and how long it will endure. You promise, as in times of old, you will be working salvation into our situation (v. 12). So we pray:

Prayer

Lord God, in this Lenten season, we turn to You. Yours is the day; Yours also is the night. When shadows cover our hearts, come alongside us. Increase Your intervention and chase the shadows of doubt away. We ask this in Jesus' Name.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 26 – April 3

Prayer

Lord God, we give you praise and worship Your holy Name. We ascribe to You the glory and honour that is due to You, for You are our God, You alone are our Creator, our Lord, and our Saviour, and You alone are deserving of our worship. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 11:1-25** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 77 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

A mentor of mine once told me, "Soldiers will look you dead in the eye and tell you everything is fine as long as their nose is one inch above the water." This has certainly been my experience in chaplaincy. I have found that soldiers will quietly endure the type of pain described in this psalm for weeks, months, or even years on end, until they finally plunge into the water. This often takes the form of a divorce, an arrest, or a suicide attempt.

What do we do during the "day of trouble?" We cry aloud to God to find comfort, but for some reason, "my soul refuses to be comforted." We lose sleep, and we cannot even describe the anguish we are in. On top of all of this, we experience a theological crisis: God promised to never leave or forsake me, but now He has turned His back on me.

Every now and then, soldiers will reveal to me that they have reached out to God during those particularly dark seasons of life, but they have heard no response. They asked for relief, or, at the very least, sustainment, but it doesn't seem to be working. They are praying like they've never prayed before, but still their pain overwhelms. "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" (v. 9).

I suspect maybe that is the whole point. The Bible reminds us over and over that God is merciful and abounding in steadfast love (Exodus 34:6-7), that God never changes (Hebrews 13:8), and that God desires an intimate relationship with His people (Isaiah 43:1; Jeremiah 31:33). I do not believe that God causes our suffering, but He can certainly use it that we might "cry aloud to God," "think of God," and "meditate and search my spirit." The psalmist reminds us that even amid our suffering, it is out of God's character to spurn or abandon, to be unloving or to withhold compassion. Even on our darkest days, God is inseparable from His goodness and mercy.

Prayer

Gracious and almighty God, we give You thanks during this season of Lent. Forgive us for those times we seek lesser comfort than that which only comes from Your warm and loving presence. Continue to refine Your people, Lord, that we may seek You alone, regardless of our circumstances. In good times and bad, may we be assured of Your unchanging love and mercy toward Your people. Thank You for Your unending faithfulness. Through Christ, our Lord.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 27 – April 4

Prayer

Holy God, we worship You in the beauty of Your holiness and bow down before You in reverent praise, for You alone are worthy to receive all honour and glory and praise and blessing and worship. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 11:27-12:12** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 90 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

The writer of this psalm makes us aware of the brevity of life, something we are reminded of every time we pass a mortuary or cemetery. And yet, with our consumptive behavior, we often live as if there is no end to our days. Lent is a perfect time to reconsider our life style and belief systems. It is a call for not only penitence (abstaining), but also repentance (changing). Christ makes us aware of our pursuits and what is essential with these words: "What will it



profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16:26). The psalmist reminds us that our very life is from God (v. 1), and later in the Psalms, we are reminded of the reality of life's brevity: "As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more" (Psalm 103:15).

As a chaplain who has served in many capacities, first in the military, then in law enforcement, in hospice, and presently in the retirement community, I am more aware than ever how fragile and transitory life is - impairment, sickness, frailty, and death are the realities of life. We might make it to age 70 or, if by reason of strength, 80, then it is over, says the author. The psalmist then gives us a word for our Lenten thought in this transitory life in verse 12, "So teach us to count our days that we might gain a wise heart." In order to reach this place in our lives with conviction and success, it will take time in reflection, prayer, and perhaps even fasting, which is what the Lenten experience is all about. Jesus Himself in His journey to the cross, prepared for death with wisdom.

Prayer

God of strength and grace, teach us to number our days that we might present to You a heart of wisdom. In Christ, we pray.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 28 – April 5

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Your power and Your majesty is seen throughout all the world, the works of Your hand are displayed in the heavens above, in the earth beneath and in the waters under the earth. You sit enthroned in circle of the heavens as our eternal King, and Your footstool is the foundation of the earth, which You have made. We are Your people, the sheep of Your pasture, and You are our God. We worship You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 12:13-34** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read Psalm 91 at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

I have walked with many people on their medical journeys. This psalm brought them comfort in the knowledge that God was with them even in the darkest hour. These dark hours come in the middle of the night or in the day as the sun shines in through the window. Light creates shadows. The length of



your shadow is determined by the time of day. The length of God's shadow is determined by your situation and is always God's comforting presence. Sometimes the longest shadow of comfort comes at 1:00 a.m. When the doctor delivered the news we all had feared.

I remember one patient who was in the hospital waiting to have her first child. She was also diagnosed with cancer that could possibly take her life. We discussed how God was present with them now and how God would be with them in the future. We cried over all the moments that she would miss - her child's first words, first steps. She wondered how God would guide her child. She had faith that God would be with her child. She knew that no matter what, her child would never be alone.

We are all children of God. We are all sheltered by the shadow of the Almighty. In our darkest moments, it is hard to see the shadow of God protecting us. We may forget that God never leaves us. On this day, no matter how high the sun is in the sky, may you remember that when you call upon the Lord, God will answer. When you are in trouble, God is there. May you abide in God's love always.

Prayer

Almighty God, my refuge and my fortress, shelter me in Your shadow. Help me to know Your shadow is protecting me and that You never leave me nor forsake me. Help me to know Your love and abide in it.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 29 – April 7

Prayer

Dear Jesus, You picked us up out of the miry clay and clothed us in Your own robe of righteousness. You cleansed us of our sins and will wipe away every tear from our eyes. You give strength to the weak, help to the oppressed, give food to the hungry, and comfort to those that are suffering. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 12:35-44** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 103** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Many of us recite these words in unison after every observance of the Lord's Supper. They uplift and give a perspective on life according to the loving grace of God.

But really? All your diseases? Good things as long as we live? Like an eagle's youth? Really? I sometimes feel like I'm in the pits, as are others around me. As a hospital chaplain, I see the progression of age and disease that challenge us to the core. I am witness to both forgiveness between people and folks who hold grudges to their last breath. I am present at death due to age, trauma, sudden cardiac or respiratory failure, genetic syndromes, and neurological explosions or withering.

I believe we are challenged by Psalm 103 to know that while there can't always be "cure," there can always be "care." For instance, forgiveness by a God who does not hold grudges; steadfast love and mercy, even in the deepest valley. Good things are folded, sometimes secretly, within intrusions such as brain or spinal cord injury; sudden, devastating loss; or the fact that all will lose capacity and abilities with age and disease. Good things, even then. I've seen them.

Bless the Lord that there is care and love for us, even if there can't be cure. This is shown in crisp and awful clarity, as our Lord suffers execution.

Prayer

We bless You, Lord, even in the pit, even in despair or change, even in our waywardness or weakness. Help us soar like eagles as we prepare for early morning, the new day.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 30 – April 8

Prayer

Father God, we bless You for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all we worship and thank You for sending Your Son to save us, through whom You are redeeming all things. Words cannot express the wonder of Your love and grace, and we worship You forever and ever. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 13:1-20** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 107** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Every seasoned sailor experiences storms at sea. In rolling darkness, their ship sways and shudders by the strength of the wave. As a Navy chaplain, I've been thrown from my rack to the deck by the force of the storm. I've served alongside sailors unable to sleep because we were overwhelmed by uncontrollable circumstances.



Throughout the past two centuries, the RCA has sent chaplains to sea. The chaplains bring comforting words of the Bible to fearful sailors. Beyond words, they bring the incarnational presence of Jesus among those in the storm. When the waves are strongest, chaplains remind sailors that Jesus is even stronger. They remind mariners who are scared and stressed that they aren't the first to fight against the storm. Chaplains retell the story of a group of first-century fishermen, wet and wind-burned, caught in a terrifying squall on the Sea of Galilee. These seasoned sailors panic. They cry out to Jesus. Like the calm eye of a savage hurricane, Jesus brings stillness because, no matter the circumstance, He abides with His Father.

You may not be at sea, but you may be reeling from waves beyond your control. Are you sinking in frustration, anxiety, fear, depression, or anger? Whatever your storm, call upon the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will bring the presence and peace of Jesus to your anxious, fearful, and frantic circumstance. God promises to fill your cloudy sky with His bright moonbeams shining against the wave of your stormy sea.

Prayer

Lord, save us in the storms of life and remind us of Your promise to never abandon ship: "I will never leave you or forsake you." Thank You, Lord Jesus.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 31 – April 9

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I love and worship You for all that You have done for us, and I long to worship You in spirit and in truth. Sanctify me and teach me, Holy Spirit. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 13:21-37** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 109** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

We're four days from Holy Week. Jesus clearly knew the psalms. Did this one come to mind in the next week and a half? Did He empathize with the psalmist? Jesus was human. Would He have felt this way?

The psalmist is facing false accusation and cries out to God for vindication. Leave out verses 6-20 and there'd be no problem. But if these verses are directed at his chief accuser, we shake our heads and think, "How un-Christ-like and unforgiving."

Consider, though, forgiveness says that *in spite* of the wrong done me, I'll not hold it against them. I will cancel the debt and not try to collect. I will leave debt collecting to God. He is the master I serve and the one to whom all debts against me are owed, since I am His.

But forgiveness does not involve letting the wrong behavior continue - either to me or to others. What is wrong must stop. Thus the same person can - even must - pray both prayers: forgive them, and turn them from their wicked ways.

That the psalmist is so specific in the ways he asks God to stop in justice seems over the top to us. But what are we asking God to do when we pray for the end to evil? End wars, and many will still die in the process. Bring down evil rulers, and nations will be in turmoil. The unjust rich will be sent away empty along with their dependents.

"O Lord, act on my behalf for Your Name's sake. ...Let them know that this is Your hand; You, O Lord, have done it" (v. 21-27). The Lord is the debt collector. Like the psalmist, even if we make suggestions, we leave it to God to save and judge in His perfect wisdom.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, who knows both our hearts and the hearts of all, even our enemies, we pray for Your kingdom to come, Your will be done. As we seek Your will for ourselves, You will lead us to forgiveness, mercy, and love for others. Protect and deliver us from opposition. Help us be quick to forgive that we might be free from bitterness and hatred. For Jesus' sake.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 32 – April 10

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for making me in Your own image, and for all the many blessings You have given me. I surrender to You completely, as a living sacrifice. Teach me to take up my cross daily and present myself to You as my spiritual act of worship. You alone are worthy. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 14:1-26** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 113** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Is God always worthy?

How does this question strike you today? Is there no question in your mind and heart? Does it bother you that I would even pose such a question? Wherever you find yourself today, I invite you to linger with that question, or even just the word *worthy* for a little bit. Take five minutes or more (even 15-20

minutes) and sit in silence with that word. Breathing in, breathing out, and repeating the word as you do so. What happens within you as you do this?

Psalm 113 proclaims God's worthiness. You could say it's even a little excessive in doing so; in just the first three verses alone, we're already admonished to praise the Lord four times. Today, we've just passed the six-week mark in the season of Lent. That's 32 days of 40, starting with Ash Wednesday (Sundays are traditionally omitted as resurrection celebrations through the season). Yesterday, you spent some time in Psalm 109. I don't know what verse, section, or part as I write this, but that psalm is an ardent cry to the God of our praise (109:1). David desperately cries out, "God, do not be silent! Vindicate and deliver me in Your steadfast love." David proclaims that, even in the midst of great difficulty, he will praise the Lord (109:30). And that's exactly how we learn, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God is always praiseworthy.

I love the paradox of the rest of Psalm 113 as it proclaims God as high and lofty, and yet personally and intimately involved in your life and the world in every way. Praise the Lord!

Prayer

God of our praise, blessed be Your Name and reign in our individual lives and the world from this time on and forevermore. In Your grace today, raise us to Your throne of grace. And as evening comes, may we find ourselves still singing Your praise.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 33 – April 11

Prayer

Lord God, open my eyes to see You more. Open my ears to hear Your still, small voice, and open my heart to worship You more so I may grow in grace and in knowledge of Jesus Christ. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 14:27-42** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 116** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

This is a song of gratitude and absolute awe and wonder. The desperation and brokenness experienced by the singer is a lonely and hopeless place. The exact causes of the suffering are unknown, but the anguish is very apparent. Something that is not so clear is that this is a request for mercy, not a simple request for help. Mercy, pardon, and grace are gifts offered to those who have found "sorrow and trouble," usually by their

own actions and choices. Self-defeat keeps them from feeling worthy, and so they continue to follow the pathway into deeper misery and darkness. The way out becomes obscured.

By grace, the word of a friend, the memory of another time, and a glimmer of light appears. A small crack opens in the walls we create, revealing an avenue to venture and a voice of prayer is found. The psalmist remembers a promise and prays: "I implore You. ... I beg You to save me." The prayer is not conditional. It is not "If You save me, I will follow You." The prayer embraces the assurance that God will deliver salvation. The response to the deliverance is gratitude, a promise to continue to call upon the Lord, a promise to remember, and a wonderful understanding of humility.

The psalmist extols the grace and mercy and is suddenly impacted by just how big this is. God is righteous *and* merciful. How is this possible? Righteousness is often synonymous with justice. Justice is more often associated with consequences and punishment and rarely associated with mercy, grace, and pardon. How great is God who unconditionally forgives, accepts, and restores one who is not righteous or just!

In our deepest, desperate moments of life, the Lord "inclines His ear" to our prayer, reaches toward us, and sets us free.

Prayer

Lord, may I be humbled by Your mercy and set free to rejoice in Your grace. Direct this day in gratitude, for the blessings I have received are that I may be a blessing to others and a faithful servant in Your kingdom.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 34 – April 12

Prayer

Dear Lord, may we together proclaim the joy of Your salvation to all the people on earth and declare the glory of Your marvellous majesty to all the nations. Marvellous are the works of Your hand, for You are the Lord our God, who alone is worthy of our worship and praise. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 14:43-65** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 121** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Psalm 121:1 is the very first verse I memorized in my childhood. Memorization was easy because that verse was etched on a window at the front of our church, which, in fact, *did* look up to the glorious "hills" west of Denver (the direction that our sanctuary faced). As a young girl, I would look



for opportunities to be up near those windows, and I would trace each letter with my finger as I overlooked the front range of the Rocky Mountains.

Many childhood days were spent hiking those mountains, and many spiritual lessons were learned while exploring the forests. I learned the value of looking at the terrain ahead and being prepared. I learned that seeing light ahead meant that I had reached a new plane but not necessarily the summit, which always seemed over the next horizon. I learned that the journey is almost *always* longer than I thought it would be, and, most importantly, I learned that I must always keep track of where the campsite and safety were located.

Though this psalm is not referenced or alluded to in the New Testament, it remains a popular psalm and has even been set to the glorious music of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Leonard Bernstein's "A Simple Song." I think this popularity stems from the fact that we are all, in our own way, making a pilgrimage in this life. We all wonder what will come next, how we will deal with it, and when we will at long last reach that final summit that God has planned for our lives. The psalmist aptly points out that "my help" comes from the Lord, who is not only mighty enough to make the heavens and earth, but also intimate enough to be called "mine." Though I know not what the light or darkness I see ahead will bring, I can rest knowing that God will continue to watch over my life through eternity. This will lead me to continue to look upward, to acknowledge the source of hope and strength in my life, both now and forevermore.

Prayer

Lord, may I ever look upward to the source of my greatest strength and help as I journey through this life. Thank You for the promise that You watch over my life, for the path You set before me, and for the guiding hand You offer every step of the way.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 35 – April 14

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I praise and worship You for who You are. You have saved me. Loved me. Justice and truth are in Your hands. May the awe of You overtake my entire being. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 14:66-15:15** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 50** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Praise the Lord! Where?

"...in His sanctuary." Not in a bounded place, but wherever we experience God in life - as we gaze from our own yards into the heavens; as we walk barefoot along the shore of a lake; as we listen to a choir from pews or concert hall seats; as we pray in the solitude of our homes or sing in a congregation of worshipers. We praise God whenever and wherever our hearts are inspired to do so.

Praise the Lord! Why?

"...for His might deeds, according to His surpassing greatness!" Praise the Lord for the rain, which nourishes the earth; for the wonder of a sunrise; for the cry of a newborn child; for the inquisitiveness of young children; for healing bodies through the medical community; for comforting hearts as the Lord works through ministers, priests, counselors, and friends.

Praise the Lord! How?

With a diversity of instruments! I've employed most of them: a *trumpet* graced my ordination service. And though 40 years have passed since then, I can still hear the melody of the *oboe* during productions of "Amahl and the Night Visitors" by the first church I served. Now, at the assisted living residences where I conduct worship, we are blessed regularly with *harp* and *piano* accompaniment, and frequently we welcome a *cellist* when he is home from college. I distribute *tambourines* on occasion to enliven our singing. Liturgical *dancers* have engaged worshipers. And, I, myself, have clashed *cymbals* during the singing of "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today!" (Praising God with a *lute*, however, remains on my bucket list!)

Praise the Lord! Who?

Everything that breathes is to praise God! Breath is a sign of spirit, of life. Let's all take note of the goodness of God in our lives today. Let's be instruments, ourselves, and praise the Lord!

Prayer

Give us pause, today, O God, to breathe in and out, to look, to listen, and so to notice and celebrate Your goodness. Move us to applause, to song, to prayer, to smiles, to words and acts of gratitude, which praise you with our whole selves.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 36 – April 15

Prayer

I offer up this time to You, Lord, in gratitude for the gift of salvation that Jesus won for us. I humbly ask that You would show me how deep Your love is for me, instill in me a quiet peace because of Your perfect love, and keep me close to You all day long. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 15:16-39** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

Contemplatio: Simply sit in silence. Do nothing. Practice being still in the presence of God, enjoying being with Him, without any requirement of intercession, working, striving, earning... Enjoy the freedom of being with and contemplating the God who calls you 'Beloved'. Absorb what you've heard and prayed, and receive the love and grace of God.

Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 139** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

David wanted to analyse his motives and behavior, asking God to guide him and help him see what thoughts or actions may not align with God's thoughts. Why would David ask God to do this? Because David knew that his way of thinking might cause a chasm separating him from God, and that was the last thing David wanted.

Many of us are motivated in Lent to ask God to forgive us for doing anything that has offended God. Sometimes, though, don't our attempts at doing this feel more like empty rituals or dutiful prayers? We say a quick prayer and soon end with "amen." Then, after the amen, how long do we usually sit around waiting for God to point out anything God found in His search? Do we do this because we are busy or because we fear what God will do after He completes His search?

David knew that he had nothing to fear in allowing God to search his heart. Not because he felt there was nothing offending there, but because he knew that our God is a loving, merciful, and gracious God.

Don't be afraid to allow God to explore your heart, mind, and spirit. God loves you and longs for a closer walk with you.

Pause. Ask God to search you. Then, sit and wait long enough for God to point out what you need to see and work on. God will lovingly help you transform and will lead you along the right pathway, bringing hope and joy to your journey through life.

Prayer

Lord, You know me better than I know myself. Search the deepest parts of my heart for anything that is displeasing to You. Examine my attitudes and actions. Show me what needs to be transformed and help me to change it so that I will not only be closer to You, but will also be able to go where You lead me and do what You are calling me to do.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 37 – April 16

Prayer

I offer up this time to You, Lord, in gratitude for the gift of salvation that Jesus won for us. I humbly ask that You would show me how deep Your love is for me, instill in me a quiet peace because of Your perfect love, and keep me close to You all day long. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 15:40-47** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 140** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

As children, we used the rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." As we said this, we hoped that the hateful words tossed at us would bounce away without causing any harm. Unfortunately, the reality is that words do hurt us. Slander and name-calling can hurt us deeply. They wound our psyche to such a level that it can take



years to overcome the wounding. That is why bullies use tactics of words as well as violence against people - they know how wounding they can be.

David, God's anointed, was not immune to slander nor to the pain that words produce. So painful were they to him, that he equated them with the venom of the most poisonous of snakes: vipers. Without legal recourse, without position or authority, David turned to the only one who could help him in his deepest distress, God. Out of his deepest pain, David raised a prayer to God for protection. His confidence in God - the deep understanding that God takes up the cause of the needy - led him to seek God's protection not just from the weapons of war, but from the weapons of words.

When people say things that are hurtful, we can have confidence like David that God will hear our cries and will bring justice, a justice that might not be present in this world, but a justice that will allow us to stand before God with praise upon our lips. Trust that God will deliver us from the slings and arrows of hurtful words and provide a balm that will heal all our wounds.

Prayer

Loving God, thank You for hearing our plea. Keep evil words from hurting and wounding our hearts and minds. Provide protection from the pain of words used as weapons. Help us, Lord, to mind our tongues that we may only provide words of hope and encouragement to the people who surround us. Thank You for listening to the cause of the needy and providing justice for Your people.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 38 – April 17

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may this season of sacrifice and fasting remind me of my dependence on You for all things. May I be transformed according to Your good and perfect will. I surrender to Your love and grace, Father. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 16:1-8** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 123** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

It's Maundy Thursday: watch the hands of Jesus. We see Jesus' hands holding and cleaning dirty feet, then breaking bread and lifting the cup, sharing food and His very heart.

We lift our eyes to the heavens, for mercy. Our appeal to the cosmic reign of God becomes manifest in the gestures Jesus makes to care for the



disciples. Jesus's intimate gestures extend throughout the cosmos - far beyond that table.

Asking for mercy is easy, until we realize how much we've enthroned ourselves with contempt. We don't so much fear the contempt of others as we cringe at the way our own contempt indicts us of being so graceless. Who are we to ask for mercy?

We swim in contempt these days - so many people do not see the world the way we do! Might our contempt get arrested in the awareness that God in Christ cares for those whom we've held in contempt. Then, Lord, in Your mercy, hear my prayer. And may we not only see Your gestures of grace, but **do** them, as You command. May we have mercy, Lord, we pray, so that those whose eyes watch us see Your mercy.

Prayer

May Your mercy work through me so completely that my soul pours out ever more freely to all.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 39 – April 18

Prayer

Dear God, I submit to You. Help me draw near to You, and nearer still. Cleanse me. Purify me. Shape me as You will. You alone are God. I will ever praise You. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 16:9-14** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


Oratio: Read the passage again, and pray in response. Be honest with God about your feelings; respond to His grace based on what He has said in His Word. Do you sense any personal invitation from God as you engage Scripture? If so, make note of it in a journal or in the margins of this booklet.

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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalm 130** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

When I think of this psalm, I hear the organ playing in a minor key. It's a hymn by Martin Luther from 1524. Luther's lyrics are a paraphrase of Psalm 130. *Aus tiefer Noth* is the name of that hymn tune - *out of the depths*. You can Google *Aus tiefer Noth* if you want to hear it. The first note is high C, the second note dips down to F, getting down there with the speaker, calling out to God from the pit. The tune climbs and falls again, up and down, hoping and then losing hope, returning at last to that F, the lowest note in the hymn. It's



not a happy clappy hymn or a happy clappy psalm. Rather, it's slow and solemn; it's a "waiting for redemption" song.

Down there in the pit, the psalmist is in despair, not only about her own iniquities, her weaknesses, her sins of omission and commission, but also about the iniquities of her people Israel. The individual sins are entwined with the sins of the nation. But it is also down there in the pit the psalmist remembers something else: "...there is forgiveness with you," and "with the Lord there is steadfast love," and "with Him is great power to redeem." There is hope in the waiting for God's redemption. Twice the psalmist repeats the image of the soul waiting for the Lord "more than those who watch for the morning."

As a chaplain, I get to wait for a little while with souls that are waiting for God to show up. It's really dark down there. But in the very act of crying out, sometimes a light surprises - a healing, a surrender, a peace, a hope. The song rises.

Prayer

Dear God, grant us to see Your light though we may be in the depths. Grant us to feel Your steadfast love though we may feel unlovable. And grant us companions to wait for You in hope.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Day 40 – April 19

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may we feel the warm embrace of Your love this day. May the glory of Jesus' resurrection remind us that with You, nothing is impossible or without hope. We wait for You. We cling to You, the Risen Jesus. We turn our backs on death and open our hearts to You, for You are life itself. *Pause to come present to God in silence.*

The Gospel of Mark: Journey with Jesus

Lectio: Read **Mark 16:15-20** at least twice (aloud if possible), slowly so you can savour each word and phrase. As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

Meditatio: Sit in silence with the passage; if your thoughts wander, gently call your attention back to what stood out to you. Talk to Jesus about what you've read, and listen for His Voice as the Scripture sinks slowly and deeply into you. This isn't about *striving* to figure it out, but *receiving* what the Holy Spirit is speaking to You through His Word.


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Psalms: Worship God with Our Whole Being

Read **Psalms 147** at least twice, slowly (aloud if possible). As you do, take note of any words or phrases that especially stand out to you, or any stirrings within your heart.

The tattoo on my wrist is a dumbbell with the word *abide* written on the bar. The word, written in Greek, is also the only part of the tattoo comprised of color: purple and green.



There is no shortage of scriptural images for finding our strength in God, so I won't take space here to elaborate on the layers of that part of the tattoo. The word *abide* is also commonplace in the New Testament, but, for the purposes of my tattoo, the full meaning of it cannot be understood without also looking at the color choice.

In the liturgical calendar, purple occurs during Advent and Lent. The color is tied to words such as mourning, waiting, and reflecting. Green, alternatively, is liturgically used to represent ordinary time, as well as renewal and new life.

So, when I look at my wrist, I am reminded to abide with God in times of mourning and in ordinary times. When things are great, neutral, or terrible. But, it is also a reminder that the ordinary times will come again; though the times of mourning and waiting appear to far outweigh the rest, we have strength to endure if we but abide.

Abide with God always. Even on this Holy Saturday, this in-between time, trust in God's steadfast love that does not end in mourning. Rather, God's steadfast love always, yes always, carries us through to new life. Abide with God and see.

Prayer

In all of my in-between times, God, I pray You strengthen me to but abide in trust of Your steadfast love. May I honor You by holding fast and resting in the assured hope of redemption.

Continue in prayer as the Spirit leads

Praise God, He is Risen! He is Risen indeed.