



**THE LENTEN  
DEVOTIONAL**

**UNIVERSITY OF  
INDIANAPOLIS**

**2017**

Hello Reader,

I would like to thank and welcome you to this year's *Lenten Devotional*. We are so happy that you have picked up this book that includes 40 devotions for reflecting upon during this Lenten season. Each devotion has been written by UIndy students and faculty for each day during Lent beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter (excluding Sundays).

The process of getting this devotion together was a long and enduring one. But it also became a time in my life that resulted in spiritual growth and a closer relationship with God. It is my hope that as you make your way through its pages that you will be blessed and also grow in your relationship with our savior as we reflect on His sacrifice, His relentless love for us, and anticipate His glorious return.

In Christ,

Christianna Lopez

Lent 2017

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March 1

**What is Lent?** by Michael Lynch

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As kids, we all went through the same yearly ritual of giving up something for Lent. Lent was about giving something up to break a bad habit, hopefully with the intention of bringing us closer to God. Aside from giving up chocolate, candy, or perhaps giving up a particular sin, what is Lent all about? Lent came from a word, *lencten*, referring to springtime. It is a 40 day spiritual journey for Christians all around the world in preparation of Easter. The 40 days goes back to the time when Jesus travels into the desert for 40 days to pray, fast, and be tempted by the devil after His baptism. We imitate His actions by typically taking this 40 day season to prepare ourselves to become better people before the Lord's resurrection. We can do this by giving alms, praying, and fasting. This idea, called the three pillars of Lent, comes out of Matthew 6:1-18.

**Almsgiving- giving alms means taking care of those who are in need as an act of charity. Almsgiving comes from a Greek word meaning "mercy", so giving alms can be viewed as showing mercy. Jesus says in his ministry, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31, Matthew 9:12). We must try to connect with people here on campus who may be looked down upon, just as Jesus did with his disciples early on.**

**Prayer- Growing up as Jews, it is expected that a person knows how to pray at a very young age. Yet as grown men, it is ironic that the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. This is where the "Our Father" comes from (Matthew 6:9-14). Jesus shares this new prayer because the Jewish prayers were known by everyone. Recited but not felt from the heart. This is**

**a great time to focus on praying from the heart and not reciting empty words.**

**Fasting-** Fasting is a form of sacrifice by denying ourselves something for a certain amount of time. It is usually associated with food though, and in that case it is described as eating one large meal, and two smaller meals that do not exceed the larger meal. **Why?** In Luke 5:35 and Matthew 9:14-15, Jesus tells the disciples that they will fast once He departs from them. Fasting is not about starving ourselves, or not eating at all, but rather cutting back to demonstrate to God that we are serious about growing in our faith and reliance on Him. Fasting can also be from worldly things that distract us so that we can focus more of our attention on God.

Through the process of giving alms, praying, and fasting during this Lent; we grow in our spiritual faith and become better followers of Jesus before the celebration of Christ conquering death on Easter Sunday.

March 2

## **The Lenten Pilgrimage** by Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Gibbs

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McCleary Chapel Ministries have been emphasizing the role of pilgrimage in our spiritual lives for many years. We have taken pilgrimage to Virginia in service to the people of Appalachia and to Sierra Leone in West Africa to help improve education. We have taken pilgrimage to Taizé, France to the ecumenical community there, and we have walked the pilgrimage of Camino de Santiago in Spain. Lent is an invitation to that kind of pilgrimage. It is a 40 day journey that parallels Jesus' final pilgrimage to the cross. All pilgrimage shares four defining characteristics and these can be helpful to understand God's calling in Lent as well.

1. **Spiritual pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place.** This place may be holy for personal reasons (like a family estate or grave site) or for religious reasons (Jesus or a saint lived there, an important church, or a particular community of people). But unlike a tourist, a pilgrim goes with a goal: to meet with God. Our Lenten pilgrimage will end with the cross and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. This is the holiest time of the Christian year, so the journey to this holy time should also be driven by our goal to meet with God.
2. **Spiritual pilgrimage involves a transformation of the pilgrim.** If you return the same way that you went then something has come up short. You are supposed to be changed by your pilgrimage. As you proceed through the Lenten season, ready yourself to be changed by God and be open to it as it happens.
3. **Spiritual pilgrimage is supposed to be difficult.** Christians don't believe that you can "earn" God's

grace through these acts (that wouldn't be grace!), but to go on a difficult journey with the aim of meeting God changes a pilgrim. This is why Lent requires that you add some new spiritual practices, or fast from some pleasure. Part of opening yourself to transformation is to challenge yourself with a difficult road. Like adding weight at the gym, the resistance makes you stronger.

4. **Spiritual pilgrimage requires disconnecting from the routine.** Pilgrims leave work, friends, responsibilities, and media behind for a time. Often pilgrims take ruggedly slow methods of transportation like walking. The devotional practices you engage during Lent should include some committed and faithful time of individual prayer.

*Are you prepared well for this Lenten journey? Are the devotional practices and fasting that you intend to keep enough to make this a difficult journey? Ask for God's grace for the difficulties, and ask for God to change you to be more like his Son.*

March 3

**The Gift of Weakness** by Allison Vickery

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*“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”*

*Hebrews 2:14-18*

Our American culture hates weakness. Indeed, the ideology of self-help has pervaded our culture since the beginning of this nation—the “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” way of thinking. Whether we intend to or not, it is all too easy to assume these patterns of thinking and living in our spiritual lives. Although particularly noticeable in the American culture, it is universal to human nature that we attempt to transcend our limitations and become “superhuman.” Additionally, shelves upon shelves of books line the walls of Christian bookstores, offering just one more approach to a more joyful, more fulfilled, and more secure Christian walk. Because of the Christian self-help movement, it is all too easy to become quickly disillusioned with our spiritual lives, seeing only failings and apathy. Into this pressure to rise above along with disillusionment with human nature comes the time-honored season of Lent—putting aside comfort and the illusion of competence to rest in the gift of weakness. Both counter-intuitive and counter-cultural, Lent gives the gentle reminder for us to embrace our human



weakness and look beyond ourselves for strength and wholeness. This can only happen through the gift of Christ, who shared in our flesh and blood—the fullest manifestation of human weakness—so that we could share in his divinity and in that way only, transcend our inherited humanity.



March 4

**Believe God** by Rev. Arionne Yvette Williams

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*"If we receive the witness of people, the witness of God is greater."  
1 John 5:9*

During Lent we are urged to do serious self-examination, to be real about how spiritually healthy we are. This passage challenges us to think and pray about how strong our faith is, especially as it relates to believing what God has said. This verse boldly claims that we believe people, especially those we love and trust, but God is even more credible. Yet, sometimes when God gives us a vision for our life, a new ministry, business, or career, we don't believe God will carry us through. Perhaps God is telling you it's time to walk away from that comfortable, stable, but dead-end relationship because God has something better. You've prayed and received confirmation. Will you take the step? Will you trust? What's your M.O.? We love to proclaim that Jesus came to give us life more abundantly (John 10:10), but the truth is that abundance is on the other side of our faith-filled, God-directed steps. The larger passage, here (1 John 5:6-12), shows us what believing the words and promises of God does: it gives life (5:11)! In context here the passage says that those who believe God's witness in Jesus Christ have eternal life! What if we started to believe God for everything. Not just for salvation, but also for the deeper purposes and provision God has planned for us? How much do you really believe God? Explore that in prayer and reflection. Prepare to go farther. God has more for you. Go get it. I dare you.

Prayer:

Gracious God,

Thanks for believing so much in me and creating me with such rich purpose and power. Give me the courage I need to truly seek your purposes for my life and then to **LIVE THEM**. I want to please you, but my fears and doubt often stand in my way. Give me grace to trust you more. Amen.



March 6

**Go!** by Erin Miller

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In the season of Lent, we aren't necessarily thinking of Christmas, even though nothing in this time would have happened without the birth of Christ! However, I've had a Christmas song stuck in my head for a while, and I thought it would be worthwhile to share with you.

We all know the song "Go Tell It On The Mountain," and we probably sang it on Christmas Eve with our families or in a children's choir when we were younger. It encourages us to \*GO\* spread the news of His birth everywhere we go – whether it be on a mountain, over the hills or literally anywhere, and everywhere else. I want to encourage you to not let that song be just in the Christmas season, but to let it ring true all year long. It is so easy to be excited and sharing the news of the miracle of Jesus's birth at Christmastime, but I would suggest that we should be using that same excitement to go tell the world about the miracles of Christ in the time of His life, but also be sharing the gift that He gave us in His death and resurrection! Be open to talking to your roommate or classmates about why you are celebrating Lent and Easter, and tell them about the grace that provided to all of us through that! Maybe this includes sharing some of your own practices and traditions through the season, or taking them to chapel or a church service with you. Jesus himself gives us the commandment after His resurrection to \*GO\* make disciples and teach them to follow His teachings. (Matthew 28:16-20) So in this season, I encourage you to...

\*GO\* tell one person about why you are celebrating Lent.

\*GO\* invite someone to a service with you to learn more.

\*GO\* share the love that Christ offers to us with others.

\*GO\* tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere  
that Jesus is no longer a baby. That He died for all of our  
sins, but He rose again!



March 7

**Do Not be Discouraged** by Bekah Edmonds

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I remember when I boarded the plane for my first trip out of the United States. I was anxious, terrified, and excited to see what God had in store for me. I let my anxiety get the best of me when I boarded the plane, even though I knew God was with me all the time.

The plane had landed in Port-au-Prince, Haiti the summer of 2015. I was fresh out of high school and I was ready to experience something different. I knew as soon as I got off of that plane that my life would never be the same. Even today I am not living the same as I did that summer.

My first glance of Haiti was a frightening one. There was a sea of people that wrapped around the entire exit of the airport outside. These people looked like they were waiting to find their seats for a movie premiere. Hundreds of faces staring at me, trying to grab my bag, wanting my attention, and all because they needed money to support their families. This was their job since the economy did not provide enough jobs for more than half of the population.

As my team and I boarded the bus and started our two-and-a-half-hour drive to Grand Goave, people followed our bus trying to get our attention. The Haitian people would hit on the bus or yell in Creole to try to get us to buy what they were selling. Some of them would even try and get in front of the bus, but luckily our bus driver was a native and knew how to navigate through the craziness. When I say craziness I mean that there were no rules of the road and there were only two stoplights. The de facto rule of the road was that the bigger vehicle has the right of way. It did not matter if you were turning right; if a semi needed to get out, they would without a warning.

You can imagine after all this I would be fearful, and I will admit that I was terrified. I questioned myself as to why I

had done this. I thought about the potential danger that was here. In that moment I needed a reminder that God was with me. He had called me here, and he would be there with me no matter what.

The rest of the week I reminded myself of Joshua 1:9, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” This was encouraging to me the rest of the week to not be afraid of what lies ahead of me. I have God with me so I have no reason to worry.

I want to challenge you to write this verse and place it somewhere you can access it easily. Whenever you are afraid or discouraged read that verse and pray. Do this until you believe the truth behind this verse. I can tell you from experience that if you are distracted by worry, then you will miss out on something amazing God has in store for you.

March 8

**God Always Wins** by Lucy Shirley

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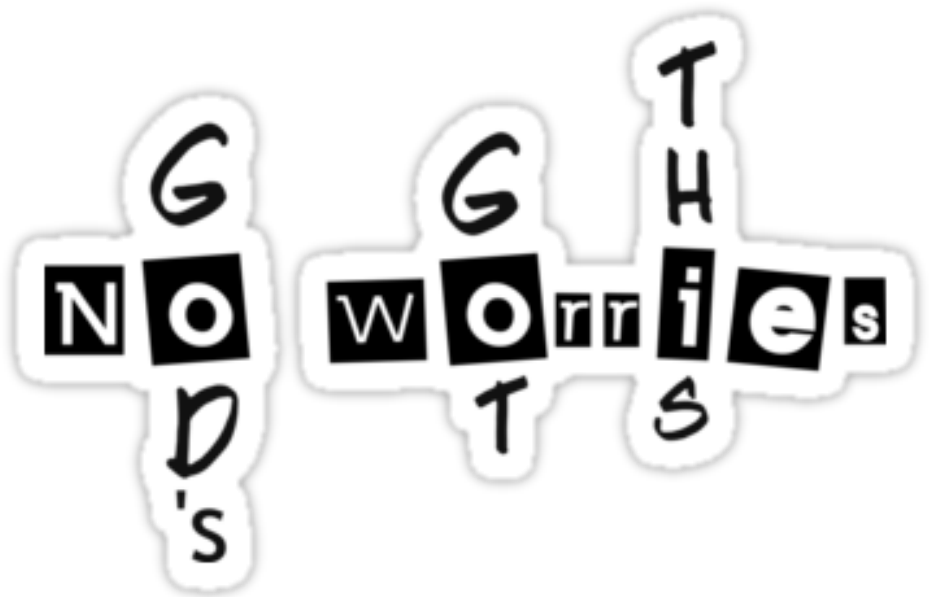
*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.  
Peter 5:10*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
Psalm 23:4*

It is very easy to feel bitter or angry about sorrows or troubles we face in our lives. When something truly awful happens, my first reaction is often, “Why, God, must I go through this? This suffering feels pointless!” However, when I step back and think of all the times in the past when I have felt intense pain, defeat, or even hopelessness, I look at where I am today and see that God has truly used those experiences to shape me into the person He wants me to be. It seems almost funny now that the worst times in my life have been used to do the most good or bring the most joy. At the time, though, I feel ready to give up, and I am 100% sure that God must have made a mistake by allowing me to walk through an awful situation. But Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” God said this to the people of Jerusalem right before he sent them into exile in Babylon. This was a terrible time for the people of Jerusalem, but God used this time to do great and powerful things. The people’s exile strengthened their faith in God and their religious devotion, and years later, just as God had promised, they were able to



return back to their homeland. I have come to believe that every single thing that happens, whether wonderful or terrible, God shapes for good by God as part of his ultimate plan, whether we see the good or not. We know that at the end of time, God will claim final victory over evil, so we can claim hope when facing hardship, just as the Israelites did in Babylon. It is my goal that someday, instead of saying “Why, God?” when I am struggling, I will say, “You know the plans you have for me.” No matter what trials we face in life, we have hope. God is there, and he will win in the end.



March 9

**An Island View** by Rev. Dr. Lang Brownlee

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Set in the Inner Hebrides islands west of the Scottish coast, one will find the Iona Abbey. This treasure of Celtic Christian monasticism has a long and significant history in the story of the Gospel in Ireland and Britain, and its spirituality is so very evident in the Christian community that continues to this day (though it is no longer an active monastic community.)

I was very blessed to have visited Iona a couple of years ago; it was a dream come true to see the site in person and spend a few days there. You see, I appreciate the Christian message that comes via the Celtic sensibility. It is a very holistic one—one that takes into account God's salvific work for all the world—the planet earth and all its blessed creatures. We would do well this Lent to include in our introspection and prayers a concern for all that God is concerned with, and so I share with you a prayer that comes from Iona with that hope:

*You are above me O God  
You are beneath  
You are in air  
You are in earth  
You are beside me  
You are within.  
O God of heaven,  
You have made your home on earth  
In the broken body of Creation.  
Kindle within me  
A love for you in all things.*



March 10

## **Perfect People Need Not Apply** by Carolyn Fiegle

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“God loves the people that suck.” Someone once told me this, and it has been a comical reminder ever since on how much God truly loves us. The pressures of college can really make me and so many others push perfection. We all want the perfect grades, relationships, opportunities, future; the list goes on and on! We want to succeed and be as close to the best as possible. God, however, has a different thought about our striving for perfection. He loves those that are imperfect and broken.

Luke 7:41-43 says, “Two people owed money to a certain lender. One owed him 500 silver coins. The other owed him 50 silver coins. Neither had the money to pay him back. So, he let them go without paying. Which of them will love him more? Simon replied, “I suppose the one who owed the most money.” “You are right,” Jesus said.” Jesus uses this as a parable to explain to Simon the worth of the sinful, servant woman expressing her love for Jesus. Jesus loves this woman who has been deemed imperfect just as the person who owed 500 silver coins.

There are so many other examples of Jesus loving the imperfect and sinful like Zacchaeus, and the ten lepers. God’s love is one pressure that we will never have to worry about because it the only thing that is complete perfection through our eyes. We can of course still have goals and aspirations for grades, relationships, opportunities, and the future, but God is the only thing that we need to keep as our number one. It will wipe away those perfecting thoughts that flood our minds every day. Even when you may feel “you suck” because things are not going the way you imagined, God’s perfect love will always be there to tell you that everything will be okay.

March 11

**It's All in the Trust** by Craig Westberry

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*"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"*

*John 14:5 ESV*

The life of a college student involves learning, making friends, and any number of other things, but ultimately is focused on looking for the next step in life. Looking for that next step can be elusive, a mystery that can take a long time to uncover. It is no wonder that some of us have changed majors, changed career paths, or even changed schools! Maybe the questions in your mind are not focused on career, but on who you should be friends with, who you should be dating, or how to improve your devotion to God. Whatever the question is, it does not have to be answered alone. The verse above shows how one of Jesus' disciples asked Him how they were going to know where to go next. Jesus' reply is to say that He is the way. We may not exactly know where God wants us to go next, but we can trust Him to take us in the right direction. So the next time you ask God where you need to go, remember that He is the way. We must simply trust.



March 13

**Finding Peace in Decision Making** by Shayna Ritchie

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*In him we were also chosen, having been  
predestined according to the plan of him who works out  
everything in conformity with the purpose of his will  
Ephesians 1:11*

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have  
kept the faith.  
2 Timothy 4:7*

Many of us become paralyzed when it comes to making decisions -what college to choose, changing our major, taking that internship, making that big move, and the list goes on. Many of us sit in fear when we come to a fork in the road; afraid that making the wrong decision will have us walking outside of God's will. Afraid that making the wrong decision diverts us from God's grace and his perfect plan, and afraid that if we make the wrong choice we will never make it to the destination God has designed for us. Friends, let me suggest that this walk with God is less about the destination than it is about the journey. God grants us the ability to make decisions as he wants to go on the journey with us, right by our side. We will come to plenty of forks in the road throughout this life, and when it becomes hard to choose right or left, ask for God's guidance and for his blessing in either direction. Our God honors faithfulness and only asks to be at the center of our story, wherever that may lead. Friends, I pray that you find peace, comfort, and freedom knowing that our only real destination isn't even on this side of eternity. So run the race before you and know that God will grant many good options, and He will never cast you out of His good and perfect plan.

March 14

**Lead by Example** by Allie Aguirre

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*“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

*Romans 12:2*

College... how easy is it to get sucked into the “college lifestyle”??? Yeah at first we say “just this once” I will sleep in on Sunday morning and go next week but we soon realize that the “just once” has turned into over a month since our feet have stepped through those church doors on Sunday morning. Or perhaps our nightly Bible reading has been pushed back so many nights due to homework that we even forget where we left off. How easy is it to skip bible study because all of our friends are going out and you don’t want to feel left out?

Falling into this college lifestyle is so easy and may seem fun at first but what we do not realize is our spiritual life is taking the biggest hit. We conform to our surroundings and forget what truly matters most... Our Faith. God’s will for us is far greater than anything we could ever imagine but we need to stay loyal and true to Him. Showing God’s love to others and being good disciples is what we are called to do. So the next time on Sunday morning when you hit snooze on your alarm clock and say “just this once” remember what all God has done for you... Don’t conform to society, instead lead by example in His light.

March 15

**Hatred, Anger and the Life of the Spirit** by Rev. Dr.  
Gregory Clapper

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*“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down  
while you are still angry.”*  
*Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)*

*“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone  
should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become  
angry, because human anger does not produce the  
righteousness that God desires.”*  
*James 1:19-20 (NIV)*

James Stockdale was a Navy pilot during the Viet Nam war. After he was shot down, he served as a POW—prisoner of war—from 1965 until he was released in 1973. For his behavior in leading the other POWs in terrible conditions of persecution, he was awarded our nation’s highest military honor—the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Writing in his memoir, Stockdale said he was once asked if he hated the North Vietnamese while he was their captive. He said that hating them would do no more good than hating the blackjack dealer in Las Vegas would help you win at blackjack. Hatred served no purpose.

While most of us would agree with the Admiral that *hatred* should be avoided, we are often more ambivalent about *anger*. This ambivalence is reflected in how different academic disciplines understand anger. Psychologists will sometimes say that anger is a “blocked wish.”

Philosophers sometimes refer to anger as “an accusation of injustice.”

But a great writer, Frederick Buechner said it best, I think, from the Christian perspective. He said “anger is a delicious dish . . . until you find out that it’s yourself you are eating.” (*Wishful Thinking a Seeker’s ABC*)

To try to integrate these different, wise reflections on the strong emotion of anger. I think that we can say that we need to be sensitive to anger within us as a warning sign that our values have been violated. But if anger becomes the main reason we get up in the morning, we are on the path to self-destruction.

It is no surprise, then, to see that "fits of anger," as well as hatred, are described by Paul as “works of the flesh,” which need to be countered by the “fruit of the Spirit.” (See Galatians 5:19-23)

**Prayer--**Lord, we confess that our usual self-centered perspective too easily sees slights and disrespect in everything, leading us to anger. Please help us move from that perspective and help us to gain true self-control, the control that comes when your Holy Spirit is leading us. In Christ’s name, Amen.



March 16

**Hello, Are You There?** by Kenzie Sauer

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*1 Samuel 3:1-21*

It's easy to get lost in our journey. In the bustle of school and the stress of new classes, new studies, roommates, and new experiences we can lose ourselves and put our relationship with God on hold. Lent is the perfect time to reflect on your journey. Maybe, you have been waiting and praying but still have not heard from God. Have you taken the time to *listen*? In 1 Samuel 3, Samuel hears God but when he takes the time to listen, he understands and learns not only of God but what God wanted him to know. This story shows that although it may not be on our time, God will speak to us when he wants to be heard. God will often speak to us in unexpected ways. Take the effort this week to find God in something every day. How has God talked to you today? This season, focus your attention back to God, work towards strengthening your relationship with Him. If you listen you may be able to hear what you have been waiting for.



March 17

**Over Time** by Kristen Dyson

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In today's world, we have become used to instant gratification. We can go to a nearby Taco Bell and have dinner served to us in a matter of minutes, or order things online from Amazon Prime and find them waiting at our doorstep in 2 days or less. We have become so accustomed to getting things right away, that sometimes it's hard for us to slow down and wait. However, the old wise tale says, "Good things come to those who wait." Although we can receive things instantaneously these days, those things are mostly material things. In comparison, other things like relationships, knowledge, and experience come along with time. Your best friend likely didn't become your best friend in a 5 minute conversation. Instead, you developed the friendship over time by pouring into one another. Likewise, our relationship with God takes time. A relationship with Him will not happen overnight, but will require a lifetime of work. This is a good thing though as He promises to provide wisdom (James 1:5), guidance (Isaiah 30:21), and peace (Philippians 4:6-7), as well as an abundance of other things. Remember today how much He loves you and that this love takes time. As you continue to work on your relationship with the Lord, I invite you to think of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 which says, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." God has a plan for you, and if you're willing to work with Him, He will bless you in extraordinary ways.

March 18

**Discipline of Mind** by Lucas Frandsen

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*“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”*

*Philippians 4:8*

*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

*Colossians 3:2*

“Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.” Lent is a season close to my heart because of the physical discipline we are called to exercise. The reigning-in of fleshly desire is good and right in order for us to listen more fully to God instead of our own wants. We exercise discipline over our flesh during this time, but we are also called to exercise discipline over our minds. Romans 8:6 (NLT) says this: “So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.” Sinful nature knocks at the doors of our mind, asking us to complain, gossip, and tell ourselves we are not deserving of God’s love. But we have victory over our sinful nature through Jesus, and with this we can reign in our wayward thoughts and set them on things from God. I’ve found that whatever someone thinks about the most, that’s what they’ll talk about. And so I ask myself, and challenge you to ask yourself, “What if I thought about God so much that He was all I ever talked about in conversation? How would my attitude change? Where would I see new fruit start to grow?”

When I tried to have physical discipline years ago with my eating habits, I always told myself I hated healthy foods,

and I only thought about not liking the foods I needed to eat. It wasn't until I allowed God to renew my mind and discipline my thoughts to focus instead on the necessity of my health that I was able to exercise the discipline I needed in order to eat right. Discipline of the mind makes discipline of the body easier, and vice versa. So whether it's your mind or your body in need of discipline, don't neglect the one in attempt to focus on the other. Instead, let the discipline of one feed the discipline of the other!

March 20

**What Will You Choose Today?** by Emily Sands

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*“Be very careful then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the LORD’s will is.”*

*Ephesians 5:15-17*

Each day God gives us is a blessing, but sometimes we forget to see it as such. Instead, we think about what we *have* to do that we do not *want* to do. We may focus on how we have a harder life than someone else we know, and then feel sorry for ourselves. Satan loves when this happens.

Our thoughts play a large part in our behavior, happiness, and effectiveness. Each day that we are alive, God has a purpose for us. It may be to encourage someone, share how God has worked in our lives, witness a miracle, pray for those who need it, draw closer to God and learn more about Him, make a new friend, be awed by God, or go through pain/struggles so we will be pushed to grow more dependent on God.

We must refuse to let our next 24 hours be filled with self-pity, jealousy, anxiety, or resentment. We must choose joy. Choose joy through whatever God may throw at you in the next 24 hours. Choose to care. Do not be victimized by your circumstances. Choose to replace negative thoughts with ones that are positive and hopeful. By choosing these things, we will be much more likely to make a difference for the Kingdom of God today.

I would challenge you to ask yourself each night, “How did I make a difference today?” If you ask yourself this and nothing comes to mind, do not worry because not all hope

is lost. As we become more thoughtful and intentional about making a difference for the Kingdom of God every 24 hours, God will present us with ways to do so. We may be in school or working, but that does not mean we cannot make a difference. After all, God did *not* create us with the purpose of going to school or working 40 hours a week. He made us to have a relationship with Him and to grow His Kingdom.

Let us choose to make a difference.



March 21

**Beyond the Cross** by Steven Freck

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*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

*John 10:10*

The cross is often one of the very first symbols people associate with the Christian faith, especially around Easter. It makes sense...I mean after all the cross represents the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, which is what the season is all about. Through the cross our greatest debt has been repaid and we are now free to live life eternally with our Heavenly Father. However, while the cross represents great hope, it also represents great pain and sadness. The cross was reserved for the lowest of the low. It was a *crude, harsh* instrument that represents *agony, pain, and death*. Many times you will hear Christians say, “*I’m just a no good sinner*” or “*I am just a sinner, saved by grace*”. We play a dangerous blame game and guilt ourselves into believing that Jesus’ sacrifice on a cross means we can *someday* have a good life, but we don’t actually deserve one now, when that is not the reality of why Jesus came down to join man on Earth.

There is another symbol of the Easter season...the open tomb. After Jesus died on the cross they placed his body in a tomb and sealed it with a large stone. On Easter day, we not only celebrate the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but also His triumph over the grave! The cross was not and is not the end of the story. Three days later, He arose and His victory over death is what gives us life now...as well as in the future.

Now for some reason, we don’t see people wearing necklaces in the shape of a boulder and you see even fewer people with tattoos of an empty tomb, but this symbol of

the season carries a powerful message. You are not simply a broken sinner, but a loved child of the Almighty God with a heart that is true and good. Christ's triumph over Satan and death is a victory that we now share!

Take some time today to thank God for His triumph over death and for allowing you as His child to share in that victory. Think about how your life might look different if you adopt the glory of the open tomb as a new symbol for your life.





March 22

**He Loves Us** by Lauren Powell

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*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

*Psalm 139:14*

*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment,  
such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold  
jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your  
inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit,  
which is of great worth in God's sight.*

*1 Peter 3:3-4*

Self-image is continually a problem with young adults. Especially going into college where the “freshman 15” is at stake. People become so concerned about their body and what they look like that they take drastic measures to make sure their body looks “right”. Although, if you think about it, there is no right way for our bodies to look like. There are no actual “requirements” that everyone’s body has to meet. Everyone’s body is different and that is what makes them unique. In Psalm 139:14 it says “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful. I know that full well.” God made us all different and in his image. No matter what that might look like, He loves us and He will always accept us.

We are all beautifully made in God’s image. God does not judge us by our outward beauty, but rather our faith and our path with Him. When it comes down to it, the way we live out our lives is more important than the body that we do it in. Our body is only a temporary thing that will go away

once we make our way to heaven. As 1 Peter 3:3-4 says, beauty is not about anything on the outside, but rather it is beauty of your spirit.

No matter how hard we try to change our outward appearance to match the standards set by society, it is not going to affect the way God looks at us. God is the one person who genuinely looks past our appearance to others to look at what really matters on the inside.

esteemed,  
valued,  
set apart,  
chosen,  
pursued,  
loved.

March 23

**Faith Like a Child** by Katie Mehrlich

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*“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”*

*Matthew 18:1-4*

I recently had the privilege of seeing my six year old cousin get baptized, declaring his salvation through and love for Christ, his Savior. He was barely tall enough to stand in the baptismal. His humble, smiling eyes and the top of his head poked out of it to see his family as a member of the church read off his testimony. In his incredible six year old way, he explained that before he knew Jesus as his Savior, he could be mean and angry (especially with his brothers), but is working on that now with Christ in his life.

This was so precious, but what really struck me was when his testimony said he wanted to be friends with Jesus. I remember thinking this long ago. This thought though, is hard to keep in the front of your mind when the world tells you that God is here to punish you, to send you to hell, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. People who claim to be, “wise,” have thrust these thoughts upon us, when really, my little cousin has it right. Christ came so that we could have a loving relationship with Christ. What a beautiful example of faith like a child. “I want to be friends with Jesus.”

This is what God calls us to: childlike faith and a loving relationship with Him. Faith like a child is not naive, immature, uneducated, or less than others. It is not childish.

It is uncomplicated, unpretentious, humble, sincere, unadulterated love and friendship with the God who saved, saves, and will continue to save those who desperately need Him. We need nothing else than faith like a child that brings us closer to our loving Savior.

March 24

**Always Know** by Brenden Everett

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*“When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.”*

*For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”*

*“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”*

*James 1:13-18*

*“For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of His mouth.”*

*Psalms 33:4-6*

I guess it all comes down to this, folks - do you trust God? How well do you trust Him? It seems simple enough, giving everything in your life to Him - but how much do we actually give to Him? I see that when I think too much about a psych test, or my future in music, I forget to give all of my worries to God. I find myself scattered, away from God’s call and settled into my own anxiety. I am constantly having to be reminded that He’s got me completely covered - all I have to do is give it all to him. No matter what, you can know that He’s made it clear to

us: He is here to hold all of your anxiety, fear, and other burdens forever.

It's an impressive revelation. Give God all of the trust and put your entire life into his hands.

It is not, and will never be overwhelming, for God is by us, supporting us, and smiling very, very brightly.



March 25

**Finding Joy in the Journey** by Cindy Sturgeon

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When going through a life-changing transition several years ago I began the spiritual practice of choosing one word to focus on for the year. After much time of contemplation and reflection the first year, I chose the word “joy.” It seemed an odd word to choose because I was going through such a difficult time. What could possibly be joyous about this experience?

But in my time of reflection I realized that life is hard. It always has been hard. It always will be hard. Our attitude is what makes all the difference. Jesus asked me to choose joy in the midst of my suffering.

Jesus showed me by his example how to live in joy in the midst of suffering. Can you imagine the suffering that he went through while on earth? Imagine being Jesus and giving and doing everything possible to help people and they reject you. Imagine in your darkest hour your best friends fall asleep and leave you to suffer all alone. Imagine someone you thought was your friend and that you included in your circle betrays your trust. And imagine turning around and loving and forgiving all those who hurt you deeply because you chose joy in the midst of suffering.

March 27

**Drawing Near to Him** by Ellen Hodson

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*“Come near to God and he will come near to you.”*

*James 4:8*

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

*Matthew 11:28*

When something good happens, who do you go to? When something terrible happens, who do you vent to? When you are disappointed, who do you cry to? I don't know about you, but when I answer those questions, the Lord is not the first person that comes to mind. I go to my friends, family, heck, I'll even tell a stranger! I spend far more time asking people advice before making a big decision and far less time asking God His plans for me. A few weeks ago I was talking to a friend about how I didn't have time to sit still and be in the Word daily, and she told me, “Ellen, you HAVE time, you just choose to spend your time in other ways.” That stuck with me and I began to think about all the times I am so excited to tell all my friends about a funny story that happened to me or tell them about a frustrating situation, but I've never felt that same excitement to tell the Lord. In actuality, God should be the FIRST one I tell about my accomplishments because He is the one that allowed them to happen to me, and often times I forget to thank Him for being so present in my life. I took some time to try this method out, and my mindset has completely changed. I feel more at peace, I feel less pressured to follow the ways of the world, and I truly feel like God is my best friend. Of course I still love confiding in my friends and family, but when God is the first person



we confide in, we eliminate so much gossip and other sin in our lives.

For those of you who watch Grey's Anatomy, Meredith and Christina are each other's "person." I challenge you today to think about what you need to change in your life in order to make God your person—the One you go to when you're happy, sad, excited, confused, and the One you are most excited to share stories from your day.

March 29

**Still Learning** by Chandler Renick

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It seems like most days people expect me to know the answer to everything before I even have the chance to ask why. As if once you enter that first day of class, suddenly all of your life's questions are figured out. At Thanksgiving all of your relatives want to know who you're going to marry and what your job is going to be when you graduate. In interviews for internships they expect the 20 year old to have two degrees and three years of experience, and those questions and expectations can make a person feel unqualified and unprepared for this part of their life.

When asked to write this I was not sure if I could do it. I'm a 19 year old student with minimal life experience and amateur knowledge about the Bible and God. I did not feel qualified to write about faith and Jesus when there are still dozens of questions I haven't found the answers to.

However, the Bible says "those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2), and I find comfort in that. Too often we feel that our value in God's eyes comes from how well we are doing and that if what we are doing isn't stupendous then it is not enough. However, it is the act of doing that gives us our value. God wants us to be his hands and feet, and the only way that can be accomplished is by trying.

You do not have to know everything, you just need to know that God loves you and that He sees your works. THAT is what is enough for him.

So as you look for the answers to your questions and you feel like you are slipping, know that you are enough not because of what you know but because you are trying to learn and grow. Jesus loves you and that alone is enough.

March 29

**Fear Not! God Has a Plan** by Molly Wolfe

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*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

*John 16:33*

As we go through this Lenten season, it is important to remember that God is with us always, forever, and ever, even when trouble arises. This verse, John 16:33, is a very powerful one, especially to us right now, as fearful college students. Trouble is a very encompassing term, and can include a variety of things like forgetting about semester papers until last minute, enduring relationship troubles, or even losing loved ones. But this verse tells us that God is aware of it all, and He has overcome the world so that we can have His peace in those troubled moments. In those moments, we should not fear or worry about what will happen. “Fear not,” God knows the trouble, and has a solution for the trouble too. God always has a plan. No matter what trouble currently surrounds us, we are told to “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9). For the Lord has the future all planned, and He knows the answer to everything. His Word promises us that He will take care of us if we place our full trust in Him alone.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for the peace You have given me through the good news of the Gospel. Help me to walk in peace and in joy, constant and fearless. Help me to remember to pray about everything rather than constantly worrying. Amen

March 30

**God's Time** by Robyn Nadler

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Things take time, especially God things (what isn't a "God thing" though?). We want things to happen instantaneously, but the Lord's plan takes its own time. He has his hands on all things: when the flowers and trees bloom, when the seasons change, when children grow up, and when the good news finally comes. We are constantly waiting for something to happen and we try to speed up the process a little, or at least try to distract ourselves from the wait, but what we really need to do is develop a sense of patience knowing that whatever is to come next is good because it is God's plan. Waiting to hear an answer about whether or not you were accepted into your number one choice for a program is on God's time, not your time or our time.

Waiting for that one person you know you will spend the rest of your life with is on God's time. Finally figuring out what your calling is or what your next step should be in pursuing your calling is due to God's time. HE HAS A PLAN, PEOPLE! Once we can understand that we are where we need to be and that His plan is good then we can start living in our present and in his presence. Even the stories in the Bible depict a sense that God's plan is on his own time. Abraham and Sarah desperately wanted a child, and God gave them a son once they were in their old age because this was on his time. For generations upon generations, God's people waited for their savior to come and save them. This, too, was on God's time when he gave us his only son.

What I have learned recently is that we have created a sense of time that makes sense to us, but God's time is the only one that matters when it comes to how he wants everything to happen. Allowing patience to envelope us doesn't mean we put our lives on hold—it means we start

to listen to God as we sit silently and patiently in his presence. We must live in the moment, right now, because this is the place and time that God wants us to be.



March 31

**Power of the Cross** by Brett Hutson

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Throughout this year, there has been a common theme in my life the theme of uncertainty. It may just be me, but I feel like many of us feel this way during college. We face challenges daily that make us uncertain about our future. Maybe you're uncertain if your major is right for you but are too afraid to switch to what you're truly passionate about. Maybe you've lost a loved one and you're uncertain how that will affect your future. The question for me is how do I react to these challenges and uncertainties?

Jesus gives us the answer on how to react to the uncertainty in life. John 16:33 says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Knowing that Jesus has overcome the world gives us strength to know that no matter what we face in this world, our Savior can help us through it. When thinking about this in the context of our own lives, it helps us think not about what we can do for ourselves, but what we can do for Jesus.

There is no real way to remove uncertainty from our lives; it will always be a part of it. But when Jesus died on the cross, it was the greatest act of the love that this world will ever see. That act shows us that we have been given a purpose by God to glorify him, and we find our identity in what He has done for us. We should remember this everyday, not just during Lent. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Jesus gave up everything for us; the question is what are you willing to give up for him?

April 1

**A Holy Community** by Natalie Benson

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*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us”*

*Hebrews 12:1*

Throughout the season of Lent, we aim to repent our sin that “so easily entangles” us. Whether that sin is pride, self-doubt, gluttony, apathy, or impatience, we all struggle with sins that entangle us and hinder our ability to run the race that God has marked out for us. God has a plan marked out for each of our races, but we make our races a lot more difficult for ourselves when we are tangled in our sin. However, here is the good news: we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. God is instrumental and proactive in the way that He places people into our lives. We are not alone in our race, because we have lessons to help us all along the way. We have something to learn from every single person that we encounter in our lives. This could even be in little ways, like the person in line in front of you at the store or the person sitting behind you in class. Be always on the lookout for lessons and be open to learn from others, because God does not allow two people to cross paths for no reason. Also, these lessons do not have to be from someone like yourself in order to be meaningful. In fact, some of the most meaningful lessons can come from someone who has a completely different background or belief system than you do. The greatest respect and love you can show to a person is to be open to learning a lesson from them, because this mindset shows that you view their beliefs as valuable. So, this season of Lent, take advantage of this chance to learn from your cloud of witnesses.

Prayerfully observe the way that the people around you move in the world. Be curious, ask questions, and seek wisdom. Keep an open mind with the answers you receive. Above all, use the wisdom you are given to help you better run the race marked out for you.





April 3

**Enough Indeed** by Emma Hogsett

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*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*

*Ephesians 2:10*

The past few months I have grown to love the idea of being enough in God's eyes. I write it on my bathroom mirror, my planner, and any blank space on papers so that I can always be reminded that I am indeed enough.

I think I have come to love "enough" so much because sometimes I don't feel like I am. I fall short of the glory of God. I fail and I sin and I don't deserve the forgiveness God continues to give me. I compare myself to others and I look around at the successes, beauty, items and grades that others have and I don't. I dwell in what others may think after I say or do something. When I compare myself to others or rest in what others think of me, I am not enough. I will never be enough for humanity. But I'm not *meant* to be enough for others. Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This verse reminds us that our purpose is not to live for what the world wants of us but for what God wants of us.

We are meant for God, and according to him, we are already enough! He created us perfectly and loves us just how we are. Psalm 139:14 even says it! "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." We are perfect according to Christ.

So rather than striving to have what others have and rely on what others think of you, remember that you are enough in God's eyes. This Lenten season and beyond, may we

always know that we are enough and may we live it out in the most minute and magnificent areas of our lives.



April 4

**No Résumé Needed** by Cassidy Smith

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*The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”*

*Exodus 4:11-12*

In any season of life, I think everyone questions if they are really fit to do God’s work. We struggle with the idea of not having an adequate résumé for the job God is calling us to do. Exodus 4:11-12 reminds us that God is in control and He is the one who made us to be who we are. He knows His plans and has placed us directly where we need to be to live His plans out. We get off track some times, but ultimately His plan is within our hearts. If you ever feel inadequate in a job God has called you to, think about Moses’ interaction with our God Himself. Moses questions God in his command, as this is an automatic human response for most. We all must do our best daily to place our FULL trust in the Lord and let His work be done. It is a difficult task and the first person that can help us in this goal is Jesus Christ our Lord. In this season, allow Jesus to fill you up with His spirit and know that we are able to live out God’s plan because of His sacrifice.

April 5

**Love Conquers All** by Rev. Dr. Lang Brownlee

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Fact-check this: “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear....*”  
*1 John 4:18*

This is quite an assertion for us to reflect upon. We certainly seem to be in a period of fear in our world. There is violence that is actualized in various locales, with literally thousands upon thousands of persons—women, men, and children—killed, homeless, displaced. There is the threat of violence that is influencing policies that affect literally thousands upon thousands of persons who are seeking refuge, safety, stability. There is the confusion and chaos of fear that is literally touching persons—even university students and personnel—not knowing whether the direction in which we embark is going to help humanity and our world, or harm us.

Where do we find hope? Where do we find peace? Virgil famously pronounced *Amor vincit omnia*, (“Love conquers all”), but is this assertion worthy of our assent?

Even though the days of Lent are lengthening, the darkness of these questions persist. They do not permit facile responses. But, again, fact-check this:  
*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear....*  
The writer of the first letter of John makes this audacious claim in the context of a community facing its own uncertainties and the confusion they entailed. John’s message broadcasts that God is Light and Love, and that in Christ our Advocate, we can truly love one another as a reflection of this divine light and love.

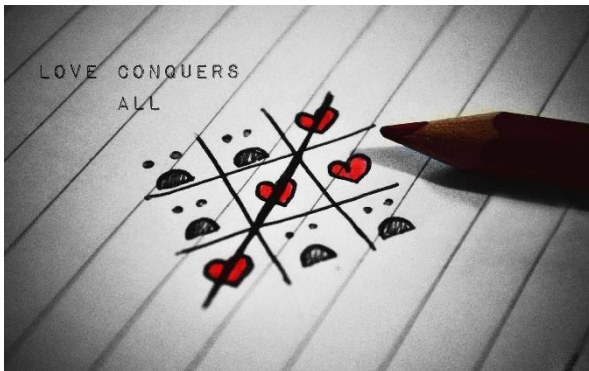
What holds us back? Well, our sin, of course. And how much of our brokenness, our alienation, our turning our

backs on faithful living, has to do with our fear? Maybe more than we first realize.

If it is the power of God's love that empowers us to love one another, and if this is the root of faithful living, then our individual discipleship and our communities of faith surely can demonstrate the truth of John's statement. *There is no fear in love....*

The bottom line is that a follower of Jesus, (that human embodiment of God's love in real time), enables us to conquer the fears we face and to live our lives (in real time) with love as our guide and our strength. Doing so, we will make the efforts to counter the violence, the threats, and the ambiguities that make us afraid.

There's a great quote that goes like this: "Fear can keep us up all night long, but faith makes one fine pillow." Let's make Christian love our aim; maybe we'll sleep better at night.... What do you think?



April 6

**Joy, Peace, Faith** by Olivia Jongkind

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*“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”*  
*Romans 12:12*

As a college student, the response of “I’m fine, just busy and stressed” becomes as normal and frequent as breathing, and it’s usually accompanied by “I have to go – I have to study”. It’s easy to fall into a monotonous routine of going to class, saying hi to a few people along the way, checking in on your roommates, studying, working, making Ramen noodles, then studying some more. The only hope we have is that the next exam is over in three weeks, that payday comes in two weeks, and that sooner or later, we will get a break. But ladies and gents, this isn’t our only hope. Our hope is greater than these earthly things revolving around school and work. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was sent to die for our sins and who then rose from the grave so that we could live forever with Him. THIS is our hope. Our hope resides in the fact that there is something and someone greater than this earth, than school, than a career. Be joyful in this. While a career and school may be a huge blessing, it is not all we were meant for. Rejoice in this. Amidst studying, take a moment and remember that your identity and hope is not in the things we accomplish, but rather our identity and hope is in Jesus Christ. When you hit bumps in the road, be patient. Romans 8:28 says “All things work together for good for those who love Him.” God teaches us a lesson in every step of our journey, and in this affliction, He is drawing you closer to Him. I am not guaranteeing that every hard season will be followed by recognizable blessing, but the blessing is that you are now in closer relationship with our Lord. And without ceasing, pray. Talk to our Father, and listen to

His response. Half (if not more) of praying is listening to God. When you are sensitive to Him, He will guide you through the affliction and reassure you in your hope. So I encourage you, think about how you can be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.



April 7

**Gained Righteousness at Christ's Expense** by Emily Scott

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*“At just the right time Christ died for ungodly people. He died for us when we had no power of our own. It is unusual for anyone to die for a godly person. Maybe someone would be willing to die for a good person. But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*  
*Romans 5:6-8*

You are loved more than you will ever know by someone who died to know you. Just think about that for a minute. God loves you so much that he was willing to give the ultimate sacrifice by sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for us for the forgiveness of our sins. Although we continually mess up and put God to the side for our own selfish desires, God still wants to have a relationship with us. No matter where we come from or our past mistakes, God still adores us and loves us. The love of God cannot be compared to any other love because God is love. According to Romans 8:38-39, “...neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. It is because of God's grace that we can have a relationship with him. I watched this video on youtube by Jon Jorgenson, titled *What is Grace?*, and he stated that G.R.A.C.E stands for “Gained Righteousness at Christ's Expense”. This phrase has really stuck with me. If it were not for Christ's sacrifice for us, then we would have not been made morally right or righteous with God. We would have had no hope. However, since God sent his son Jesus, we can have



everlasting life if we accept him as our Lord and Savior. If that doesn't show you how much the Father loved us, then I don't know what will. The question is, how will you respond to God's love and show his love to other people?



April 8

**More Than Just a Checkmark** by Emily Hiland

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*“Then people brought little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ When He had placed His hands on them, He went on from there.”*

*Matthew 19:13-14*

I am a sucker for a good to-do list. Somehow, the feeling of marking things off and knowing that I completed them gives me the motivation to keep going and keep checking things off the list. Beyond that, my to-do list shows me all the things I have to accomplish, and reminds me just how hectic life truly can be. There are days that go by that I truly feel like there is no way that I will ever be able to get everything done. I blow past spending time with people I care about, I don't go to bed until 3AM, and I don't take time to appreciate the beauty around me. Perhaps the worst of all the things that stay on my to-do list is my personal time with Christ. I look at it as another thing that just has to be done in the day, and if it doesn't get checked off, then I think to myself “it's okay, Jesus still knows I love him, I will try again tomorrow.” But, what would it look like if my devotional time were no longer just a checkmark that I am striving to attain. What if Jesus looked at us like a checkmark on His list?

I don't think it is any secret to anyone that Jesus was probably a busy man. He traveled all over performing miracles and spreading the love of God. People literally followed Him everywhere He went and people would do anything they could just for even a touch of his cloak. In the passage from Matthew, Jesus was traveling through

Judea. I can only imagine that His disciples had a list of people and things He needed to see and do, that was probably about a mile long. When the crowd approached Jesus with their children, the disciples I am sure thought “No, this is not a checkmark that needs to happen.... This is not in the game plan.” But, Jesus did something amazing, that truly teaches us a lot about who He is. He stopped, He placed His hands, He took the time needed, and then continued on with his to-do list of tasks. So, why is it so hard for us to do the same? Why can't we see our time with Christ as more than just a checkmark on the to-do list of life? Why can't we instead take the time needed and then go back to what we need to do? In this Lenten season, I challenge you to figure out a way to make your relationship with Christ more than a checkmark. Maybe this is starting the morning each morning in prayer before your feet even hit the floor, maybe it is picking a certain time and knowing that no matter what you are doing, you will stop and worship. Whatever that looks like for you, make Christ more than just a checkmark on your list, and watch what He will do for you in return.



April 10

**Saying Yes to God** by Kristen Dyson

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Are you afraid of saying yes to God? Jonah was. Instead of doing what the Lord had asked of Him, Jonah ran away instead. In the process of running away, he faced death, but God saved him and he ended up doing the task that God had set out for him all along (Jonah 1-3). It's okay if you too are scared. Many of us are, or have at some point been, scared to say yes to Him. After all, surrendering everything to someone else means we lose control, something that is very hard to lose. Although it may be hard to surrender control, I guarantee that in the end, God will not disappoint. What a beautiful gift it is that the creator of Heaven and Earth would care enough about each of us to want to guide our lives. He loves us so much that he's willing to look past all of our faults and create something more wonderful from our lives than we could ever even imagine. Sometimes we may feel as if we cannot do what God wants us to do, and the temptation to run from the task may be strong. But God says He will not allow more temptation than what you can handle (1Corinthians 10:13). And despite how weak you may be, Jesus wants you anyway saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," (2 Corinthians 12:9). When God calls you to do things, it is okay to feel nervous and unsure. But take your nervousness and insecurity to Him in prayer. He wants to help you unfold something beautiful and He will be with you along every step of the way. The next time you feel God calling you to do something, whether that be to form a new friendship, go on a mission trip, or maybe even change your major, say yes. After all, God's plan is more glorious than we could ever imagine or even deserve, so give it up to Him. He will not disappoint.

April 11

**Acknowledging God's Will** by Joslyn Juhl

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*Psalm 33:6-11*

How often do you find yourself praying, “God, make this go away” or “God, make this easier for me”? Have you ever considered that maybe what we should be asking is, “God, give me the strength to get through this”? I have a tendency to start my prayers with the things that I *want* to happen and the things that I would *like* to end, rather than acknowledging that these things may not be in God’s plan. Yes, God answers prayers, but that doesn’t mean that praying is a way to give God a wishlist of the things we want changed in our lives. Rather than asking God to change or end situations in my life, I now ask God to give me the right attitude and the right words to handle the situations that I face. I know that even though I may not have any control over the struggles, I can face life with grace and positivity because God’s plans and purposes will triumph over our hardships. So, I challenge you to not just ask God for things to go your way in life, but for you to recognize that He is the one who has a plan for you, and that He is the one who can give you the strength to push through. Even in the difficult times, choose to pray: “God, let your will be done.”

April 12

**Experience the Peace** by Irene Carlquist

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*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”*

*John 14:27*

Most people see Lent as a time to challenge themselves and give something up. Some people look at Lent and don't see the big deal. Personally, I love Lent. While I do like to take up the challenge to give up something I like, I view Lent as a time to re-center myself and think about what comes next in the spiritual calendar. Lent ends with Easter after Jesus's resurrection. Right before that though is His crucifixion. During lent I like to think about this and think about this bible verse as I remember what God sent him for. Jesus brought us peace as well as dying for our sins. Lent is the time when I remember this and pray over this verse to keep it in my heart. During Lent we stop saying “alleluia” until Easter. One of my favorite parts of Lent comes towards the end, right before the crucifixion. It's the night of the Garden of Gethsemane. It's a tradition in our church that we hold a watch. From the end of the night service until midnight, we have rotations of sitting in the chapel and praying. Also in the chapel are the bread and wine from the service. This represents us staying up with Jesus to wait for the soldier to come take him away. I love participating in this watch because I get to sit with Jesus and I can pray or I can just be in his presence. Even when it's not the watch I like to do that, especially in Lent. It gives me the chance to experience the peace that He left with us.

April 13

**Embracing the Change** by Liz VanAllen

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Change happens. Sometimes, change is a good thing. Other times, it's not. You're comfortable with the way things are, and as the old saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. However, you can't always stop change. Sometimes so much changes that things can never be the same as they were. If you're like me, this can leave you feeling kind of lost.

Currently, we're getting ready to celebrate the time where Jesus conquered death. As amazing as this was for mankind, I can't help but feel that the disciples were less than ecstatic that Jesus was leaving Earth. What change is more terrifying than losing the actual physical Son of God after following him around for three whole years? I mean what days could be better than touring with *the* Savior of the world? But the disciples didn't lament over the fact that Jesus would no longer be on Earth. Instead, they let the Holy Spirit guide them into making new disciples and some of the first churches ever. The disciples found a way to adapt in order to continue to fulfill their callings. Change did not stop the disciples from living meaningful lives after Jesus left Earth. Instead, the opposite happened, and the disciples found ways to better themselves.

Change will happen, and it will be terrifying. For the rest of our lives, we will be presented with change, and at times, we'll have to lose something we really don't want to let go of. However, the Holy Spirit is always there to guide us if we simply let it. So what will you do? Will you lament over change, or will you let that change inspire you to grow?

April 14

**Singing This Season: From Sorrow to Celebration** by  
Rev. Dr. Lang Brownlee

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John Wesley, that 18<sup>th</sup> century Christian who founded the Methodist movement in England, had directions for disciples of Jesus regarding their communal singing. Among other instructions, he wrote that they, “Sing lustily and with a good courage...” but “Sing modestly. Do not bawl....” Another good thought he shared: “...strive to unite your voices together....”

I’ll leave it to each of us to decide how our pastor should tell us to sing (!), but I want to commend to you that the Lenten season should include singing. I know that you have your own favorite Christian songs that reflect the emphases of this journey of Jesus to the Cross and Easter Sunday, but I’d like to offer the words of two hymns that you can find in many hymnals that, to me, permit my song to move from the sorrow of Lent to the celebration of Easter morn. First,

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!*

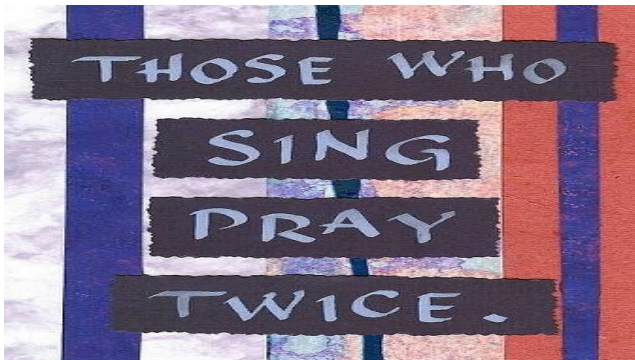
*What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.*

That is an appropriate contemplation for my Lenten path, but not the end. On Easter Sunday, I can sing in a different key:

*Now the green blade riseth, from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green.*



Prayer: O God of Love, you put upon our hearts the weight of the walk your Son Jesus undertook as he made his way to Jerusalem, to betrayal, to arrest, to mockery, to abuse, and to a tortuous death. Yet your Love through the words, the acts, and even the death of your Son brought forth a new being in Love, an affirmation that life in you, through you, and with you rises with your Son! You indeed give us the most important of reasons to unite our voices together in song! Thank you for your gracious Love. Amen.



April 15

**Is It All Good?** by Rev. Corey Howard

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*“1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. 2Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. 3Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. 4One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. 5On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. 6The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. 7They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. 8The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. 9The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. 10All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you. 11They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. 14The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. 15The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. 16You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. 17The LORD is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings. 18The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. 19He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them. 20The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. 21My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.” Psalm 145*

When I read the lines of this psalm, I always find myself focusing on the first few words of verse 9, “The LORD is good to all,” and verse 19 “He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.”

I read these words, and I immediately want to say “Yes, that is true.” My first response, which is drawn from all the good I have experienced in my life, is to agree. But then I think about others who cannot simply say “Yes, that is true.” I think about people I know who have had tragic, horrible experiences in their past that might lead them to completely disagree and say “That is absolutely false. God does not hear my cry, God does not fulfill my desires.” These are people who have, in all honesty and earnestly, cried out to God; not for petty needs, not for minor things, but sincere and heartfelt desires, even simply the desire to feel God’s presence.

Or I think about those who have been victims like the refugees fleeing their homeland in Syria, or those who spend nights on the street here in Indianapolis, or any number of other people who I do not know, yet I cannot help but imagine have cried out to God, seeking to be heard, seeking to be saved.

I do not have an answer. I do not know why these things happen. I don’t think any of us do. But the one thing I do know, the one word that we can speak to this situation is hope. The message of Christ, the message of this Lenten season, really boils down to hope. During this time, we do many things- we might give up a bad habit, we might look at our lives and make penance, we might take up a spiritual practice such as fasting or daily prayer. Each of these things serves to remind us of what we commemorate during the Lenten season, and on into Easter. We commemorate the coming death of Jesus Christ. And we celebrate his resurrection. To me, that is the greatest message of hope- that things can change, and that things do change.

Hope.

Hope that things will be different. Hope that those who can say “Yes, God is good” will do so. Hope that those who cannot say “Yes, God is good,” will someday be able to. But it does not start there. To simply say “I hope it gets better” is to miss the call to do something about it. We cannot sit by and merely pass out hopeful platitudes. However it is hope that guides us, the hope that is central to the message of Christ.

It is that hope that always brings me back to this psalm, challenging me (and us) to seek a day when we can echo the Psalmist and say “The LORD is good to all, and His compassion is over all that He has made... The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing. The LORD is just in all His ways, and kind in all His doings. The LORD is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him; He also hears their cry, and saves them.”



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