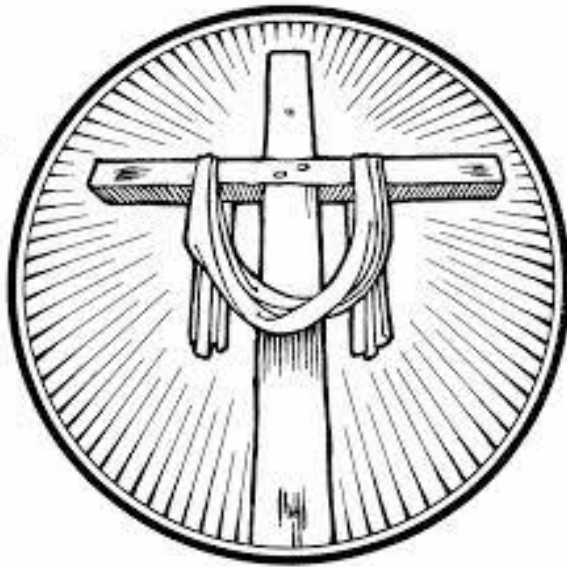


Towards Easter and Beyond.... A Journey with Jesus!

Personal Reflections on Jesus' Passion, Death, & Resurrection



Dedication:

In early 2020, like many others I was completely caught unaware and unprepared, by what would later become known as the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. Life changed nearly instantly for everyone, as the world wrestled with so many confusing and seemingly contradictory “facts” and an apparently ever-growing list of unknowns. It became overwhelming for many. But one irrefutable fact remained in my mind and brought solace to my heart during those bleak days.... God is good. GOD is good. GOD IS GOOD!!!! No matter the circumstances or the darkness facing us, God is good, and His love endures forever. Despite the chaos, the Lord was still in charge and He was neither surprised by the COVID Virus nor was He without a plan. This invariably led me to Scripture and as I sought answers I was drawn to reconsider and take to heart once again St. Paul’s words to the Church in Philippi:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-7).

These words brought me comfort for they reminded me that as a Christian my hope and joy are not dependent upon my circumstances, but rather my nearness to and dependence on Christ Jesus. Then I pondered how I might help the inmates of the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, deal with the mounting isolation, anxiety, and hopelessness that was this scourge, a virus which not only afflicted the body, but also grieved the hearts, minds, and spirits of so many. Again, the Lord spoke to me and chastened me not to worry about the things I could not control or focus on what I could not do, but rather to concentrate on what was possible. Authentic Christian Disciples do the things Jesus is calling us to do—which was to be “Salt and Light”—to sow love and joy amidst the darkness! Consequently, the kernel of an idea was born for the larger Community of Christian Volunteers to produce this Devotional as gift for our “Brothers in Blue” along with our heartfelt prayers.

This Devotional is dedicated to all of you!

May the Holy Spirit use it speak to your hearts with the ineffable that is found only in Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

The Rev. Russell Martin, Protestant Chaplain,
R. J. Donovan Correctional Facility, San Diego

Introduction:

For Centuries, Christians have undertaken sacred journeys or pilgrimages, to the Holy Land or other sites of religious significance as a means of growing in their faith, deepening their piety, and expressing their devotion and commitment to Christ; a practice that grew out of Biblical accounts of visiting or remembering places significant in God's plan of salvation. However, early in its history the Church recognized that it was not always possible for people to make a physical journey to shrines or other Holy places and so the practice of Spiritual Pilgrimages became a viable alternative. It is not the number of physical steps one takes that determines the success or failure of a Spiritual Pilgrimage, but rather the openness of one's heart and spirit to what God will do in us as we travel. Often the journey itself matters more than destination. In the process of baring our soul to the Lord, He uses that as an opportunity to shape and transform us more and more into His likeness.

It became the custom of much of the Early Church to set aside a dedicated season of fasting, prayer and special acts of self-denial, whereby Christians would prepare to remember Jesus' Passion, Death, and ultimately His Resurrection on Easter Day. The season of Lent, provides an opportunity, to take a virtual pilgrimage, a Journey with Jesus. This Devotional is intended to be a guide to assist you in making a journey of personal spiritual significance. It is our hope and prayer that this book will aid you afford the opportunity for you to encounter the Risen Lord Christ in a new and vibrant way, even as it allows you to discover and grow in your own journey as a disciple of Jesus.

I hope you will accept our invitation to take the next 32 days to make a Spiritual Pilgrimage in your heart, and travel alongside Jesus, beginning with the Last Supper, His Passion, and His Death on the Cross, Towards Easter and Beyond....

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

(Numbers 6:24-26)

Suggested Format

1. **Begin with a Prayer:** Invite the Holy Spirit to Instruct and Guide you as you study.
2. **Read the Scripture of the Day:** Found at the top of each Daily Meditation
3. **Reread the Scripture of the Day:** Noting of any key idea or concept that speaks to you.
4. **Read the Day's Devotion:** Then consider and reflect on the Questions of the Day.
5. **Meditate:** What insights did you gain? How did God Speak to you today?
6. **Application:** What is one concrete step you could take in response to the day's lesson?
7. **Close in Prayer:** Use the Prayer Prompt to pray as the Lord leads.

Jesus: The Servant Leader (John 13:1-17)

Day 1

Author: Don C.

Today, in many circles the phrase “servant leader” is an oxymoron. However, servant leadership is a philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. This is different from traditional leadership where the leader’s focus is the thriving of their company, organization, or them self. A Servant-Leader shares power puts the needs of others first, and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. In this passage, the Apostle John helps us understand why Jesus is the greatest example of a servant and leader. When Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, Jesus shows us three important character traits of a Servant Leader.

Humility: An effective Servant Leader leads with humility. Jesus knew the Father had given him all power and authority over all things. Yet with humility, Jesus chose to lay aside His outer garment and taking a towel, tied it around His waist (v.3-4). This was a position of servitude. The root of this practice is found in the hospitality customs of ancient civilizations, especially where sandals were the chief footwear. A host would provide water and a servant to wash the dirty feet of their guests. Most viewed this as the lowest of a servant’s task. Yet, Jesus sees it as the greatest.

Others First: A good Servant Leader places the needs of others first. Although Jesus knew who was to betray Him (v.11), he treated Judas no different than the other disciples. Jesus was willing to put others first, even in the face of death. Jesus confirms this sentiment by saying, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn. 15:12-13).

Example: One of the greatest traits of a Servant Leader is a person that leads by example. After washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus told them, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (v.14-15). Jesus led by example. He reminded them that the Lord had just washed their feet, so no position should prevent them from doing it for someone else. Jesus let them know that if the Lord and Teacher washed their feet, they ought to imitate him. His model was to be reproduced. His example was more powerful than a lecture about the principles of service. Actions speak louder than words.

As a returning citizen, after spending years in and out of prison, I understand the frustrations, loneliness, challenges, and barriers that come with serving your sentence. However, it was there, in prison, that the Lord began a good work in me. Let Him do the same for you. Use your time wisely and develop the skills necessary as you learn to lead with, humility, placing others first, and by example.

How do you demonstrate humble service in your community?

What actions do you take which serve as positive examples for others to follow?

Prayer: Lord, grow within me a heart to serve others and a compassion to help those in need.

The Betrayal of Jesus (John 13:18-30)

Day 2

Author: Elliot N.

Betrayal surely is a horrible thing. It can destroy families, friendships and marriages. It is human nature to feel hatred and anger when someone betrays our trust. Especially when we have a close relationship with them. They were our most trusted confidant and knew everything about us. Without fervent prayer it is so hard to reconcile with and forgive our betrayer. God's Word tells us that while they were eating and celebrating the Feast of Passover, Jesus stated someone there would betray Him. What a bold and prophetic statement to make. When Jesus told them someone sitting at this table eating with us would betray him, the Apostles asked who it was. They had complete trust in Jesus' omniscience and desired to protect him from the traitor. Jesus proceeded to publicly point out the person who would betray him. He let them know that whomever you see me serve this drink to...that is the person who will betray me.

We all know what happened to Judas after this event and what the future had for him. He couldn't live with the realization that he walked with Christ, talked with Christ, and then betrayed Christ. John 13:2 it states that the Devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. We have to understand that the Devil relishes in every sin we commit against Christ. His purpose is to destroy any relationship we have with Christ. It is imperative that you believe that ensuring you don't walk with Christ is the Devils ultimate goal. God stated in Ephesians 6:10-18, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Be ye ready. God in his Word did not say half or some armor. He specifically said, put on the whole armor of God.

It is paramount that we remember that God's Word constantly reminds us who the Devil is. It clearly states in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." We sleep, but the Devil never sleeps. In the wild, lions hunt, seek, and devour the lost sheep that becomes the easy conquest...the easy prey. The one who has lost his direction and gotten away from Christ is easy prey. Don't let that be you. Don't let yourself drift away from Christ and be lost. So how do we remain close to Christ? How do we not become lost? Start by getting immersed in the Word and studying the Word. Strive to live according to how the Word says to live. Finally, ensure you surround yourself with others who believe in the Word.

Christ knew he was to be betrayed and still went willingly to the cross for you and I. Now that's LOVE!

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you loved?

What did the process of forgiveness look like?

Prayer: Father please help me forgive those who have betrayed my trust and love.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial (John 13:31-38)

Day 3

Author: Danny C.

After finishing the Passover meal, Jesus spoke in somewhat disguised terms about being “glorified” (a reference to His death and the salvation that would be possible through His sacrifice), but more plainly about the fact that He would be leaving His followers for a place they were not yet able to go (John 13:31-33). Then He commanded them to love each other, the ultimate proof to “outsiders” that they were indeed His followers (John 13:34-35).

Ever-curious Peter couldn't hold his tongue any longer, “Lord, where are you going?” (John 13:36). Jesus told him he couldn't follow Him right away but would later. Peter couldn't conceive of such a situation: “Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (John 13:37). Peter had left everything to follow Jesus. He had seen Jesus do many miracles and even briefly saw Him in His heavenly glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter even swore loyalty to Jesus—even if that meant death. Imagine Peter's shock when Jesus said, “Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times” (John 13:38). Peter was in disbelief: “What? After I just promised to lay down my life for you!” Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself!

Luke tells us that Jesus softened the blow of His prediction, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Matthew records Peter's response, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the other disciples said the same” (Mark 14:31). Luke quotes Peter as saying, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33).

After that exchange, Peter was silent. He had been in Jesus' inner circle, had spent nearly three years traveling with Jesus. Disowning Jesus was unthinkable. Fortunately, Jesus gave Peter encouraging words to carry him through the trial that was ahead: “I have prayed for you that your faith [in me as the Messiah, the Holy One of God] fail not [not be eclipsed]. But I know after you deny me, you will repent of your sin and when you do so, please encourage and strengthen my other followers so they won't follow your example” (paraphrase of Luke 22:31-32).

Describe a time when you were tempted to deny being a follower of Jesus?

How can we guard against that happening?

What does it mean to you to place your trust in Jesus as the Messiah, the Only begotten Son of God?

Prayer: Lord, as you prayed for Peter, and pray for me now, so I pray that in times of trial or temptation, that my faith in you would not fail, that I would walk in your righteousness and treat people with compassion.

The Gift of The Holy Spirit (John 14:15-30)

Day 6

Author: Roger Z.

In this portion of scripture, Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to heaven to prepare a place for them. They are troubled that He will be leaving them but assures them that they will not be left alone. The Bible says that every good and every perfect gift is from above (James 1:17). Here we discover that the Holy Spirit is not only the gift from God, but the Holy Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is called by several names: The Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the Helper, the Intercessor, the Revealer, and still others. Jesus not only tells the disciples of the gift but also, He assures that gift with a promise. Jesus tells His disciples in verse 16, "And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you and in you forever." The Holy Spirit is there to remind us that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He helps us in our weakness, He comforts us when no one else can. He leads and guides us into all truth in a world that seeks to keep us in darkness.

As a new believer in 1975, I was overwhelmed with the thought of reading God's word and not knowing what I was reading. It was all new to me. Though I didn't understand, nor could I articulate my new life in Christ, I knew in my heart that something had happened. As the song we used to sing in the chapel says, "I know I've been changed," I couldn't explain the theology of being a new creation in Christ. But I know now that it was the Holy Spirit bearing witness with my spirit that I was a child of God (Rom 8:16). We live in troublesome and trying times. The challenges that we all face during this pandemic have been difficult to say the least. But be encouraged knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in you. Hope is not found in our circumstances, our feelings, or our best efforts. Blessed hope and the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. He will help you when you feel helpless, guide you when you lack direction, and comfort you in your darkest hour.

How do you rely on the comfort of the Holy Spirit during times of need?

What does trusting in His guidance during difficult times look like?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the wisdom and strength to walk in the Spirit so that I may fulfill your calling in my life. May all that I do and say bring glory and honor to your name.

Abiding Branch Made Clean For Love (John 15:1-17)

Day 7

Author: Bart H.

It is our gracious God who created the Branches. It is our gracious God who became the Vine. It is our gracious God who cleansed and tends the branches. It is our gracious God who produces the fruit through the branches. It is our gracious God who Loves us and commands us to Love one another.

Our Lord Jesus makes the statement "I am the true vine." "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This brings me great comfort to know that when I am confused, uncertain, or fearful, I have a Lord, Savior, and Friend that guides me into all truth.

In this passage our Lord uses the word abide ten times in eleven verses so we better pay attention to the point HE is making! Jesus is the vine, we as believers are the branches called to always be connected to (abiding in) the vine and God our Father is the one who perfectly tends the branches. Jesus makes it clear to me that without HIM the vine, I the branch cannot bear fruit without abiding in HIM, but note that as I abide in HIM I can do all things! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13).

In verse three, Jesus inserts this wonderful statement about us, yes us. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Dear friends do you believe in the Word of God? If you believe, you have been made clean! There are many times that I feel anything but clean. "Oh Lord but YOU know what I did, what I said, what I thought...How can I really be clean?!" Friends praise be to God our Father that our cleanness is based on what our Lord has already done for us and not my works (Eph. 2:8-10). Don't let anyone tell you that you are not clean in Christ. You are now clean, saved, and valuable and set apart for HIS good works in Love.

You see the vine dresser when He goes about to tend the branches He will always come across some branches that have falling into the mud and dirt, they are barely hanging unto the vine and can wither and produce little fruit if any. Note that now the vinedresser (the Father) comes and lifts the branches out of the filth, cleans the branch then secures the branch close to the vine. Beloved by God we are those branches which He has for some reason chosen, now HE cleans us, lifts us, restores us and Loves us unto good works (bearing fruit) for HIS glory! You are worth much to our Lord, remember in verse 15-16 Jesus calls us friends and that HE chose you.

Twice in verses 12-17 Jesus commands us to Love one another. Not a suggestion if you know what I mean.

If I trust in the Lord for my eternal salvation, do I trust HIM for the needs of each day and enjoy the peace that comes with that relationship?

How can I bear fruit that glorifies God?

How do I love others, how do I forgive?

Prayer: Dear Lord I pray that I will never forget your Love for me, what you have already accomplished, and that it is by YOU that I can bear fruit for your glory and my peace. Thank you for making me clean in your eyes, the only eyes that matter, and may I learn to love as you loved, forgive as you forgave, and live unto You, for You Jesus are so worthy of this!

Author: Al C.

I grew up in the church. I attended Sunday School and youth activities almost every week until I went away to college. After a few weeks of going without church, I returned to attending frequently though it did not affect my social life as one would expect. I remembered the rules (commandments) but ignored them when I preferred to go my own way. I realized that I resented more and more the “holy ones” I met in church. I thought they believed they were better than me. Finally, one day in my senior year in college I listened carefully and realized how much of a sinner I truly was and how much God loved me and was calling me to follow him. After understanding the Good News, I began to change my life and enjoy the fellowship of other Christians. That is when I first experienced the negative reactions that others had against my changed life.

Hate is a strong emotional word. I am not even sure that I have experienced the severity of hate. Maybe you have. Every year many Christians suffer badly and are even killed due to the expressed hatred against their faith, changed life, and Savior. In my years as a Christian, I must admit that I prefer to have someone hate me than to just be apathetic. It is almost impossible to reach an apathetic person while someone who hates is challenged with any change they see in me as I seek to conform to the image of Christ. In this passage Jesus reminds us that we have a new relationship in this world. All of us understand how we can be slaves to this world, its ways, and its attitudes. However, when one receives Jesus, he no longer is a slave but now he has been chosen to be Jesus’ friend. His allegiance has changed to God and eternity. Jesus calls him his friend.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.” Jesus anticipates that we will be persecuted because He was. We are no longer slaves to sin, but friends of Jesus. We are willing to conform our life to His that we might bring others into the saving knowledge of God’s grace. Like marriage. It was fun meeting my wife as a friend. From friendship it turned to love. From love, it turned to marriage. In marriage we have obstacles and trials that we must endure, but the more victorious we are the more we appreciate the strengthened, loving relationship we enjoy.

In 1964, I let go of my fight to become a friend of Jesus. Over the years, I have had people express discontent for my life and faith. Like Paul on the road to Damascus when his hate was confronted by the love of Jesus, his life was changed dramatically. People who hate your Christianity can be turned by your caring response to them as a friend of Jesus. Paul suffered greatly as he spread the good news of God’s love for all. He exemplified the joy that one can find in this relationship despite the hate of some against a changed life. Let us walk with our friend Jesus and respond with love when someone expresses hate for our faith and relationship to Jesus.

Before becoming a Christian, what did you feel about Christians? Why?

Have you come to know Jesus as a friend?

Have you been able to love those who express a hate for your new life in Jesus?

Prayer: Holy Spirit help me to walk more closely with Jesus and to love those who struggle against the life I have found in following Jesus.

The Disciples' Grief Will Turn To Joy (John 16:16-33)

Day 10

Author: Bill L.

Sitting at the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus told them they would grieve, even while others would celebrate, because His physical form would be leaving this world. I can tell you, you will have grief too. God did not tell us this is going to be easy. Look at life, there has been grief, and there will be again, because God loves us. He wants us to be the best version of ourselves. Grief is an inevitable part of our transformation into a person better than who we are now. God is going to continue to form us into who He intends us to be because He loves us and He intends us to be His.

Jesus told the disciples that their grief would be turning to joy. As a woman giving birth goes through much pain, yet that pain is forgotten when she holds her baby in her arms, so is our journey. Years back, my son drowned in our backyard swimming pool on Easter Sunday. I was overwhelmed with grief. But, I didn't turn from God, I leaned into Him, and in time that turning to God has led me to a closer, deeper relationship with Him, and joy. Trust "that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

I can tell you, if you trust in Jesus, and you believe that he died for you, and was risen from the dead, you will be filled with joy too. The kind of joy Jesus is talking about is the kind of joy that James teaches us in his book. Joy is a choice we make to trust that God has everything under control from His point of view and that He's refining us into who He intends us to be. Trusting we are being refined in our grief and knowing we will be who He intends us to be, leads us to the place where we can "count it all joy when [we] fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of [our] faith produces patience" (James 1:2). I heard this acronym for "JOY" that helps me find this kind of joy. Put your heart and mind on these, in this order: **J**esus, **O**thers, **Y**ourself.

Another blessing that comes with truly being His, is to be filled with the peace of God. Jesus told the disciples that He was giving them a heads up about what was going to happen so that they would have peace. Paul describes this peace Jesus is talking about as "a peace that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Jesus told them that in this world they would have trouble. But that He has overcome this world, and in Him, they would share in that same victory. We have this same promise!

Know that God has a plan, and He's carrying it out, and it is good. He wants the best for us. When we find ourselves in grief, know He's got it. He has a plan, and it's not to be stuck in grief, it is to be full of joy, to be filled with the peace of God. All praise and glory to God, amen.

When did you pass from a place of grief to a place of peace?
How did you see God's hand in the transition?

Prayer: Lord, reveal a grief I'm going through and help me find joy in it.

The Most Important Work We Do Is Prayer (John 17:1-5)

Day 11

Author: Bill F.

In the previous four chapters of John, Jesus speaks to the disciples. In chapter 17, he stops speaking to the disciples and speaks to the Father. John chapter 17 is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. It is also the longest prayer in the Bible although it would only take you about three minutes to read it. Jesus often prayed out loud and He prayed this prayer out loud so that we would have knowledge of it. This is truly the prayer of Jesus and is divided into three parts. In part one Jesus prays for himself; in part two Jesus prays for his disciples; and in part three Jesus prays for us, His Church. God's gift to Jesus is the Church. We have come to know Matthew 6:9-13 as the Lord's Prayer but this should be called the disciples prayer. Jesus could not have prayed this prayer because he had no trespasses to be forgiven. He was blameless. The prayer in Matthew 6 was to teach us how to pray. The Lord's prayer is actually John chapter 17. Our security as a believer rests upon the Father's faithfulness to answer the prayers of the Son.

Verses one through five in this chapter are Jesus's prayer for himself. It is not selfish to pray for ourselves. It is essential that we pray for ourselves in order to be in tune to God before we begin to pray for others. Jesus begins his prayer by stating that the time has come. He will now pay for your sins and mine where he will show the love of God for us. That is the Gospel; that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures. God is glorified in demonstrating that he so loved the world that he sacrificed his only begotten son so that we could be saved (John 3:16). Jesus states that he has been given authority over all people, yet He allows us to come to Him through our own free will by believing in the Father and the Son and accepting God's gift to us. Jesus also states that He has brought glory to God by completing the work God gave him to do. If Jesus has completed the work, there is nothing we can add to it. We can accept the free gift but cannot earn it. It is by grace alone that we are saved, not by our efforts. God has done all the work; we just need to respond. In His prayer, Jesus petitions God to "glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus laid aside His glory to become man but will return to be at the side of the Father. As written in Hosea 5:15, Jesus will return again when Israel has acknowledged their guilt and seek His face. All men and women will exist forever, but only believers will experience an eternal life of Joy with God.

The correct concept is to think of prayer as the breath in our lungs and the blood from our hearts. Both occur continuously without us even being aware of it. Beware of anything that stops the offering up of prayer. Jesus never mentioned unanswered prayer. He had the unlimited certainty of knowing that prayer is always answered.

What in your life is keeping you from a life of continual prayer?

How can you have the confidence that your prayers are answered when they are within the will of God?

Prayer: Father, I pray that Your Purpose for those I pray for will be done in their lives.

Jesus Prays For His Disciples (John 17:6-19)

Day 12

Author: Steve D.

We are blessed with modern medicines that seem to offer a pill for every ill. But we all know that these pills treat the symptom, and do not treat the cause of the illness or hurt. Anti-inflammatory medicines reduce inflammation, but inflammation is a physical reaction to a problem. For example, if we fall down and scrape or bruise our knee, our knee will become inflamed. If we really want healing, we can take an aspirin to reduce the pain and inflammation, but we are just masking the pain. The damage still exists. To achieve healing, we must treat the wound and care for it, so that we are restored. We must address the root cause of the injury or illness and not just address the symptom. Prayer is a means of sharing our pain, recognizing Jehovah Rapha (God, the Healer), and petitioning God for healing.

Jesus was intentional and specific in dealing with his own hurts and those around him, and this passage beautifully demonstrates how Jesus dealt with needs and hurts. When Jesus “made his [Father’s] name known,” he was doing three things at the same time; evangelizing unbelievers, discipling believers, and asking the Father for true healing that would last a lifetime. Did you notice how Jesus said, “I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me”? (v. 9) Jesus was specific in his prayer, and focused not on the needs of the world, but the need of the sheep – on the sheep needing care. (Matthew 18:12–14).

Many believers claim they are overwhelmed with their own needs and the needs of others and say, “I don’t know how to pray or what to pray.” Jesus is showing us to pray for, “those that you gave me.” The Holy Spirit offers us convictions on who to pray for. We could pray for what we see in the news, or who people ask us to pray for, but Jesus was intentional and chose to pray for “those whom you gave me.”

Jesus was protective of his sheep, like any Good Shepard. He said, “I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost” (v 12), and to “protect them from the evil one (v 15). The Bible is God’s Word, and there are commands in the Bible to not only know scripture, but to use scripture as a basis for living and praying (v 17). Prayer is another practice we can use to “love one another” (1 Peter 4:8).

Are you praying for those that God “gave” you? How are you praying specifically?
What scripture are you including in your prayers?
Who are you praying for regularly?

Prayer: Father in Heaven. You are mighty and the Good Physician. In my body and mind, mend what is broken. Remove all inflammation and cleanse any infection. Let the warmth of your healing love pass through my body and mind to make new any unhealthy areas so that my body will function the way you created it to function, and my focus will not be divided. Restore me to full health in mind and body so that I may serve you the rest of my life.

The Most Thrilling Prayer Ever Prayed (John 17:20-26)

Day 13

Author: Doyle Y.

In verse 20, Jesus prays for the church, for all of those who will hear the message of the gospel through the apostles. This is Jesus, interceding for His own, especially for His church. It's amazing to think about, but two thousand years ago, Jesus was praying for you – as well as dying for you. We are His personal possession, a love gift from the Father, cherished by the Son, guarded, protected, and someday to be raised up to glory. Here you see Christ immediately taking care of His own by interceding for them. That's how He cares for us now. This constant intercession goes on and on.

There are many great and profound truths in this prayer, but one pervades it all...the amazing love that Jesus has for His own. That's what prompts this intercession. It's His great and profound love that prompts this prayer for His disciples and for the Church. "Behold what manner of love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1). This immense, astounding, really undefinable, unimaginable, and infinite love is expressed here as the Savior prays for His own. This takes us into a profound expression of the love, not in a physical action, but in a spiritual communion with God Himself. Nothing is more emblematic or more demonstrative of the love of Christ than that He intercedes for His own.

He has you in His heart, He has me in His heart, and He carries us to the throne of the Father that He might plead on our behalf for all the best gifts that God can give. That's how much He loves His own. His love, depicted in this high priestly prayer, is sealed forever in the willingness expressed in His death, as He went to the cross to die for those for whom He had just interceded. No greater evidence of His love can be seen than the cross, but next to the cross, this incredible picture of His high priestly intercession demonstrates how deeply He loves us.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to be the beloved of the Father and the beloved of the Son?
How do you experience the love of God?

Prayer: Lord, I am overwhelmed with your incredible intercessory work, yet I'm thrilled to be a part of what you're doing in the world. Though I don't understand all of it, I thank you that you picked me up out of the darkness and you made me your own. I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, that you ever lived to make intercession for me, that I might be holy and that someday, I might be brought to glory. I thank you, Lord, and I know that my thanks should translate into the way I live. A grateful life is an obedient life. Thank you, Lord, for what you're going to do in me as I come to understand more and more your love for me.

Author: Steve D.

There is an old hymn called “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” This old hymn was written by Joseph Scriven around 1855. Historians tell us Mr. Scriven did not have a lot of friends on this earth because he was different—some would say eccentric, or odd. Mr. Scriven was faced with a lot of trauma in his youth and young adulthood, that often left him feeling depressed. Many tragic moments in our lives can leave us feeling depressed and alone, and one such event would be getting arrested. For those who have been arrested, sometimes it is because a “friend” enticed them to do an illegal act. Sometimes, an arrest occurs where 2 or more friends are caught together in an illegal act. And occasionally, an innocent person is arrested. And sometimes, that innocent person is not only arrested, but also convicted of wrongdoing. And this is where our scripture passage begins.

When most people get arrested today in the USA, it is unlikely they were arrested after finishing an hour-plus long prayer vigil. Well, maybe the wrong doer is praying the moment after they were caught and arrested, but that is not the situation Jesus faced. In John 18:1, Jesus had just finished a time of prayer, and upon arriving in one of his favorite peace-filled places, was approached by the tabernacle leaders and their law enforcement guards. Initiating the arrest one of Jesus’ twelve disciples—Judas. Some friend! Judas witnessed Jesus performing miracles, walked alongside Jesus for miles and miles over 3 years. Yet, this “friend” had planned Jesus’ arrest. Then, Jesus had his day in court (v. 13).

We use the term friend to mean many different things these days. Some use “friend” as in “partner in crime.” Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man with many friends may suffer harm, but there is a loving friend who sticks closer than a brother.” To have such a loving friend usually requires time, patience, and dedication. Jesus is our friend who will never fail us and will always be patient when we fail. However, Jesus will be honest with us when we do wrong things (sin). Proverbs 27:6 says, “You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies.” A real friend will confront us when we fail, and hopefully, will help us realize that we are headed in the wrong direction before we do wrong and get arrested.

Who is one friend to whom you are close enough to confess your sin? (James 5:16) Since each believer is called to encourage, who is one person God has placed in your reach to whom you can demonstrate godly friendship, especially someone who is not accepted readily by others?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, You created me as a social being and You designed me to build up special relationships and friendships with those that pass along my way, sometimes family members, and at other times strangers that simply walk into my life or cross my path. Lord, I lift up those who do not have any special friend or who desire to have someone significant or important in their life, not simply as a marriage partner, but a friend, a kindred spirit, a special person with whom they can build up a trusting relationship, and who will share in their joys as well as their sorrows. Look down in pity on those that have such a longing in their hearts and give them the desire of their heart, so that together they can encourage and edify each other in the faith and unite together in praise and worship with the God who in His loving-kindness drew them into each other’s lives.

Peter's First Denial (John 18:15-18)

Day 15

Author: Tom S.

Back in the spring of 1969, I was working a rotating shift in the Midwest that would allow a 5 day break every 28 days. A co-worker and I decided to drive to Daytona Beach on our break that spring. While in Florida we met up with a high school friend of mine going to college in Deland and had a great weekend.

As we were driving home late at night, we were directed to take a short detour off of I-75 and I had to stop at a Mom & Pop gas station in Georgia to use their restroom. The restroom was in the back of the station where there was a young black youth waiting outside the door. When I got in line behind him to wait my turn, the owner of the gas station walked up to us and addressed me, while motioning toward the youth, "Is he with you?" I truthfully and naively answered, "No." At which point the owner told the youth he had to leave, no Blacks were allowed to use his restroom.

Here it was, my first real life experience with racism. I was 20 years old. I knew what I was witnessing was wrong. I could take this moment to appeal to the owner and ask for his compassion or I could stand up to the owner and say, "If this bathroom is too good for this youth, it's too good for me too" and leave.

What I chose was similar to Peter. I chose to not align myself with my young brother as Peter chose not to align himself with his brother, "the other disciple."

Peter chose not to align himself with Right, the teachings of Christ, but to go along with the crowd and stand with them by the fire. I chose not to align myself with Right, in the teachings of Christ, but to go along with the crowd by saying nothing as I entered the restroom.

Peter and I both learned valuable lessons as a result of these denials that shaped our lives. I was convicted of my poor choice as we continued the drive back home that weekend. Peter was convicted later that night when he heard the rooster crow, remembered Jesus' words, and saw the look on His face.

When have you denied Jesus in your life?

How has He blessed you as a result?

Prayer: Lord, allow Your Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct my life to always make Your choice in my life.

Author: Thomas B.

When I told my family that I converted to Christianity and gave my life to Christ, it was as if I betrayed the family. I was questioned as to why I made this decision. I was told that I was following the wrong teaching and asked why I left the family's faith. My family was afraid I was joining a cult, but the truth is, I was simply following Jesus. The more I tried to explain, the more upset they became and less they seemed to understand my decision.

I have never met a person who did not experience rejection. We all have experienced rejection in some form or fashion. In school, maybe you were not picked on a team to play kickball. Some of us have experienced rejection by our family members, others by our friends because we would no longer participate in things they do. Being rejected is never a good feeling to go through.

Who better to understand rejection than Jesus? He was rejected by the high priest but also by the people. In Matthew 27:15-20, during the feast, Pilate asked the crowd whom shall he release, Jesus or Barabbas? The crowd choose Barabbas.

Even though the Priests, Pharisees, and the crowd rejected Jesus, he withstood that because he had the approval of the father. In Matthew 3:17 God said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

You see, it does not now matter what others think of us or what they say or do to hurt us, the most important thing to know is that the father loves you and will never reject you. Jesus bore the rejection of the cross for us! Who better to heal us of rejection other than Jesus? The answer is no one!

When was a time when you were rejected?

How did Jesus redeem that situation?

How does Jesus speak to you when you are feeling rejected?

Prayer: Lord, allow your holy spirit to guide me when I am in a situation where I feel rejected. Let your love abound in me and do not let rejection discourage me from following you and loving others. Continue to teach me to be compassionate and loving towards others and to pray for those who disagree or reject me.

Peter's Second & Third Denials (John 18:25-27)

Day 17

Author: Steve S.

He was known as Simon, son of Jonah, and brother of Andrew. A simple fisherman who was known for his impulsive behavior and a quick tongue that often spoke without thinking and no doubt got him into much trouble. He could be defined as often brash and certainly not lacking in self-confidence. You might wonder why Jesus would give him a new name Peter, which means the "rock," build his church upon this rock, and entrust the keys to the kingdom of heaven to this man. Seems with all his flaws and faults, he was not exactly a prototype, model disciple. But then Jesus wasn't looking for a "model" disciple, no he was looking for real and authentic men which includes all their faults and brokenness.

Are you starting to have hope? Man, I sure am because I know in spite of my faults and brokenness, the Lord can use me (and you) in ways that exceed my wildest expectations for His honor and glory when we surrender our will for His will.

Scripture tells us as Jesus is being interrogated and accused of wrong doing, Peter is hanging close to this mock trial in a courtyard warming himself at an open fire when he is accused of being with Jesus of Galilee. He snaps back, possibly caught off guard or surprised by this accusation, and responds that he didn't know what they were talking about. Same Peter, quick with his tongue, speaking without thinking.

A short time later, with surely enough time to think about his denial of being associated with Jesus, he was confronted a second and third time with the same accusations, this time his response was seemly more premeditated, each time claiming he did not know Jesus and even called down curses on himself.

Peter, a follower, a disciple, a student of Jesus for approximately 3 years, a witness to numerous miracles and professed to believe Jesus to be the Messiah is now witnessing Jesus being abused, beaten, and humiliated. What mixed emotions Peter must have been experiencing in that moment. So much so, that in his human condition he exhibited fear, confusion, and discouragement (how could the Messiah, the Savior of the world be arrested). He denounced the man he proclaimed as the Messiah. Wow, it doesn't get much worse than abandoning the person you called Messiah in his moment of need and support. In spite of Peter's desertion, Jesus would show Peter mercy and forgive him for abandoning him in His time of need.

If you think God can never forgive you for a sin you have committed or a reoccurring sin that you can't shake, come in confession and repentance before the Lord, and like Peter, remember Jesus loves us so much that he died for us, exchanging our sins for His life, so that we might spend eternity in His presence.

How do you abandon Jesus?

Was there a time in your life when you had the opportunity to defend your faith in Christ but kept silent?

Prayer: Father may you always be with me and may the Holy Spirit provide the words necessary to defend my faith in Christ when I am challenged.

Even Religious People Are Capable Of Manipulating Others (John 18:28-40) Day 18

Author: Art S.

In our text we read the narrative of sinners working against God because of their own pride and selflessness. Nothing really new here though, mankind, in this case the Sanhedrin pulling out all the stops in their desire to have their way. A trial in the night before Annas and Caiaphas, Jesus guarded by a heavy contingent of “underlings” or the police force of the Sanhedrin, a crowd of common people that had discovered the extraordinary proceedings, perhaps all to show the gravity of the case against Jesus with the view to impress the governor to assent to the verdict of the Sanhedrin. They want him dead. But they don’t have that authority, no, it has to come from the Roman court.

What are the accusations against this man? The Romans dealt with straight forward methods. Pilate has to assume that the Sanhedrists have come with one or more charges against Jesus; taking them to be the accusers. Romans deal with accusers and the accused face to face. Pilate proceeded as a Roman judge should. The Sanhedrists don’t want another trial of Jesus though, they want Pilate to accept their verdict and order an execution. They answer; “if this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him to you.” The demonstration the Sanhedrists were putting on certainly looked as though Jesus must be a terrible criminal. Pilate is to sign the Jewish verdict and make it his own by ordering the execution of Jesus forthwith. They are the judges; Pilate is to be the executioner.

To Pilate’s ear the term “evildoer” could mean only one thing, namely that Jesus was a great criminal against Roman law. And this is what the Sanhedrists intend Pilate to understand. But the charge against Jesus and this report of the trial to which the Sanhedrists had subjected him are a barefaced lie. No criminality against Roman law had ever been even as much intimated against Jesus at trial. The death sentence had been pronounced upon him for calling himself the Son of God in the presence of the Sanhedrin, utter blasphemy. They had not even attempted to prove that Jesus was not the Son of God. Of course, none of this was revealed to Pilate, for he would have at once turned them away from his tribunal. The Romans would never have entertained a religious charge that lay outside of Roman law and pertained only to the religious notions of a subject nation.

For us today, here we see an example of religious people, not different than you and I perhaps, manipulating others to advance their agendas. There is no boundary for sin, no one is left out of its grip. Remarkably, Jesus’ death at the hands of unjust accusers became the very means through which our gracious God took away the guilt of sin. God uses men for His purposes. Jesus said; “everyone who is of truth listens to my voice.” That means you and it means me.

How can you allow Jesus to work through you like he did with Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate and all the others for His glory today?

Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (Ps. 51:10).

Author: Art S.

John the Apostle in our text gives us Pilate who succumbs to political pressure exerted by Jewish leaders and delivers Jesus over to death by crucifixion. All human beings, by virtue of their participation in Adam's sin (Romans 5:12), bear responsibility for Christ's death. Yet, take comfort in this truth: "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities...with His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Jesus, the Suffering Servant King takes on human flesh in order that He might be humiliated, tortured, and killed to take away your sins. He was wounded—for you. He was crucified to bring about peace with God—for you. Through His work as the Suffering Servant, He brings healing—for you. Who is this Servant King? Who is like this God?

John helps us to learn that Jesus was not scourged in order to be crucified but in order to escape crucifixion. Pilate's attempt to save Jesus through Barabbas saved only Barabbas through Jesus. John tells us, not that Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified, but to be scourged. Pilate offered to scourge Jesus and then let him go free (Luke 23:16). After this failure Pilate, without agreement with the Jews and solely on his own initiative, orders the scourging. He even lets his soldiers stage a mockery of this "King of the Jews." Why allow this? In order to satisfy the Jews so that they may turn away from a wretched figure, a man who is too helpless and too ridiculous to give another thought. But this time Pilate's effort to save Jesus more than fails. At the sight of Jesus, scourged and dressed as a mock king, the Jews find the words that force Pilate to complete surrender, "From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar'" (v. 12). Thus, at last Pilate gives the order to crucify Jesus (v.16). And John solemnly notes both the place where the order was given and the hour when the fatal word was spoken.

To answer our question of who is this Servant King, we need to go back a chapter to John 18:35, where Pilate asks Jesus what he had done to be delivered up to him for judgement. Jesus answers in v36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." And concludes his admission of who he is in verse 37: Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

The story of Jesus' Passion is filled with people refusing to accept responsibility for their own sins, a failure that affects all of us. But God willed that the guilt of sin be laid on His innocent Son so we might receive God's forgiveness.

Has there ever been a time when you have condemned Jesus or another innocent person? How do you listen to the voice of Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to confess my faults. Rule my heart with Your most gracious favor.

The Crucifixion Of Jesus (John 19:17-27)

Day 20

Author: Jeff S.

“How can this be the end of who we believed was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Messiah?” “He did amazing things. He even raised the dead! Why can’t he save himself?” “I thought he would restore the throne of King David.” Pondering what might have been going through the minds of those around at the time; the people that lined his path to Golgotha, the soldiers, the criminals on his left and right, passersby, his mother, aunt, two other Marys, a disciple, and eventually me. What might I have asked or pondered?

Yet at this moment, who Jesus was to each of these people does not take center stage. The permissive will of God was occurring, Scripture was being fulfilled, and the perfect will of God was being accomplished on a cross atop Golgotha. What mattered was that the will of God be realized. Isaiah prophesied in 53:10, Yet It was the will of the Lord to crush Him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation (an Atoning Sacrifice) was accomplished by His crucifixion...not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Crucifixion, in antiquity, was considered one of the most brutal and shameful modes of death. We can look medically and forensically into the gruesome details of crucifixion and realize how devastating this manner of punishment is. And though we must consider this, we must also consider something beyond this.

Looking back about 2000 years earlier, on another hilltop not too far away from this one, a father, Abraham was asked to take his son, Isaac, up, bind him, and sacrifice him. But as the knife was about to go down, God said, Stop! I will provide the Lamb. Now here at Golgotha, God led His Son up to the top of the hill, bound Him, but the “knife” did not stop. Here, God provided the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. This was the will of God. Planned before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:19-20). We cannot know the fullness of the love of God unless we look upon His Son crucified on the cross and consider the heart of Father God. As you consider the crucifixion of Jesus, the Son of God, may you consider and realize the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth of God’s love for you--Jesus’ love for you. God’s love cannot be contained. His love must be shared.

What does Jesus Christ crucified on the cross at Calvary mean to me?

What did God accomplish in giving up His Son?

Prayer: Father, may I discover your heart and know how much you love me? And then, grant that I may love as you love.

Author: Bill B.

The death of Jesus is at the center of God’s plan for man. Everything up to this moment was preparation, and the future depended on this moment. The single most important moment in history.

Concerning the actual death of Jesus, Barclay comments: “When we compare the four gospels we find a most illuminating thing. The other three gospels do not tell us that Jesus said ‘It is finished.’ But they do tell us that Jesus died with a great shout upon His lips (*Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46*). On the other hand, John does not speak of the great cry, but he does say that Jesus’ last words were, ‘It is finished.’ The explanation of this difference is that the great shout, and the words, ‘It is finished,’ are one and the same thing. ‘It is finished’ is one word in Greek—*tetelestai*—and Jesus died with a shout of triumph on His lips. He did not say, ‘It is finished,’ in a weary defeat; He said it as one who shouts for joy because the victory is won. Jesus seemed to be broken on a Cross, but He knew that His victory was won.”

Yet there was one more enemy to be conquered, death. And so, Jesus’ final word was a shout not only of victory over sin, but also a shout of attack toward the next enemy, death.

The eternal, all powerful God of creation, made man for Himself. He made you and me to be with Him for eternity.

As a final testimony to the fact that Jesus is THE one to fulfill God’s plan, John testifies of two events that confirm Jesus to be the fulfillment of God’s plan. The fact that Jesus was already dead and that his legs were not broken, and that as confirmation that he was indeed dead, that a spear pierced his side and blood and water came out. Both of these events were fulfillment of prophecies made hundreds of years before the event.

Have you ever longed to be wanted?

The Creator’s plan for you is for you to be with Him for eternity. He wants you. How would you respond to this thought?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for wanting me so much. I want to be with you today, all day.

The Burial Of Jesus (John 19:38-42)

Day 23

Author: Pat A.

Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy businessman and a secret disciple of Jesus. He was also a member of the Sanhedrin, but was not among those who had condemned Jesus (Matt. 27:60). Nicodemus, though not mentioned in Scripture to be a disciple of Jesus, had secretly and undercover at night, visited Jesus and expressed his belief that He was sent from God, and had asked Jesus to explain His teachings (John 3:1-9).

These two men were from the Jewish High Counsel. They were talking to Jesus on the downlow. They didn't want their Jewish Council buddies to find out. These two stepped up to the plate to offer to bury Jesus' body. Joseph and Nicodemus, undercover believers, took Jesus' body down off the cross and Nicodemus brought expensive seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from aloes and myrrh to wrap Jesus' body with these spices and wrapped his body with long sheets of linen cloth. They placed Jesus in a new tomb, never used before.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus risked their reputations to provide for Jesus' burial. Are you a secret believer? Do you hide your faith from your friends and fellow workers? This is a good time to step out of hiding and let others know who you follow.

The Message Bible says this regarding you pretending not to know Jesus: "Stand up for me against world opinion and I'll stand up for you before my Father in heaven. If you turn tail and run, do you think I'll cover for you?" (Matt. 10:33).

Both Nicodemus and Joseph had hidden their faith in Jesus for fear of the Jews. Four people were changed in the process of Jesus' death: the criminal dying on the cross beside Jesus, who asked Jesus to include him in his Kingdom (Luke 23:39-43); the Roman officer that said, "Jesus was surely the Son of God" (Mark 15:39); and Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. These men were changed more by Jesus death than by his life.

Jesus, the "Lamb of God," and new Passover Lamb, had completed the work His Father had sent Him to do (John 17:4). Jesus' death on the cross would pay the price for all sins, making it possible for all who would believe in Him to have eternal life.

When have you been embarrassed to show your Christian commitment in front of others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to stand strong in my confession of faith toward Jesus Christ wherever I go. Thank you, Jesus, for dying & shedding your blood for the forgiveness of my sins. Forgive me for denying you.

The Empty Tomb (John 20:1-10)

Day 24

Author: Mike M.

Like the shock Mary Magdalene experienced that Easter dawn, I awoke a few years ago from a deep sleep, only to find that I was in a hospital bed. Magdala thought her world had crashed when she discovered that the body of the dead Jesus was missing from His tomb. My world had crashed from a severe heart attack that required many hours of surgery and five stents (plastic inserts in veins around my heart to enable it to keep working). Groggy and barely lucid from the ordeal, the cardiac medical team immediately began lecturing me about how I had to change my entire diet—no red meats, no salt, no processed foods, no alcoholic beverages, no desserts, no donuts or cake, and no regular milk—the list seemed endless. And I also needed lots of green vegetables, fruits with little or no sugar, and regular exercise. Never mind that the short walk from the hospital parking lot to my doctor’s appointment had produced severe pain in my hips, thighs, and back.

Bear in mind, I’m hearing all these medical instructions as an 80-plus-year-old who had been raised on a farm, eating meat, potatoes, and all the milk I wanted. “Never mind about that, sir,” the medical team continued, “all these diet changes need to happen now; it’s a matter of life or death!” You can imagine the shock to my world: How could this be? There had been no warning signs. Much like Mary Magdalene, I couldn’t believe my senses. Was this a bad dream or just someone’s tasteless prank?

At first, my thoughts remained stuck in denial and wondering as to what God had in mind by saving me from the heart attack? So I decided to fully investigate the foods I could now eat, and pray for God to bring me to a place of complete surrender to his will. Turns out there are a number of alternative foods I can eat that taste pretty good and won’t further injure my heart. Like Mary Magdalene, my prayers and further investigation brought me renewed energy and an answer as to what God had in mind for me. In her case, the results were astounding—a conversation with the risen Jesus; in my case, the results were beyond my wildest dreams—I found the strength and discipline to write a new book about the risen Jesus: *The Resurrection Chronicles*.

Has there been a time in your life when you thought your whole world had been turned upside down?

How did you handle it; upon reflection, would you do it differently, given the chance?

Prayer: Lord, please help me always remember that my entire life should be in accordance with Your will, Your perfect and loving will. A will that enables my life, second to second, and from whom all good things come.

Author: Charlie B.

Don't you just love a good action movie? Lots of stuff going on, exciting, attention grabbing. Mesmerizing. Take a look at John 20. Look at all the stuff going on. Women being important in a time when they were a little better than property. Sneaking around in the dark, so she wouldn't get caught. Stones moved, big ones! Praetorian guards in big trouble! Angels! Speaking Angels! Jesus Gone! How did that happen? What are they going to do now? John runs faster than Peter! (must be because Peter's foot is always in his mouth!) Look at all this drama in 10 short verses! (We see the angels in the other accounts of this scene!) We are in the middle of the most important event in all of history! Eye witness accounts! Jesus is Alive! He's defeated death! We are rescued! Praise God!

But did you see it? Did you miss it? The most important statement in all of the gospels? It's right there. Look at verse 7. What the heck is that doing here? The most important moment in all of Christianity, and John is talking about napkins? Who cares? Why do I need to know about this incidental little event? Why is it even in the bible, let alone here?

It took me a few weeks to find the answer for verse 7, and when I did, it changed a lot of stuff for me. When a servant brings the food to the table with the napkin, he leaves, and lets the master eat alone. Should the master get up from the table, he would do one of two things. He would roll it up in kind of a ball, and put it on his plate, signifying, that he was finished, and doesn't want to finish any more food. The servant then knows he can take the food away, and not offend his master. He was done eating. The second option was for the master to fold it up neatly, setting it aside, and therefore signal to his servants, that he was not done, he would be coming back to finish what he had started. That's what verse 7 is communicating. Jesus is telling His disciples, that He is going to come back and finish what He had started, the rescue mission. He was coming back to be the Messiah that they were hoping for, but He first had to solve their worst problem, their sin! All that stuff going on, big stuff, to be sure, and yet the biggest message of all, is that Jesus is coming back!!!

We pray for big things. Stones to be moved. Sins to be forgiven. Signs from heaven. But do we miss the biggest request of all? "Come quickly Lord Jesus" Come back, to fix the rest of what is broken. The thing we broke. The world. The thing we made bad, when the Father made it good. Scripture says that there is a reward for those who long for Jesus to return (1 Thess. 2:19).

Our world is a mess, and it seems we are unable to fix it. It keeps getting worse. Yet in the midst of this great event in John, the Holy Spirit reminded John to remind us, that Jesus is coming back to the table, to finish what needs to be done, and in the simplest of ways, out of context, there it is, skipped over a million times, our great hope to make this world what it was supposed to be. None of us forgetting that the Lord Jesus Christ is still on the Throne, and He is wanting You to ask Him to come back. How's that for something to pray about? Do you pray for Christ's return? If not, why not?

Prayer: Lord, you are the Great Redeemer. Please come redeem your people, your land, and all that is yours.

Mary's Inconsolable Sorrow Becomes Incomprehensible Joy (John 20:11-18) Day 26

Author: Jacqui M.

As I look back, I see the Lord has intervened in my life many times. I can't say I was possessed with 7 demons as Mary Magdalene had been prior to meeting Jesus, but I sin in ways I hate to admit. However, just like Mary at the Tomb, Jesus met me intimately in the middle of great sorrow and supernaturally gave me His Joy.

November 2, 2007 started like any other morning as I got my teenagers ready for school, but it is a day that I will forever remember. A day filled with every emotion on the spectrum—doubt, hope, fear, anger, disbelief, great sorrow, and then finally greater joy than I can describe. The phone rang and my mother was on the other line telling me that my 47 year old brother was being taken to the hospital with a possible heart attack. That's all she knew. Quickly I was out the door and headed to pick up my mother to take her to the hospital. (No gas in my car by the way, but that's another miracle story!) En route, after hanging up with prayer partners, I received a call from my mom. "He's Dead!" Lord, how can this be? "DEAD? DEAD?" I kept screaming. "Like GONE FOREVER?" I had prayed for him for over 20 years, but I felt so hopeless and helpless, wanting God to "fix this." Within a few minutes of my mom and I being by his side in the emergency room, it dawned on me that I didn't know his eternal destination.

At that moment, the Holy Spirit led me to start praying over my dead brother. "Jesus you raised people from the dead. Lord, You were resurrected Yourself, please let my brother come back to us. If it's not Your will, I need to know if he's damned for eternity in hell or in Heaven in the arms of our Savior right now?" Within minutes of my fervent prayers and crying out to The Lord, my mom's cell phone rang. She flipped it open and said, "It's for you." Before I could utter a word, my sister-in-law told me that my brother "was in the arms of Jesus as he had accepted the Lord and Savior 2 weeks ago." In that moment, as she almost verbatim repeated the words I had prayed, God gave me a JOY that has never left me. In the first days of his death, the Joy made no sense. How can I have Joy as my young nieces and nephews mourn their daddy? Over the years, I've seen God work miracles in the lives of his wife and 4 children. There still have been many tears, but I have to say from that day forward, I only cry tears of Joy for my brother and how Jesus took him home.

God knew me so intimately that this news had to be reserved for that moment. If I had received his "good news of salvation" earlier, in my human character, I would have been questioning God, instead of celebrating Him! Jesus called me on the phone that day and I recognized his voice. On this particular day, he used a very unlikely person to transform my incomprehensible sorrow into incomprehensible joy!

Who has prayed for you to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

When has God shown you how He blesses you in spite of where you're from or what you've done?

Prayer: Lord God, let me hear Your voice and see how You intimately know me better than I know myself. Lord turn my sorrows into Joy! May Your Peace that passes all understanding be with me.

Author: Russell M.

Jesus' Appearance to the Disciples on the eve of that First Easter is one of the most poignant, subtle, and yet potent parts of the whole Resurrection narrative. The disciples gather huddled in the Upper Room, hiding behind closed and locked doors, gripped by fear. There they sat utterly terrified that the same authorities who captured, tortured, and crucified Jesus would be coming next to arrest, brutalize, and perhaps even kill each of them. Yet, it was not the Jewish authorities who came for them, but instead Jesus, their Lord and Master, their Teacher and Friend, the Messiah (Christ) and Lamb of God, who suddenly appears to these anxious and timid disciples. He who was thought lost, dead and literally buried was now standing before for them, not as a putrefying corpse but as a LIVING KING in all his glory. John then reports that the disciples were "glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20). The truth was their hearts were near bursting with joy at the reality of the fact that Jesus was not dead—but ALIVE. HE IS ALIVE!

It is what happens next, that is most intriguing. Jesus again speaks and says, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." Have you ever stopped and asked yourself what does it mean that Jesus, was sending the disciples just as the Father had sent Him? Why did he "breathed on them"? For many years, I would skim over those verses and think "okay, cool." Then one day, while reading this passage the Holy Spirit sparked a question in me... "How did the Father send Jesus?" After meditating for a time, my mind was illumined by the light of Holy Spirit and I knew the answer (at least in part). It is not just that the Father so loved the world that He sent His Son, Jesus, into the world (John 3:16)—true that! That is an inarguable fact. So there really is another question behind the question, which is "HOW DID THE FATHER SEND JESUS INTO THE WORLD?" The answer, when it came, blew my mind! There were four ways Scripture reveals that Father sent or commissioned Jesus. First, He sent Jesus in the FLESH, that is Jesus, the Divine Son of God, became incarnate. Second, the Father sent Jesus in the POWER of the Holy Spirit—Jesus' miracles, healings, exorcisms, and the like were all done in the authority of the Spirit. Third, Jesus was sent in LOVE—as a gift of the Father's Loving-Kindness for a sinful and broken World! Finally, Jesus was sent as a RANSOM for many—for HE was the Sacrificial Lamb, by whose blood and death we are freed from the wages of sin and death. Jesus then breathes on His Disciples and imparts and infuses them with the Holy Spirit, so that they not only receive the Holy Spirit but have the grace necessary to live the new life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, as Jesus commissions and sends His Disciples into the World, He does so in the same way He, Himself, was sent—In the FLESH, in the POWER of the Holy Spirit, in LOVE, and finally as a LIVING SACRIFICE, so that the World may know of the Father's Love begotten, in the Good News of Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen!

Where and to whom is Jesus sending you?

How can you better manifest the Good News of the Gospel, in the Flesh, in Power, Love or as Living Sacrifice?

Prayer: Jesus, please empower me for your service as you send me into world as a witness to your love, grace and peace.

Author: Elliott N.

Many don't believe anything until they see it for themselves. We believe in Abe Lincoln and George Washington although we haven't seen them. But for some reason, we can't believe Jesus lived, died and rose again. Unfortunately, we live in an age where the truth is subjective, personal, relative, and subjected to public opinion. Truth is not waiting for you to verify it nor give it credibility. It's just waiting for you to see it and be revealed. It's neither my truth, nor your truth. It is just the unadulterated truth all by itself. The Bible even states it will set you free!

The resurrection referred to in the Bible has been thoroughly investigated, but not successfully refuted in over 2000 years. Thomas doubted, but Jesus displayed so much patience with him. He allowed Thomas to see for himself. He allows you and I to make mistakes and then lovingly corrects us if we are open to it. Jesus then made the ultimate profound statement for that situation, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." He let him know you had to see me to believe, but I'm going to bless those who haven't seen me...but believe.

We have to forgive ourselves for our moments of unbelief. You are definitely not alone. Mark 9:20-29 tells the narrative of the loving father desperately desiring that demons be removed from his son. Jesus let him know that it will happen if you believe. The father then asked for help for his unbelief. We all have our faith tested. Let us follow this father's example and ask Jesus to help our unbelief when we are beset with trials and tribulations.

The Apostles walked with Jesus, witnessed miracles, and saw him raise the dead...and still their faith was tested. Jesus sat down at that supper...you know the last supper...and let the Apostles know exactly what he was going to do. Mark 8:31 says, "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Jesus did exactly what he told the Apostles he would do. Acts 1:3 says, "To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

It wasn't temporary. He didn't just quickly show his face, say peace be with you, and leave permanently. He was with them for 40 days instructing them. Preaching and teaching them. Only one Apostle died of natural causes. The Apostles were willing to die for their faith.

What are you willing to do for your faith?

When did you start to accept and believe that Jesus was crucified and rose again?

When you had your belief shaken, how did you regain your belief and faith?

Prayer: LORD, please help me with my unbelief and refortify my faith.

I Saw The Sign (John 20:30-31)

Day 29

Author: Aaron B.

In 1992, the Swedish pop group Ace of Base released *The Sign*, a multi-platinum global sensation which spoke about seeing “the sign” that opens up your eyes, and allows you to experience joy, and ultimately a new life. Throughout his life, and especially at this point in the gospel of John, Jesus performed signs which revealed his true nature. After he revealed himself to Mary, he revealed himself to his disciples, last of whom was Thomas, a cynic full of doubt and uncertainty.

In 2013, I made one of the biggest decisions of my life. I chose to leave a lucrative career in nuclear power, which I loved, to pursue prison ministry...the great unknown to which the Lord was calling. In the wake of this decision, I was filled with uncertainty. What am I doing? Is this right? Are you really calling me to do this Lord? While some friends and family encouraged my transition, others thought and told me I was stupid and crazy. Feeling torn between my convictions, doubts, concerns, and mixed peer reviews, I was in need of some serious encouragement. It was then when I prayed like Gideon (Judges 6), “Lord, if I’m walking in your will, can you send me a sign to let me know? I could really use one right now!”

A week or two after I cried out to the Lord in prayer, I had to go to UCSD to pick up my official college transcript for my seminary application. While I was driving around campus, I became frustrated because it took me forever to find parking (probably 20 minutes). When I finally found a spot, I was rushing over to the administration building, when I saw a sharp dressed man in a suit who looked out of place and lost. I don’t know what compelled me, but for whatever reason, I asked if he needed help. He said he was looking for the Price Center Ballroom (which they use for special events and lectures). Since his destination was along the way to where I was heading, I offered to escort him. As we walked, I asked if he was an attendee for the event or if he was speaking. It was then, when he told me he was the speaker and that he was going to be speaking on prison reform and that he was the Chief Parole Officer of San Diego! Are you kidding me? Here I am on a random Tuesday, delayed by parking frustrations, only there to pick up a transcript for seminary, just happen to run into a man going in my direction who is a leading figure in the field I’m just becoming a part of! It was as if God lovingly slapped me in the face and said, “How many more signs do you need Aaron?”

One of the greatest scientific and mathematical minds of all time, Blaise Pascal, once said, “There is enough light in the world for those who desire to see, and enough darkness for those who choose otherwise.” For me it was clear. I saw the sign, and it opened up my eyes! From that moment forward all doubt with regard to my path was removed. I believed! I trusted the Lord and never looked back, and now flourish in the new life I have in his name.

What signs has the Lord revealed to you throughout your life?

What does living a “life in his name” look like?

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes, that I may see you for who you are, and believe and partner with your active involvement in my life.

Author: Andy H.

Looking back on the whole situation, I can see how I was blinded as to what God was really trying to tell me. You see, I had been praying for a few years about what God wanted for me to do in my labors to best glorify Him. After being released from prison in February of 2015, I felt that becoming a productive member of society was going to be a tedious journey with many roadblocks. However, God had a plan that allowed me to put to use the talents and abilities He gave me when He created me.

One day, I realized I wanted to become a business owner in order to offer employment to recently released inmates as a way of paying forward all the blessings God had given me during my transition back into society. After five years of employment with a local company, I thought God was opening the door for me to possibly make this dream a reality when I was approached by a man in the same field as my trade, who asked if I would consider partnering up with him and his company. I was excited and really contemplated moving forward with the merger because I felt like God had ordained this whole scenario, but there was this one thing. As I continued to pray, asking God to reveal to me if this was the path that He wanted me to take, I realized that this merger was not the right thing for me to do at this moment in my life and that all I had worked for up to this point could possibly be lost if I decided to continue on the journey. After focusing on Jesus and fixing my eyes on Him, the Holy Spirit convicted me, as some of what the business man was doing was on the cusp of being in conflict with current state laws.

“Wait for Me” and I will give you the desires of your heart. I will bless you abundantly if you “Wait for Me.” Just as Simon Peter and the others went out to fish all night and caught nothing on their own abilities and wisdom. We sometimes tend to take our eyes off of Jesus and want to move ahead of God and all that He has planned for us. But just as Simon Peter and the others looked to the shore and decided to listen to someone whom they didn't even know at the moment was Jesus, we too can listen and look for the prompting of the Holy Spirit as to when we should move forward or when we are stepping out of God's will and purpose for our life. We have to make sure that we are hearing the correct voice and not listening to our heart's own desires. As we wait for Him, the prompting of the Holy Spirit guides us in the direction God has planned for our lives that will best Glorify Him.

When have you waited on God's timing and the prompting of the Holy Spirit before making a decision that impacted your future?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for speaking to me and allowing me to have the discernment to recognize when it is You who is calling me and directing my path. Please help me to keep my eyes fixed on you always so that my walk may reflect your goodness and draw others towards your loving grace.

Author: Gerald P.

John 21 is focused on 2 primary figures: the unworthy Peter and the singularly worthy Jesus. After again feeding His disciples, Jesus begins to question Peter. He asks the man who promised fealty to death, but then thrice betrayed him, “do you love me?” Three times to match his three denials: “Do you love me?” Jesus’ first question though was not just “do you love me?” but “do you love me more than these?” Do you love me more than your boats? Your fish? Your friends? Your life? Do you love me above all other things?

The dialogue reveals Peter’s heart and new humility. He does not respond with the same arrogant human certainty that he did when affirming that he would never deny Jesus. Peter, no doubt, remembered the interaction vividly. Luke 22:31-34 records it: “‘Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.’ Peter said to him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.’ Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.’”

But now, three times, Peter defers to Jesus’ perfect knowledge. His replies: 1. “You know that I love you” 2. “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you” 3. “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Peter understood that Jesus knew his heart perfectly. He knew Peter loved him. As we learn in Luke 7, “the one who has been forgiven much, loves much.” Peter had been forgiven much.

On hearing Peter’s reply each of the three times, Jesus told him how to live out that love. “Feed my lambs,” “take care of my sheep,” “feed my sheep.” Jesus had just fed and served his disciples, and he now called Peter to do the same. We, like Peter, do not receive this love without bearing its natural responsibility and outpouring. Be fruitful and multiply His flock. Feed and care for them. Love them.

Jesus finishes His instruction with a warning. It appears Jesus is saying, I have suffered to save you and to love you completely. In this world, you will suffer for loving and following Me.

What do I do in response to His great love and suffering to redeem me?
Do I love Jesus more than possessions, relationships, reputation, etc.? Enough to serve?
Enough to suffer?
How will I respond to His call to “Follow me?”

Prayer: Suffering Servant, and Most High God, You know my heart. Help me to love You! Help me to serve You! Give me the supernatural courage it takes to face suffering for You as you have done for me.

Next Steps:

As Peter, James, and John had to descend the Mount of Transfiguration, so too our Christian journey must advance beyond Easter and our holy encounters with the Living God. Though this part of your spiritual pilgrimage comes to an end, the door to walking the rest of your life with Jesus Christ remains open. How shall you proceed? It is our prayer that you will choose to walk with Jesus each and every morning, fully equipped with all the spiritual insights He revealed to you along this 32-day process, by his Spirit, as you spent time in the Word and in prayer.

If this devotional ministered to you in any way, we encourage you to share it with a friend. While this particular journey through scripture was intended to prepare your heart for the wonder and glory of Easter, it can be used anytime throughout the year to accomplish God's will and purpose for your life. That, is indeed our ultimate goal; that all of us would walk more and more, as we are transformed from glory to glory, in the paths of righteousness which He has ordained us to walk.

It's been said before, but I cannot overemphasize how much we volunteers pray for you, for your spiritual wellbeing, for God to meet you through this devotional, for God to meet you this very moment, and for the love and forgiveness Jesus offers you and me to become real in our lives! Oh, that we would taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him via His Word and prayer (Ps. 34:8).

May the God of hope continue to fill you with His joy and peace as you trust and take refuge in Him.

In Service of the King,

Pastor Aaron

