

# [RE]FOCUS

Moving Forward Together in Faith, Hope, and Love

## DAILY DEVOTION BOOK



Thanks for picking this up!

Here are some things we want you to know:

1. This is all about Jesus.
2. This is for everyone. No experience needed. If you have experience, take some time to walk with someone who's just getting started.
3. Any journey has guides along the way. Whether its people, a map, trail makers, a compass, or the North Star, these guides give a sense of location and direction. They help us know what to look for and where we are. We've designed these devotions in a similar way.

Every “” means there is something to help you focus. There are 3 of them per devotion:

-  **Read** - a verse or verses from the Bible, and some stories by our writers related to that section from the Bible. In the Bible, God guarantees this is how He speaks to you.
-  **Pray** - Talking to God. He invites you to speak with Him. He'll even teach you how. (See Luke 11:1-4)
-  **Live** - There are questions here to help you consider what was written for that day. Use these questions, come up with your own questions, or use both. :)

These are simple moves inspired by ancient spiritual habits: meditatio (meditate) - oratio (pray) - tentatio (tension, struggle). Meditate on God's Word, pray about it, struggle. Struggle? Did we lose you there? Sometimes living can be a struggle. That's when reading and reflecting on God's Word (the Bible) and praying to ask God for help comes in.

These are simple enough all on their own, but simple rhythms typically point to profound realities. Read, Pray, Live are also rhythms we see in our lives. We experience God's Word, we call out to Him, especially as we face trials and temptations. That is what is at the heart of [RE]FOCUS.

You are not doing this alone. One person walking by themselves is easy to miss or ignore. A group of people walking in step? That's a band, an army, a community. You are invited to be in step with us, as Jesus leads us to [RE]FOCUS on Him.

Sharing Christ's story with love - Trinity Utica Staff

This devotion book is made possible by:

God and His grace

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# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

Day 1 Devotion – Reflecting: “Mic-Drop”

by Pastor Justin Krupsky

## READ:

Every once in a while someone says something or writes something that I hear or read that causes me to stop and think, to reflect. Let me be so bold to say that everything recorded for us about the person of Jesus in the 4 Gospels are worthy of reflecting on. So let's begin refocusing by reflecting. Reflecting on what Jesus said recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke.

***Luke 8:17-21 “And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”***

No doubt about it: Jesus captured everyone's attention by His claim, their eyes were fixed on Him. He was claiming that well over 4,000 years of history was His story. Everyone knew what He was claiming as He reflected on words from the prophet Isaiah. The question would be: really? Is He really the One and Only? Is He really the One that will fill in the void that sin had created? Is He really the One that will make everything whole again and right?

Jesus no doubt knew what He was saying that day as He quite literally dropped the mic. He knows what He is still claiming today. As we begin the next 8 weeks together, let's begin refocusing by reflecting on Jesus. Let's fix our eyes on Him.

If you are looking for hope, for comfort, for courage, for purpose, for strength, for truth, for love, or for forgiveness: fix your gaze on the good news of Heaven and Earth. Jesus.

## PRAY:

*Father in Heaven, as we begin these 8 weeks together refocusing our attention on Jesus may we thank You for always being focused on us. We confess that all too often we fix our eyes on the things of this world. Thank You for forgiving us. We ask You to pour out more of your Holy Spirit on us to give us more faith, hope, and love. Amen.*

## LIVE:

How does the boldness of Jesus give you courage right now?

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

## Day 2: Miracles that Restore

By Katie Lindhurst

### READ:

Jesus performed many miracles throughout His ministry here on earth. Turning water into wine, walking on water, feeding 5,000 men, raising people from the dead, healing the blind, sick and possessed are just some of the miracles that are recorded for us in the Bible.

Why does the Bible tell us of these miracles? **John 20:30-31** tells us that Jesus did many more than just these miracles, but they are “**written so that you may believe and have life in His name.**” Exodus (6:1-8; 9:16; 14:31) shows us that the purpose of miracles is to show the might of God, His love and concern for us, His power, to show He is there for us and for us to trust Him.

Miracles help to create or build faith in those *observing* the miracle. Mary had faith that Jesus could supply wine, that’s why she asked Him to help. Imagine the faith that was restored in the witnesses of all the miracles mentioned in just the New Testament alone! Sometimes it was just the disciples who witnessed a miracle. At other times it was thousands of people that were witnesses! Faith was ignited or restored in each of these witnesses. May your faith be restored in God and what He has done for you! By God’s power, refocus on Him.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, thank you for showing signs that pointed to so much more: displays of love, grace, and power. Keep working those same gifts in me to grow in following you, and to bring others along with me. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How does believing in something unlikely like Jesus’ miracles challenge your faith? How does it encourage your faith?

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

## Day 3: Love that Renews

by Josh Britton

**John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

## READ:

re-new: to resume (an activity) after an interruption.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe it is just me, but as I focus in on the dictionary definition of the word “renew,” I find that it seems to hit home a little bit more than usual these days, especially against the backdrop of 2020. With a global pandemic, race and societal issues, job losses, death, and a list that seems to go on and on, this hasn’t really been a year devoid of interruptions, has it? What a perfect opportunity for God to remind us that this isn’t anything new to Him.

You see, God has been (re)newing or resuming His activities of restoring and reconciling all of creation, including us - the ones who messed it up, ever since the greatest interruption of all took place: sin. I love that God wasn’t phased by the interruption, but rather immediately displayed His amazing grace and mercy by already having a plan laid out and set forth into action the minute things went south. That is what John 3:16 is all about, Jesus being the plan to renew and make all things right in this world by coming and taking our place on the cross.

May we then, the renewed children of God, love this world like Jesus loves this world. May we love those around us as Jesus loves them. Let’s join in on the family business together of renewing and seeking to extend grace, forgiveness, and mercy to the world around us. No matter what the interruption is, there has never been a better moment than now to resume the activities of the family business.

## PRAY:

*Jesus, at just the right time, you came to renew all things, despite us being your enemies. Because of your renewing love, renew my heart to actively love those around me, the loveable and unloveable, the loved and unloved. Thank you for what you have done for me. Work through me to renew someone else today. Amen.*

## LIVE:

God loves the world even though many don’t love Him back. What does that teach you about the depth of God’s love? How does that impact your love for His world?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/renew>

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

## Day 4: Revealing: Unchangeable identity of Jesus

by Brenda Havers

### READ:

**“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” John 8:58**

The world around us is changing fast. I am reminded of this every time I see an advertisement for an upcoming music award show and don't recognize a single artist highlighted. Five years ago it was a completely different group of artists and five years from now it most likely will be an entirely new set of names.

In my life, I have seen sweeping changes in just about every aspect of life. I started life out listening to records, then 8 tracks, then cassette tapes, then CDs, and now digital streaming. As a teacher, I have gone from getting purple ink on my hands from “ditto machines” to using Smartboards, YouTube, Apps, and Chromebooks in the classroom. A quote from Bruce Barton states, “When you are through changing, you are through.” There is much truth in that statement as it relates to the material world we live in.

Change can be exciting. Change can also be scary. I look at so many changes happening in the world and our culture today and it's easy to be alarmed and discouraged. As Christians, we can find great comfort in the fact that our Savior Jesus doesn't change. Jesus identified Himself to the people of His day using the exact same name God used way back in Genesis - “I am”. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. His love and mercy for His creation do not change.

God's Word doesn't change either. It is as true and solid today as it was when it was first spoken and written down. Those ancient words are also still as powerful and relevant today despite the whims of changing popular culture trying to convince us otherwise. Just as musical artists rise and fall in acclaim, so do the teachings and philosophies of man. In this ever-changing world, true peace can only be found when you build your life on the solid, unchanging foundation of the one true God and His Word.

### PRAY:

*God, thank you that for every ebb and flow of life in this world and faith within me, You are constant. Build in me a hunger for Your Word. For in Your Word you constantly give me life, peace, and forgiveness. Forgive me when I doubt, restore me when I wander, and refocus my eyes on You. Amen.*

# **LIVE:**

What is one way God brings you peace through His Word?

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

Day 5: Reforming everything you thought you knew  
by Pastor Chad Wright

## READ:

**Matt 7:28–29 (ESV)<sup>28</sup> And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.**

Did you have to memorize the planets in our solar system when you went to school? Do you remember how many planets are in it? There were nine when I was a kid. Today, kids are learning that there are eight. Pluto lost its status as a planet. Today, the official make-up of our solar system includes eight planets, five dwarf planets, and a hypothetical planet (Planet X) which might be a grapefruit-sized wormhole. Why the change? Astronomers and astrophysicists have better information from decades of satellites and better computers to model the solar system. To put it simply, we know much more and much better information about our solar system. (It is pretty amazing if you go to [solarsystem.nasa.gov](http://solarsystem.nasa.gov)) I have learned so much!

This type of amazement in learning is recorded by Matthew when he described the crowds who listened to Jesus teach. His teaching was different than the scribes. The scribes were the professionals. They had studied at the feet of the theologians in the religious schools of their day. They knew the Scriptures backward and forward. But their teaching was dead. It was legalism that failed to move the hearts of God's people. When Jesus came teaching about repentance, forgiveness, and the kingdom of God, the people were astonished at His teaching. When He spoke in the synagogues and connected the prophecies of Isaiah and the other Scriptures to his fulfillment, no one challenged his authority. He had the authority to speak about the Scriptures because He was the author of them and the fulfillment of them. He reformed his people by his Word. He prepared their hearts by showing them their sins but also revealing Himself as their Savior. He still does this today wherever His Word is proclaimed. He still has authority. May we always revere His Word and study it daily and diligently and stay astonished!

## PRAY:

*Dear Jesus, as You astonished people during Your earthly ministry, so touch my heart each day with Your Word. Help me to read, learn, and apply it daily to my walk with You. Help me to open my mouth and share Your teaching with others who need to hear about You. Amen.*

## LIVE:

5 days into this, what had God done to reshape what you thought you knew about Him?

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

## Day 6: Redeeming...Everything

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**Matthew 16:21 - “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”<sup>1</sup>**

I am a difficult person to please. I make it difficult because I love to paint pictures of possibilities with my mind. When I get in my mind the way something could look like, reality *never* lives up to those absurd beautiful impossible expectations. It took me almost forty years of life, love, letdowns, and hurt to be able to write this paragraph. It also took an absurd beautiful impossible amount of grace to lead me, and those I have hurt, through all of that to call a thing what it is: unrealistic expectations and the sin I inflicted on others because of it. Can you relate to that?

A wise man once shared with me: “I know what God’s Word says. I’m still learning what God’s Word *means*.”<sup>2</sup> I think the disciples were in a similar situation. Here is Jesus their Messiah, the One who will restore *the* kingdom! Except, they are focused on the wrong kingdom, *their* kingdom. What a letdown Jesus is to human pride. How could *Jesus* possibly let anyone down? He didn’t put humanity front and center. The disciples wanted Jesus to elevate their idea of “kingdom” above everything else.

I do the same thing. I elevate what I want to see in myself, my family, my neighborhood, my church, my mission, my job, my country, my world - the “Me-monster”<sup>3</sup> is raging. On the cross, from the empty tomb, in baptism, in communion, through His World, Jesus puts the me-monster down and raises something else to life. He separates the “me” from the monster. Jesus puts pride in the grave, and raises me in faith, in life, with a new heart. He gives me descriptions of the future and turns my attention and effort toward my neighbor.

Jesus redeems everything, including my expectations.

### PRAY:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/matthew/16/21>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Jeff Gibbs

<sup>3</sup> Brian Regan, "Dinner Party," recorded 2004: *Brian Regan: I Walked on the Moon*, streaming audio, accessed August 13, 2020, [https://brianregan.shop.musictoday.com/product/3BDD04/brian-regan-i-walked-on-the-moon-audio-digital-download?cp=781\\_66102](https://brianregan.shop.musictoday.com/product/3BDD04/brian-regan-i-walked-on-the-moon-audio-digital-download?cp=781_66102)

*Holy Spirit, keep calling, gathering, opening eyes, and setting apart people to know and love Jesus. Forgive us when we confuse our kingdom with Yours. Refocus our faith on Jesus for our sake, and for the lives needing Jesus here and now. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

What is your idea of “*the kingdom*”? When does that distract you from God’s Kingdom?

# Week 1: [RE]FOCUS

## Day 7: Re-establishing

By Michele Grupe

### READ:

Revelation 21:5 “I am making all things new.”

When I taught art, it seemed like the students enjoyed working with clay the best. Any child could take a lump of clay and work it with their hands into something meaningful. After the students had created a project like a bowl or animal, the clay piece had to be placed into a kiln to go through a process called firing. The heat would alter the chemical makeup of the clay so it took a permanent shape. When the students received their project back after this first firing, they were amazed that a wet blob of gray clay was now a delicate, white ceramic piece. Sometimes they couldn't even recognize their own work!

The ceramic process is a great reminder of how God works in our lives to help us grow as Christians and become spiritually mature. Our old, sinful nature is like a lifeless lump of clay. On our own, we can do nothing to save ourselves. God [RE]FOCUSES us to shape and mold our lives into His image. Isaiah 64:8 says, “But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Just like the clay has to be fired to gain strength, over time we may face trials and difficulties in our lives. These trials help to refine our character and remove sin from our lives, as we receive our new identity in Christ. Isaiah 43:18-19 says, “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Jesus bestows us with a new identity as we let go of former things.

We can trust God in the fire. We trust that He has a reason for every pain, difficulty, and disappointment. We trust that it is for His glory and our good, to become more like Christ. Even though we may not be able to envision the end result, the Divine Artist Himself continually renews and transforms us until we become His beautiful vessel. Even when we feel like our lives are a mess, we trust that God can turn it into a masterpiece.

### PRAY:

*Father, you are the Divine Potter, we are your clay. You called us into existence. You remain with us even when we rebel and shatter ourselves and others. Move us to trust and believe that because Jesus is more than enough, You do and You will put us back together in this life. Help us also to believe that You will return and re-establish all things better than they ever were.*

### LIVE:

How does God re-establish faith in you, day by day?

# Week 2: Reflecting

Day 1: Garden of Eden - Get some weeding done

By Pastor Justin Krupsky

## READ:

John 1:1,14

I love how John starts his Gospel. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Reflect on this with me, “In the beginning.” His beginning statement causes us to reflect on the Garden of Eden, a place with no weeds, a place of peace. Just a few sentences later He says this, **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** John is saying, we all have experienced what Adam and Eve experienced in the Garden. Jesus restored what once was, He pulled the weeds. The truth for us today is that He still is.

Each spring my wife plants vegetables, but each summer the weeds come. As those weeds come up what do we do? We weed. We restore. This is what Jesus, the Word, the One who was and is and will always be with us did and still does today. The One who is full of grace and truth is ready to restore your garden today.

So, what weed does He need to pull today from your life? Maybe it's greed, maybe it's envy, or maybe it's lust. He is here not just full of truth, but also amazing grace. Reflect on the Word, “Your sins are forgiven.” You have been restored. The Word was in the beginning, the Word has been seen, and the Word has been spoken. As we reflect and focus on Jesus, may we walk in the garden in peace with our Savior, our gardener.

## PRAY:

*Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for Jesus. Thank You for staying with us. Thank You for Your grace and truth. Please continue to restore us as we refocus our lives and reflect on you this week. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Truth, grace, forgiveness, love, peace. Which of these do you seem to need the most today? How do these gifts from Jesus reveal His presence and power in the midst of your “weeds” today?

# Week 2: Reflecting

## Day 2: Son of David

By John Lucas

### READ:

You wouldn't know it now, but the Detroit Red Wings used to be good. REALLY good. Led by the likes of Steve Yzerman and Niklas Lidstrom, the Red Wings won four Stanley Cups in the 90s and 2000s. People look fondly at those glory days, remembering the Russian Five, the rivalry with the Colorado Avalanche, the list of Hall of Fame players donning the red and white, and so on.

2020 is a harsh reality, though. The team is a far cry from winning a Stanley Cup; the dynasty has ended. Such is the way in sports. Fans of any losing team long for the "glory days." They want their team to win, and keep on winning forever. Isn't it the same in other aspects of life? We want our country to be prosperous forever. We want our health to hold forever. We want friends to be close forever. However, there is only one constant: Jesus.

Israel's greatest king, David, was not a perfect man. His country was not perfect and would not last forever. But God chose David and made him a promise in 2 Samuel 7:16: "Your throne shall be established forever." Jesus is forever. Jesus is the one we can turn to in sadness and joy; he will not fail us like the sports teams so many people obsess over. In Luke 1:33, the angel tells Mary that Jesus' kingdom will have no end.

So let's focus on Jesus. Let's focus on the One who is forever faithful and glorious. His "glory days" are eternal, and our faith will make sure that we are a part of that eternal kingdom.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, Your grace goes deeper than my darkest sins. Continue to pierce my sin with the light and truth of who You are as my Redeemer and King. By Your constant power, fill my life with faith, hope, and love from You for all those whose paths I cross. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What "glory days" do you live for? How does Jesus' faithfulness reveal opportunities here and now?

# Week 2: Reflecting

## Day 3: The Long-Awaited One - Mary & Joseph's visitation

By Allison Carr

### READ:

I think it's fair to say that waiting is hard. No one particularly likes to wait for anything. We live in a time of instant gratification with virtually anything within our grasp with the simple click of a button. I'll admit, I don't like waiting and can certainly be impatient. But, as a new mom myself, this last year has been one of waiting and anticipation. Nine months of waiting to be exact, from the time my husband and I knew we had a little one on the way until his entrance into this world! However, our waiting felt even longer than that as we waited, not always patiently, for God's perfect timing in our five years of marriage before welcoming our little miracle. But, waiting for the birth of a child is simultaneously the slowest and fastest experience.

The book of **Isaiah** is filled with prophecies about the long-awaited one as we read in chapter **7:14**, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."** Our Savior, God incarnate would come to earth and be born of a virgin! Talk about anticipation!

It was a few *hundred years* before these words, that promise would come to fruition. As new parents, Mary and Joseph lived in anticipation for months after the Angel Gabriel visited them, sharing the news of fulfillment, the words written by the prophet Isaiah come to life as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. The gift of life is a miracle, but they waited for something bigger than themselves, bigger than all of us. They were waiting for the Savior!

There is nothing like holding your child for the first time, and I can only imagine the heightened anticipation Mary felt as she held Jesus, our Immanuel, in her arms. As the chosen one, she was not only looking into the face of her son, but also her Savior! As our children grow, the anticipation and waiting doesn't go away, but simply changes as one milestone leads to another.

As we refocus our hearts and our minds, there are always things we are anticipating and waiting for. But, fortunately for us, the long-awaited has come! We serve a God who keeps his promises and whose Spirit is here living among us and within us, as we wait once again for His return and to be reunited with Him in His Kingdom.

### PRAY:

*Father, You sent the Son to reflect Your love and promises given so long ago. Jesus, You came in faithfulness, truth, and humility to lift us from darkness, despair, and death. Spirit, You revealed the powerful love and truth to those who needed it the most when Jesus came. God, keep sending, coming, and revealing who You are and what You do as we anticipate Your return. Amen.*

# **LIVE:**

What helps you endure a long wait? How can this instruct your heart as you wait for Jesus' return?

# Week 2: Reflecting

## Day 4: Seed of Abraham

By Andrew Brazeal

### READ:

**Genesis 22:18** “and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

**Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15** “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

When Abraham was promised that the coming King, the Messiah, the Savior promised to Adam and Eve was going to be born through his family line, it must have been an incredibly humbling yet exciting promise. As a parent, I wonder how much pressure he felt to really instill his faith in God in his son Isaac. And as he came to realize that it may be a few generations before this promise came to fruition, it must have required a lot of patience and trust. Trust that the God that he has been worshiping is true to His word and trust that the seeds of faith that he was planting in his own family would be tended and cared for By God Himself through the generations.

Of course, as we know, our God is true to His Word, and the promise that He made Abraham was fulfilled in the coming of the long-awaited Jesus. May we too have patience and trust beyond ourselves. Trust and patience that God is true to His word and promises in our life even when it feels that He’s forgotten. So now as we are given the promise of the return of our long-awaited King, we can have trust and patience as we declare “Come, Lord Jesus!” knowing that our God has not forgotten us.

### PRAY:

*Spirit, Your patience means our salvation. Your perfect timing means we live new lives, new love, new grace. Thank You for Your faithfulness across generations, across time and space. Help me to believe and grow in faith that You have done, are doing, and will do all You have promised. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What makes trusting God difficult? In those moments, what gives you confidence to believe?

# Week 2: Reflecting

## Day 5: Lamb of God

By Pastor Chad Wright

### READ:

**Scripture: Acts 8:34–35 (ESV) - And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.**

Has anyone ever asked you to explain something in Scripture? If so, how do you think you did? If not, do you feel comfortable enough with Scripture to be able to explain it? When I was a college junior, I spent my spring break with three other colleagues helping a mission church in Brandon, Florida. It was a fun experience, canvassing the neighborhoods and inviting people to come visit the church. There were a few people that asked questions. I also had one interaction with a Jehovah’s Witness who brought out her version of the Bible. Through training at college about world religions, I had recently studied about their beliefs and their Bible, so I was able to raise questions about her salvation and point to her passages that showed Jesus was God and Man. Two hours had passed and it didn’t even seem that long.

I imagine it must have been similar for Philip. The Holy Spirit told him to run alongside the chariot of an Ethiopian, a eunuch who served as a court official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, most likely one of the three big festivals. Now he was returning to Ethiopia, seated in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked if the man understood what he was reading and was invited into the chariot. Philip started with the Scripture about the Lamb of God and told him the good news about Jesus. Imagine celebrating the Passover and eating the Passover lamb. In truth, it is one of the most powerful prophetic types which God used in the religious life of His people. A lamb without blemish or defect dying for the children of Israel. Saved by it’s blood on the doorposts from the angel of death which afflicted the Egyptians. It’s death led to their freedom. Jesus came as fulfillment, declared by John the Baptizer who proclaimed about Jesus: “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). This Lamb of God delivered us from our sins, death, hell, and the power of our enemy, Satan. We are free.

### PRAY:

*O Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on me. Forgive my sins and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to love reading Your Word and seeing the many ways You reveal Yourself to me. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How does the profound sacrifice of Jesus become something we take for granted? How does reflecting on the Lamb renew your awe for Him?

# Week 2: Reflecting

## Day 6: Prophets

By Miriam Hoerner

### READ:

Have you ever been told a prediction of something in the future that was so detailed and good that you really hoped it would come true? In the Old Testament, Isaiah and other prophets made many prophecies about the coming Messiah. Prophecies about how Jesus would come into the world and how He would interact with the world once He was here. Whenever we talk about prophecies, we really have to talk about two verses: the prophecy itself and the fulfillment of that prophecy. Today we are looking at the prophecy in Isaiah 41:1-4 and the fulfillment of it in Matthew 12:18-21.

Isaiah tells us about a God who is eternal, present with the first generations all the way until the last generations. Isaiah also tells us about a Messiah who will change the lives of individuals and nations. When we move to the Matthew account, we see Jesus mend broken lives and hearts. At the end of the Matthew verses, he reminds us that the nations will put their hope in the name of Jesus. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy about Him in the Old Testament and He keeps all of His promises. Our hope is in Jesus because He keeps His promises, He mends our brokenness, and He is with us always.

### PRAY:

*Holy Spirit, You spoke through prophets to call Your people return to You, and to continue onward in faith. You spoke through Jesus during His ministry during His time here. Now You speak to us through Your Word, through baptism, and through communion. Help us to receive Your Word, to refocus our eyes and hearts on the One who is our Refuge and Strength. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How difficult is it to know that God knows the future, but you don't? How does knowing that God holds the future *and* speaks to you now encourage you in faith?

# Week 2: Reflecting

Day 7: Gospel  
by Brie Termini

## READ:

### Isaiah 53:12

The 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah lists some of the things Jesus endured during His time on earth. Despised, rejected, stricken, and afflicted are just a handful of the descriptive words used. We can commiserate, can't we? We all know what it feels like to be disliked. We've all been the pariah in someone's story. We've all been on the outs. But...have we all dealt with that pain the way Jesus does?

The very last line of this verse is where our lesson lies. Jesus could have been angry and hateful. In His very heart, He could have separated Himself from those who hurt Him. He could have looked at those that perpetrated the nastiness as 'other'...as 'them'...as 'the enemy'. But He was and is the Perfect One, and He chose love. He "made intercession for the transgressors". He prayed for those who hurt Him. Mind. Blown.

We are in the middle of a very painful time of history. Dark, heavy lines have been drawn in the sand that separate us on SO many issues. WHAT IF we chose to deal with 'them' like Jesus did? WHAT IF praying for those that persecute us, or at the very least hatefully disagree with us, could reveal to us a deeper view of God's grace? WHAT IF those prayers could put a mirror in front of our own actions so we could see how we are inevitably persecuting others as well? The Perfect One chose love...and we are called to live like Him. Prayers, brothers and sisters, that choosing love becomes second nature to us. And soon.

## PRAY:

*Jesus, when You could have chosen distance and damnation for us, You chose grace, faith, hope, and love. Work in my heart and mind to refocus them on You, so that these gifts get to everyone who needs them.*

## LIVE:

The word gospel literally means "good news." Sometimes the most difficult thing is believing this gospel of Jesus is for you. How do Isaiah's words give you confidence to believe all Jesus did *is* for you?

# Week 3: Restoring

## Day 1: Miracles & Creation

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**Genesis 3:8** - Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

**Matthew 14:27, 32** - Immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be courageous; it is I. Stop being afraid”...And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

I remember some of my car accidents. I don't have many, but the ones I remember always seem to follow a similar pattern. For a moment, I didn't know what to do. Words came to me from experience and advice: “make sure the other person is ok. If it's safe, check the damage. Call the police. Do what you can to keep yourself and others safe.” Well, something like that. Other words also rolled through my head and off my tongue that were not so wise or calm - some confusing, some condemning. I was blessed to have someone in my life to make sure I was okay. Sometimes the damage is repairable. Sometimes it's a total loss.

Creation crashes confounding us. For a moment, we don't know what to do. Sin. Death. Disease. Distancing. Bam! Then all kinds of words come - some accusing, some condemning. We see it in Genesis 3. We see it in Matthew 14. We see it in our own lives. Not everyone is aware of someone in their life to make sure they are ok. With sin, some of the symptoms or “repairable”, but it's always a total loss.

Jesus comes to restore what we've broken. In Jesus, we see God undoing the damage we've done. Jesus confronts sin, death, disease. He closes the distance we've created to bring an end to the voices that condemn, to stop the sin that brings loss, to shout life over the death that stings so deep. We still experience these things, but Jesus ends their power over us. His power, His life, His grace and faith *is* at work in us. To a world and a people lost in the windstorm, Jesus comes to us and says, “*Be courageous; it's me. Stop being afraid*”, and give us the faith to believe.

### PRAY:

*Lord God, when we rightly hid in fear and shame for what we have done, You pursued us with truth and forgiveness. As we continue to encounter brokenness, bring the truth back to our minds, return it to our hearts so that we believe, receive Your grace, and begin again in Your power. As You show Your power over Your creation, bring peace to our lives as we wait for You to make all things new. Amen.*

### LIVE:

True or false: Jesus' command over creation helps you sleep better at night. How often is this true? How often is this false?

# Week 3: Restoring

## Day 2: Spiritual Authority

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**Matthew 15:28 - Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly."**

Authority can be tricky. A mission or assignment can give you power and focus. You are given authority by someone to go and do a certain thing. Many things can be done to finish the mission, and sometimes it's difficult to stick strictly to the authority the mission gives you. There are always other things, good and bad, you want to do along the way. Example: buy a washing machine. You have power to get it done, but do you have the power to buy the equipment to get it done? If you *think* you do, what else could you buy while you're at it? Somehow it gets to the point where you come home with a *kegerator* and no washing machine. Authority can be tricky.

Jesus sticks to His mission. The Messiah's Mission, the prophecy proclaimed, was from people God sent to His chosen people Israel, for God's Chosen people Israel. Yet there are always those outside God's chosen people who receive and believe in God and what He reveals. The woman understands and stays within the metaphor Jesus uses: she recognizes she is not one of God's chosen people Israel. Through faith alone, she also recognizes how abundant and good God is. She knows enough about Jesus to call him, "Lord...Son of David." These are core titles for Jesus' identity. However, it's not the depth of her knowledge that moves Jesus, or her argumentation skills. It is her faith alone, the same way God somehow provides faith to the magi and Roman Centurion, that allows her to cling and plead to the One so focused on His mission. He encourages that humble, relentless, courageous faith that is not distracted by all the reasons why she shouldn't. In Jesus, she sees every reason why she should seek His help. Yes, Jesus was sent directly for the lost ones of Israel. This woman's faith reveals what that means for the rest of the world: Jesus has all the Spiritual Authority He needs for His mission, and for you.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, Your grace gives us a place and a family to whom we belong. By the faith You work in us, continue to refocus and restore Your authority over everything spiritual and otherwise at work in our life. For You live, Your reign, You make all things new. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What shocks you about Jesus' words to the woman in this event? What encourages you?

# Week 3: Restoring

## Day 3: Healing

by Cyndi Carpenter

### READ:

**Mark 2:9-10** “Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

About 18 years ago when my husband Tim and I first decided to start trying to start our own family, I didn't realize what a struggle it would be. After trying for three years and no results we started feeling hopeless and that maybe God didn't intend for us to be parents. In a bible study about how God blessed Sarah and Abraham with a son, the Spirit encouraged me to not lose hope or doubt Him.

Doors started opening: doctor referrals, a fertility specialist, and a consult explaining that this was not a hopeless case and she was determined to help me. After a little more than a year, many tests and procedures, still no pregnancy. The fertility doctor said she was not giving up and we shouldn't either. This was what I had to do, and part of God's way of leading me to healing. Others believed this as well: I was praying, as was my family. Just before surgery began, my doctor bowed her head and prayed. In that moment I heard God speak to me and said, “I am here with you; you will be healed”. On my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, I received a call from the doctor's office that I was pregnant. What a birthday gift!

It was a miracle. The paralytic and his friends trusted the One who forgives, hears prayers, and heals. Jesus forgave my sin. I trusted the One who forgave my sin would hear my prayers and heal my body. I was forgiven and healed. Working through doctors and surgery and faith, Jesus was always with me, talking to me and leading me. Even though my faith was shaky at times, His love and promises never failed me. He will never fail any of us as He leads us to trust Him and His Word. As He draws us closer, He continues to speak to us through His Word. We need Him to refocus our hearts and minds. Looking back at this now with my son, 13 years old, it makes me smile. He is my miracle baby. When trials come up, I am frequently taken back to this time and reminded of God's presence, forgiveness, and healing, and my faith is quickly renewed. God is so amazing!

### PRAY:

*Heavenly Father, You are our Healer and Giver of life. Your love for us is so strong and*

*unconditional and You never turn away from us. Please forgive us when we doubt Your power, presence, and promises. Continue to draw us closer to You and Your Word so that our faith may grow stronger every day and that we may not fall into doubt or fear when we face sickness, hurt or any trials. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!*

## **LIVE:**

When God says “Yes” to our prayers, it's wonderful: miracles happen! When God says “no” to our prayers, sometimes it's difficult to accept. God *always* forgives by grace through faith. How does this affect your faith to receive God's yes's *and* no's?

# Week 3: Restoring

Day 4: Feeding  
by Bruce Volkert

## READ:

**Mark 6:42, 8:8a “And they all ate and were satisfied.”**

There are two accounts in Mark’s Gospel of Jesus feeding thousands of people through miracles. You do not need to convince me that these were miracles. How many of us have struggled with planning a meal for an unknown large group of guests? Will we have enough food or too little or too much? When will we find time to go shopping and how much will it cost? It takes a miracle for me to calmly plan a large meal. These are all non-issues for Jesus. He provided full meals in a moment’s notice for tremendously larger groups than any of us have ever entertained. And, in both cases there were baskets and baskets of leftovers. Now, that would cause us even more anxiety – what to do with all that leftover food? Consider that the disciples had no access to zip lock baggies or refrigeration. These extra baskets would make me a basket case!

Imagine this experience through the perspective of the disciples. They knew that Jesus had been provided with meager resources and yet the fish and loaves continued to be multiplied. Jesus used these seemingly impossible situations to demonstrate His authority. His motivation was to show compassion for those who were hungry. He offers the same to us today. With unparalleled compassion, Jesus showers us with His grace through His Word to meet our needs and remove our hunger.

## PRAY:

*Jesus, thank You for giving us more than we could ask or imagine. Thank You for giving Your plenty to those in need inside of Your family, and to those outside. Your love and power never fail. Help us to trust and believe that You are the God of the possible and impossible. Refocus our faith that what You provide does not distract us from the fact that You provide. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Jesus did this similar sign for a Jewish crowd and a crowd of Gentile-foreigners. What does that tell you about the love and reach of God?

# Week 3: Restoring

## Day 5: Raising the Dead

By Pastor Chad Wright

### READ:

**Scripture: Luke 7:14–16** Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited His people!”

Have you ever been in a car accident? Chances are you have. Have you ever been in a *train* collision? Thankfully, most passengers do not have to worry about it. Due to improved communication and tracking methods, riding the rails is actually safer than riding in an automobile. Still, there is a risk to ride a train. Train collisions still occur. Train collisions bring bad news. Even if no one dies, there are usually serious injuries and hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage.

There was one train collision in history that only had good news. It occurred near the town of Nain in Judea in the First Century. I know, you are thinking that there were no locomotives back then. Correct. However, there were trains; trains of people. Large gatherings moving together in a unified direction. One train was coming out of the town. It was a funeral procession following the body of a man. He had been the only son of his parents. His father had died and now his mother was the only one left. She accompanied his body.

The other train was following Jesus. It included his disciples and a great crowd. It overwhelmed the previous train. What happened when these two trains collided was miraculous! Jesus had compassion on the woman. He raised her son from the dead! The Author of Life displayed His authority over death. The response of the crowd was appropriate: “God has visited His people!” He later would face death Himself for us. The death we deserve, He bore on the cross, so that we might receive eternal life. He burst forth from the tomb victorious for us as evidence that He defeated death for us. One day, He will return to take a great train of believers, the living and resurrected to join Him in heaven. Let us remain faithful until that day!

### PRAY:

*Risen Lord, thank You for displaying Your power over death by your miracles of raising the dead and by Your own resurrection. Keep me and all who believe in You safe through Your grace and truth until the Last Day when You come to take us to be with You forever. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How does this event give a clue about what God does at baptisms?

# Week 3: Restoring

## Day 6: Miracles on the Cross

by Dave Sheldon

### READ:

**Matthew 27: 51-53** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

Amos writes in Amos 8:9 that God “will make the sun go down and darken the earth in broad daylight.” Certainly the miracles of Christ state clearly that He is the Christ, the Anointed One. Even as He hangs upon the cross, while his apostles and the enemies fall silent in the darkness, God proclaims through this darkness that the crucified one is the Son of God.

Three other miraculous events occurred signifying again that this man crucified was so much more. To honor our Lord, when He cried out: the curtain at the temple was torn in two, an earthquake occurred and the bodies of many believers were raised to life.

These miracles pointed directly to this crucifixion; causing a great stir which the Apostles and others used to begin the construction of his church. Because of the miracles, people were moved to say “yes” to the kingdom of God. Why, even a Roman centurion who had probably witnessed many executions shouted, “Truly this man was God’s Son.” The miracles changed his life as they do ours.

### PRAY:

“Many graves are opened; many people who have died  
Are now walking through the city. Truth will not be denied.  
The Voice that called out Lazarus from death has set them free.  
The signs are indisputable. ‘Look what He’s done FOR ME!’ “<sup>1</sup>  
Amen.

### LIVE:

What do these actual miracles that happened in real-time reveal to you about Jesus?

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<sup>1</sup> poem written by Giselle Russell, Daily Devotions

# Week 3: Restoring

Day 7: Resurrecting

by Becki Konkel

## READ:

**1 Corinthians 15:19-20** “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

What do you think of when you consider the word authority? Definitely an expert of some kind. Someone who knows everything about a subject. A local news station refers to themselves as the “Weather Authority” giving you confidence that when you tune into their station you will get the most accurate weather forecast in town. Or maybe you picture a court scene in a movie or TV show. An authority in forensics or DNA testing steps forth and gives testimony changing the course of the trial. One dictionary entry defines authority as the right to control, command, or determine. Being an authority takes learning, experience and hard work.

Tucked into the word authority is the word author. Whatever an author creates they know intimately, every nuance, every detail. In Genesis 1 we know that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the Author and Creator of everything, thus giving Him authority over all of creation. In Genesis 3 Adam (the first man) ushers in death yet he is wholly inadequate to be its authority. God, understanding the need for an authority over death sends Jesus to be that authority. 1 Corinthians 15:4 tells us that Jesus was dead. That He was buried and that He was raised on the third day. God has put all things in subjection under Jesus’ feet (1 Cor. 15:17), including death. Jesus may have not been the author of death but through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave He has become its authority and death is now subject to Him. Praise God the outcome is different, death no longer has control. Eternal life is available to all who believe and live for Jesus. Look to the cross!

## PRAY:

*Jesus, Author and Perfecter of all things, thank You for Your promise to hear when I pray. Thank You for using Your authority to end death’s hold on me, and breathe life into me day after day. As all that breathes declares Your praise, let my breath and voice join with them here today and with You in eternity. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Does knowing that God is *the* authority comfort you, make you nervous, or a bit of both? How does Jesus’ resurrection help you trust Him?

# Week 4: Renewing

Day 1: Love For The World

By Pastor Chris Troxel

## READ:

**John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

In 24 words, John writes what all of God’s Word reveals: God’s love and His purpose. This is not a love with strings attached; this is unbridled unfiltered best life-changing love for all of humanity, all of creation. It’s love that frees from systems, labels, and expectations. Love of this caliber is as dangerous as it is freeing. The freeing nature of God’s love is comforting, consoling, healing, invigorating, inspiring. What makes it dangerous is God putting it in the hands of people. Humans, like you and me, who will continue to struggle and fall from temptation into sin in this life. “Who will save me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

The Father sends the Son knowing we will still fall prey to sin, knowing some will reject His indescribable generous grace. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit don’t sugar-coat sin either. God calls it exactly what it is: sin. As He teaches us what to call sin, He teaches us about grace and its depth. Why would God do that? His love for you, for the world, so that sin is not the whole story, nor even the end. God’s love is for the world “so *that* no one would die but have eternal life.” Sin is a detail, a damning one, but a detail addressed by the Son on the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus reveals this to an expert teacher in these words who was having a hard time understanding them. This is what John recorded for believers to learn and believe so that they would be renewed by this love that is dangerous, potent, liberating, and *yours*.

## PRAY:

*Holy Spirit, touch hearts through Your word. Renew our minds, hearts, and bodies to be filled not with sin or despair, but with faith, hope, and love. Your grace, Your power, Your work is making us whole. Work through us to make others whole, to carry out Your mission in the world through us. Amen.*

## LIVE:

What are some ways we abuse or neglect the love of God? What does God say to that?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 2: Love for the least

by Jenny Jaroneski

### READ:

**Mark 1:40-42** A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

In today’s time, quarantine has become a hot button word. Isolation and separation is something new that we have experienced. In the Bible, quarantine was standard practice for those suffering from Leprosy. Leprosy was seen as a disease of the poor, the unclean and the sinful for disobeying the rules set forth in the Old Testament of the Bible. Lepers were considered the least of society and not permitted to come within six feet of another human. Sounds pretty familiar, right?

In a way, we are all lepers in that we are all sinners. The miraculous thing is that there is a cure! In Mark 1:40-42 a leper comes to Jesus begging to be healed and Jesus does so – reaching out and touching the man who should not be so close (based on social distancing guidelines). Jesus cared about the leper and wanted him to be free from his suffering.

Just like the leper was healed of his illness, there is healing for our sinfulness as well. When we plead for cleansing and forgiveness, Jesus does not shy away from us. He is willing! He comes forward and touches us. He heals us. He forgives us. We are the least. Jesus loves us and heals us just as He did the leper.

### PRAY:

*Lord, you are a loving and compassionate God. I am human. I am sinful. I am the least. Thank You for the gift of forgiveness through Your son, Jesus Christ. Help me to remember Your willing gift of healing. Help me to share Your love, compassion and forgiveness with others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

### LIVE:

How would the love of Jesus move you to break norms for the sake of another? Not proving a point, not to stick it to the man (who is that guy anyway?), only for the sake of another?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 3: Tax Collectors

By Bruce Volkert

### READ:

**Luke 5:30–32** 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Ah, the life of a New Testament era tax collector. Wealthy? Yes. Friends? Well, maybe only those superficial “friends” who enjoy hanging out with wealthy and despised folks. Tax collectors at the time grew their personal wealth by demanding more money than was actually due and putting the extra in their own pockets. Imagine the reaction if that happened to you at the cash register: “OK, you see here your total with tax included comes to \$152.57. Now, if you would just hand over an extra twenty bucks for ‘yours truly’ you can be on your way. Will that be cash or credit?” The clerk would be rather unpopular. In the same way, tax collectors are lumped into somewhat despicable groups when discussed in the Gospel accounts.

For example, Luke sets the scene for The Parable of the Lost Sheep in this way, “Now the tax collectors **and sinners** were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’”. Matthew (himself a tax collector) when reporting his own calling to become a disciple recorded that people asked followers of Jesus, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors **and sinners**?” But, Jesus DID offer mercy and forgiveness to these people. He met with them, ate with them and even called them to be His disciples. He offers the same to each of us. No sin is bigger than God’s eternal grace.

### PRAY:

*Lord, You seek out the ones forgotten by everyone else. Change my heart and my mind, refocus my eyes to see all the saints You know and love, and all the sinners You continue to seek. Thank you for seeking and saving me. Amen.*

### LIVE:

Have you ever felt forgotten? God never forgets you. How does knowing that give you hope and peace, especially when others fail?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 4: Adulterers

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**John 8:10–11 (ESV):** Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Have you ever heard a rowdy crowd silenced? In baseball, when the stands are filled, and the home team is rallying, a person could barely hear himself think. Forget about hearing your own voice. What would silence a crowd like that, fomenting for blood? A huge blunder by their team while the other team scores a power play.

The Pharisees and scribes brought a woman to be judged, but their real purpose was to stick Jesus on the horns of judgment. A lone woman, abandoned by the man who shares her guilt, abandoned any advocate, surrounded by men who wanted to use her to prove the fraud of yet another man. Here is how men and women have failed one another. What these guys never expected, what the woman never thought to hope for was forgiveness.

Forgiveness is what thwarts and changes everything. God’s law has her dead to rights. Her sinful neighbors have her dead to rights. Jesus has her dead to rights. The Law’s Author who had the Law used against Him uses the same Law to confront and expose sin in the crowd. They forgot about their own sin. They forgot about mercy. Jesus knows their sin, her sin, and yours. Jesus authored the Law *and* the Gospel. He gives the gospel here as only the One with authority can. He forgives. He liberates. He renews. He is faithful to this woman: as God, as a man, and as her neighbor. His forgiveness sets you free, too. His call gives *you* authority to forgive sins, too. You are not Jesus, but don’t forget what He’s done. Remember; bring the renewing power Jesus gives you to set someone else free, as God teaches you how to “go and sin no more.”

### PRAY:

*Redeemer, when my sins surround me, it is You who know my way. You call my sin exactly what it is, but You declare me forgiven. You call me Your child. You give me refuge. Guide me to show and tell others who You are as their refuge, Redeemer, the One who renews their life. Amen.*

### LIVE:

Where would you place yourself in this story? How often are we the ones who forget about mercy and grace? What helps you remember?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 5: Through the Eyes of a Child

By Donna Angott

### READ:

I can't say in words how special God's children are to me. After teaching and being in the ministry for over 37 years, I am still learning from all of God's children. As the saying goes, "Out of the mouth of babes." Here is my story and I hope and pray that you can learn from these children. It was the end of the school year. One of my students asked the question, "How do you get Jesus in your heart?"

Before I could speak, another child blurted out, "First you must believe the story about Jesus and that it is true and really happened." I shook my head and said, "Yes, this is true. You must believe in Jesus and what he says is true." Another child spoke up and said, "Remember how Mrs. Angott said that Jesus was born on Christmas Eve and how excited those angels were? They were singing "Gloria" to the shepherds." Another child screamed out, "Remember that big, bright star over the barn?" Now, I am overwhelmed with joy that the children are so excited. Then a precious little boy sitting in the back of the room said, "Remember that time when Mrs. Angott was reading that one book and she had tears in her eyes?" Right away, I said, "You noticed that? Yes, I was sad because the people were spitting on Jesus and making fun of him. Every time I read that book; it makes me very sad. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our.....". The kids yelled out "SINS". Soon another child explained that her favorite part was when Jesus surprised everyone and popped right out of that grave. These kids sure know how to tell a story and make me smile. "So", I said, "Let's get back to the question, "How do we get Jesus in our heart?" The child that asked the question said, "It is easy, just believe in Jesus and this will make your heart the happiest heart in town. That's how you get a Jesus heart." This story will always be tucked away in my own happy heart forever.

As Jesus said In **Mark 10 :14-16**, "**Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.**" He took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

### PRAY:

*Dear Jesus, help us to have faith like a child. It is so very simple and easy to believe and trust in you. Guide and protect us from every evil. Remind us that you are our true leader. If you are in our hearts, we have all we need. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How do children receive gifts? How does this image help us grasp how God gives us faith?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 6: Love for a Woman

By Pastor Chad Wright

### READ:

**Luke 13:16-17** “And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” As He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.

Jesus had a passion to be kind and caring toward people suffering around Him. In the background of the devotion text, the synagogue was a place for men to worship. There was a place off to the side for the women and children, but the two did not mix. This lady should not have even been in the same part of the synagogue with Jesus and the other men, but she went when Jesus saw her and called her. Why? Maybe she thought, "I have been ill for many years. This new rabbi is not like the others. He seems to care. The other people accuse me of having a sin or something that caused this condition. I have heard that Jesus does not accuse but heals. Blind men, a woman who was bleeding for years, so maybe He might heal me. I am going to give it a try." She very quietly walks over to the other side. Stays in the shadows. But Jesus sees her and says: "Woman, you are freed from your disability." He touched her and immediately she was made straight. Her response was to praise God!

Have you ever wondered why Jesus only healed a few people in the Bible? Why not everyone? Some have been turned off to religion wondering why after much prayer they are not healed. I have learned over the years that healing comes in many ways. For some, the healing is letting go of the hurt, the shame, or not accepting their situation; then the healing peace of Christ enters. The miracle of Jesus is that He heals broken and guilt-laden hearts for all who turn to Him. This new life is a relationship with Christ that daily allows us to accept and to be free and comfortable in our own skin. All of us at one point or another wish to be free from something. We pray, we beg, we try anything, but then reality sinks in. Jesus our Savior is with us. We pray for the strength to live each day with the peace, comfort and strength of Jesus Christ to lead the way! Healing comes in many forms, and it just might be the ability to live with the reality of life and then to be comfortable walking with Jesus.

### PRAY:

*Dear Lord, thank You for your care and compassion. Forgive my sins. Heal my diseases. If You decide to allow me to face health problems, remind me that I am not alone. You love me and are with me. Amen.*

### LIVE:

When have you placed “what you know” above a person God made, honoring what was written but dishonoring the person for whom it was written? How do we refocus?

# Week 4: Renewing

## Day 7: Loving His Disciples

By Pastor Chad Wright

### READ:

**John 15:13 (ESV)** - “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Would you risk your life for someone else? How far would you go? Would you risk it if it guaranteed someone else survived but almost certainly meant you would die? I read a story about a fire at a group home where a staff person had to think about it. He said, “I was put in an unusual situation recently, I was in a fire and I was responsible with my 4 teammates for 10 mentally and physically handicapped, wheelchair-bound clients. It was a hairy situation but we all got out safely, no injuries. It was close however. At one point my co-workers were counting off how many clients we had outside, there was a question that there was possibly one client left in the building. I went back, this time on my hands and knees. The place was Hell on Earth. It is interesting how one’s thinking slows and sharpens in these situations while checking rooms 1 and 2... I had about 5 seconds to make a decision to go further in or not... do I go for it? “It’s now or never how many do we have?” The answer came before my 5 seconds were up. All 10 clients were accounted for. Would I have run through fire to grab one of our severely handicapped clients? Yeah, I probably would have.”

What love! Have you ever thought about Jesus’ position on the night he was betrayed? He knew His 12 disciples would all desert him in His darkest moment. He knew Judas would take bribe money to betray him to an unscrupulous crowd who wanted to kill Jesus. Yet, he didn’t flinch. He didn’t walk away from it. Even after Peter denied him three times and the rooster crowed. Jesus remained resolute to the end. He did it to redeem those cowards. He did it to redeem you for all the times you turned against Jesus and cowardly chose some sin over Him. He did it to pay for the guilt you incurred before God by all your loveless thoughts, words and actions. He did it to free you from the slavery to sin, the power of the devil, and the penalty of death – physical and eternal. He truly is your greatest friend who laid down His life for you... only to take it up again. That is love. There is no greater love. He did it because he loves you. Live your life by loving Him and loving all the others around you whom Jesus has rescued.

### PRAY:

*Dear Jesus, how great is your love for me! You loved me even though I have often not loved You or my neighbor. Renew my heart with Your forgiveness. Help me to be faithful to You and loving toward all my neighbors, reflecting Your love in all I think, say, and do. Amen.*

### LIVE:

As people confirm their faith, we ask the question, “Are you willing to risk anything, even death, rather than turn away from Christ?” Are their things that command your fear more than death? How do they chip away or overwhelm your commitment? What role does God’s grace work in your commitment?

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 1: I am the Good Shepherd

By Pastor Chad Wright

### READ:

**John 10:14–16 “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”**

As a child, did your dad or mom ever entrust you with something important? I am not talking about the daily chores of cleaning your room, doing the dishes, or emptying the trash. I mean something important like watching your sibling(s) while they went out. Think about it: they trusted you with the life of your brother or sister. How did that make you feel? I can remember watching my little sister when she was a toddler and feeling bad when she broke a glass tray from the end table. I was not watching her closely enough. She sliced her hand and it seemed like the bleeding would never stop as I tended to the wound. I almost called an ambulance. I felt bad when mom asked me what had happened.

Jesus was entrusted with you and me and all believers. He reveals Himself through the many “I am” statements of John’s Gospel. But this one, “I am the good shepherd,” tells us a lot about Jesus as our Savior who watches over those entrusted to Him by our Heavenly Father. He watched over us so well that He bled for us and even died for us. In fact, He knows all of us by name and knows exactly what is going on in our lives. He calls us with His Word and Sacraments to be His own. He makes us one flock. He comes after us when we wander and guards us from the enemy who would steal, kill, and destroy us. He is in contrast to all false teachers. We recognize the false shepherds because they are not the true shepherd, the good shepherd. He knows us and by His grace we know Him.

Dr. Lenski in his commentary on the Gospel of John wrote, “In six brief months the actual death and the actual resurrection of the Good Shepherd, now foretold so clearly, will re-enforce every word they have heard. No; none of these words are mere rhetorical

embellishment; all of them reveal vital facts.”<sup>1</sup> Just as Jesus revealed Himself then to be the Good Shepherd, so He still reveals Himself today. Let us listen to His voice and follow Him!

## **PRAY:**

*Dear Jesus, thank You for being my Good Shepherd. Forgive me for all the times I have wandered. Keep me close to You and help me to know You better. Be with Your flock and keep us all safe. Help us to care for each other as members of one flock, until we are all safe in heaven. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

Jesus' care is sometimes different than how we would choose it. Does that challenge your faith, reinforce it, or both?

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<sup>1</sup> Lenski, R. C. H. 1961. The interpretation of St. John's Gospel. pp. 734–735. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 2: I Am the Living Water

By Dawn Harris

### READ:

**John 4:12-14** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

When we were given a list of choices for writing a devotion, I quickly found these verses and immediately asked to write on “Jesus as Living Water.” About thirteen years ago, my husband decided he no longer wanted to be married to me. It was the most devastating thing that had ever happened to me. I was embarrassed, hurt, and humiliated. Many of my friends did not know how to treat me and some did not know how to continue to maintain a friendship with a single mother of three children. It is a time in my life where I was often on the ground literally crying out to God. I wanted to know why He would allow this to happen to me. I had always tried to put God first and felt betrayed by Him.

Thankfully, God never gave up on me. Through the frustration and tears, I leaned into prayer and God’s Word. I realized that I had relied on other types of “water” for my happiness and future. I had tried to fill my vessel with so many things that I thought were godly, but were only for show and to make myself look good. The divorce brought me to my knees to really search out what God wanted for my life. Those terrible days brought me closer to God than I had ever been, and I remembered the promise of Jesus. He is the Living Water and I will never thirst as He fills me. I had wanted earthly things and earthly happiness. God had taken this devastating time in my life and helped me to refocus on heavenly things and the happiness I have through Christ. The happiness that will one day lead to the ultimate gift of everlasting joy in heaven.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, when I get wrapped up in the blessings and curses, refocus my soul on You. You bring waters of life, You restore my soul, You reveal that what I need for contentment is You. Thank You for revealing Your love for me. Continue to daily refocus my soul, and overflow this love from You through me to others. Amen.*

### LIVE:

“God never gave up on me.” Jesus never gave up on the Samaritan woman at the well, He never gives up on you. How does your soul need to be restored today? What is Jesus revealing to you to do just that?

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 3: I am the Bread of Life

By Allison Carr

### READ:

What's the best meal you have ever eaten in your life? You know the kind of meal that you just keep going back for more or the meal that you drive out of the way for because nothing at home can quite hit the same spot? Perhaps the meal that you just can't seem to put your fork down or fathom the thought of any of it going to waste. Whatever meal that is for you, I'm sure it's the epitome of satisfying. Now imagine for a second never being in want or need of anything ever again? Imagine the feeling of total satisfaction constantly!

As people of a world based on consumerism, that's definitely hard to fathom. We all have needs and wants. Grocery lists that seem a mile long, products we want to help simplify our lives or simply bring us joy and of course delicious food that just hits the spot! As ideal as that may sound, the reality is that's completely unattainable. As sinful people, we aren't very good at being satisfied. We have a tendency to always yearn for more, different, or what someone else has. And unfortunately, we live in a world that tries to sell us a life of attainable, complete satisfaction if we just had more.

As we continue to refocus our hearts and our minds, I am reminded that we all have a Jesus shaped hole in our hearts left by sin. From the time we were born, complete satisfaction was never attainable on our own and no matter how many things we try to fill that hole, it will remain empty without Jesus.

In **John 6:35** Jesus declares, **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty."** Jesus declares "I AM" to express the bountiful life we can have only through a relationship with Him. Bread has become synonymous with food. When I rack my brain of scriptures that specifically mention bread, I can come up with quite a few. I think of the unleavened bread of Passover, and the manna that rained down from heaven and sustained the Israelites over their 40 years of wandering. I also think of what Jesus did with five loaves of bread accompanying two fish and the bread He distributed to His disciples the night He was betrayed. But, Jesus isn't simply talking about the deliciousness of bread or physical hunger and thirst. Bread was a dietary staple, but Jesus is an eternal essential.

A person (myself included) could survive a long time on bread and water, but eventually, we would feel the itch of dissatisfaction. I could travel to the ends of the earth and have more money than I know what to do with, but without Jesus, I would always be searching for more. Jesus satisfies our hunger and thirst and bridged the gap bringing us back into a relationship with God. Jesus, and Jesus alone, can fill our hearts and bring us the true and eternal satisfaction of abundant life. So, get your fill of Him, devour His Word and cling to the cross.

## **PRAY:**

*God, You satisfy the desires of every living thing. Refocus me so that I find more than I could ever imagine in You, Your Word, Your people, Your body, Your blood. Use me to point others to the source of every good thing: You. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

What is the “daily bread” you crave today? How is it different from yesterday? How is God providing this to you? How can God use you to provide for someone else’s “daily bread?”

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 4: I am the True Vine

by Loren Sheppard

### READ:

**John 15:1-4 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.**

When I was a little girl, I had a few opportunities to visit my Great Uncle and Aunt on their farm. Their major source of income was their vineyard. I remember listening as my Uncle would explain to my Dad how he cared for his vineyards. So much care was given to his vines in order to produce the quality and quantity of fruit needed to sell to the winery. Part of the care of the vines is the pruning process. The Vine dresser, a person who prunes the vines, has to cut out the branches that will not produce good fruit. This gives the rest of the branches an opportunity to grow stronger and to produce the needed fruit.

Our Bible passage for today talks about Jesus as our vinedresser. We need to daily abide, be with Jesus, through prayer, and reading the Bible. We may face hard times as Jesus “prunes our branches” so that we can do the tasks He wants us to do. Today’s Bible passage encourages us to be with Jesus, daily repent, and focus on the forgiveness of our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we can bear the fruit that Jesus would want us to bear.

### PRAY:

*Dear Jesus, forgive us when we do not look to You as our vine. Continue to prepare us for Your work. In Jesus name. Amen*

### LIVE:

Hosea 14:8 God reveals that even our fruitfulness comes from Him. How does that connect with what Jesus speaks in John 15?

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 5: I am the Light of the World

by Mary K. Cardella

### READ:

**John 8:12 “...Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.’”**

#### The Power of Light

“Arise and shine!” I would often hear that morning greeting while growing up, accompanied by a loud knock on my bedroom door. If I didn’t get up, the next step would be the abrupt intrusion into my room, along with the room-darkening shades being thrown up, and a repeat of the phrase being “sung” into my dark, sleepy world. This time, as the room was transformed from dark to a bright, glowing light, I would hear, “Arise and shine...for the glory of the Lord is upon you.” At that young time of life, I didn’t realize my mother was quoting a part of Isaiah 60, but to this day, one of the first things I have to do upon waking is open the blinds all around the house to disperse the darkness and let the Lord’s sunlight into my home - and into my mind and heart.

The habit of allowing light into a room everyday reminds me of Jesus being the Light of the world. The Creator of the sun shines in our physical world so we can see His beauty and where we are going. When we take the time to learn about Him through His word, He shines in our heart so that we can dispel the darkness of this world and see our way to Heaven.

Sometimes we may be reluctant to let the light in - sin wants us to stay in the dark and shadows, but when in faith we welcome Jesus’s knock on the door, He will help us to arise and shine, and be powerfully transformed as we see our way more clearly each day with Him in the light of His word.

### PRAY:

*Holy Spirit, Light Divine,  
Shine upon this heart of mine;  
Chase the shades of night away,  
Turn the darkness into day.<sup>1</sup>  
Amen.*

### LIVE:

Psalm 119 says God’s Word is a light for our feet. What does God help you see today?

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<sup>1</sup> Lutheran service book #496

# Week 5: Revealing

Day 6: I Am the Door

By Bruce Volkert

## READ:

**John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.**

I like going outdoors! It is much safer than going out windows. As far as I know, Jesus did not share a lot of puns with those who followed him. Well, at least it is not recorded in the New Testament. However, He did speak often in parables. Parables are anecdotes; earthly stories with Heavenly meanings. Jesus is a master teacher. He used these stories to help us to understand rather complex messages he wanted to convey.

Take a moment to read the first half of John chapter 10. Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd and we as the sheep. In this parable he says “I am the door; whoever enters through Me will be saved.” Jesus IS our way to the Father. He IS the way to receive love and forgiveness. We read in Acts 4, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Jesus came to earth to be Our Good Shepherd. He offers salvation to us as a free gift. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me”.

## PRAY:

*Jesus, give us the faith to open the door, to know You, believe, and follow where You lead. Forgive us when we keep the door closed or ignore You knocking. Refocus our ears on what You reveal when You speak. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Which parable do you connect with most right now, Jesus being a shepherd, door, or the way? What about that imagery helps you understand Jesus in a different way?

# Week 5: Revealing

## Day 7: I am the resurrection

By John Lucas

### READ:

A funeral for a believer in Jesus brings out a full range of emotions. Naturally, people grieve and feel pain at the loss of a loved one. Jesus Himself wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). At the same time, these funerals bring out the greatest of joy: that believer has left this valley of sorrow and is spending eternity with Jesus in heaven!

In fact, several verses before Jesus wept provide that joy for Christians. Jesus tells Martha, the sister of Lazarus some of the most important words in the Bible: **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25).** The fear of death is part of our sinful human nature, but Jesus promises that death is not the end. We will be with Jesus forever.

Sadness is OK. When a loved one passes away, we cry and weep. However, focusing on those words of Jesus, we can have the joy and comfort that comes with faith. I pray that you repeat the words of Martha to Jesus in verse 27: **“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”**

### PRAY:

*Jesus, Your words speak life into humanity. Your life reveals the heart of the Father. Your death and resurrection bring new life and freedom. Give us the faith to hear, receive, and live in this faith and all You bring to us through it. Amen.*

### LIVE:

Jesus' resurrection means one day you too will rise. What does it mean for you right now?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 1: He really does care

By Pastor Justin Krupsky

### READ:

It is true: people don't care about what you know till they know how much you care. All too often when life is hard we do not think God cares. However, what we do know as we focus on Jesus is that He does care. He really cares. So, what does He know? In the day of Jesus people thought they knew. They thought they had learned everything. Little did they know He was here to reform what they thought they knew. He was here not just to fulfill the promise, not just to show us that Heaven was for real in His miracles, not just to care for those who were not being cared for, not just to show us the Father, but He also came to teach. He came to reform our way of thinking with the truth.

In **Luke 15** He taught. He taught about a lost coin, a lost sheep, and 2 lost sons. He taught about the reckless love of the one who lost their coin, the one whose sheep had gone missing, and the one whose sons needed love. I love how He describes the father's response to his youngest son as he returns home in verse **20**, **"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."**

Our teacher Jesus in this great parable is describing the love of our Heavenly Father. Do we understand this? When we give into temptation and sin, our Heavenly Father never gives up on us. What we know is that He quite literally ran to us in the person of Jesus. "For God so loved the world (that is you and me) that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but would have everlasting life." Today I pray that we receive the embrace of our Father. Bring it in for the real thing today. Be loved. Jesus reformed our image of the Father 2,000 years ago. Let's continue to refocus on the Teacher of truth.

### PRAY:

*Father in Heaven, thank You for running to us in Jesus. Thank you for showing Your care in Jesus. Today, we confess that we all too often run away in our sin, but thank You for never turning your back on us. May we receive your embrace. Teach us this week great teacher. Reform our thinking. Amen.*

### LIVE:

Right now, for some, hugging could be "dangerous". Even when we have to socially distance, what does the Father's embrace tell you?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 2: Beatitudes

by Carla Hudgens

### READ:

**Matthew 5:1-12** “Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

**And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:**

**‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’”**

The beautiful words of the Beatitudes are part of a sermon that Jesus gave to His disciples on the Mount. These Beatitudes list seven characteristics that make up the Christian character. The eighth Beatitude deals with the reaction of the world to these traits.

“Blessed” in the Greek means “Oh, how happy!” Go back and read the passage again substituting “Oh, how happy” for the word blessed. It really puts into perspective what Jesus is trying to tell His disciples and US today. “Oh, be happy are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, the hungry...etc”. The Sermon on the Mount was given close to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and He KNEW what He and His disciples were in for – the preaching, the healing, the great crowds believing His words and then the persecution, the hate, the unbelievers. Jesus KNEW all this.

Jesus knows about TODAY, too. He sees the covid disaster and uncertainty, the unemployment, the closing of businesses, the racial tension, the political nonsense. His words are as valid today as when His disciples first heard them. That’s why we MUST trust Him – He

is in control. Because we're His children, our position in His kingdom is secure. We need to remember that we're His ambassadors on earth, and we represent Christ. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Wouldn't it be something if a random person asked you why you were so happy and you could reply "Let me explain it this way....'Oh, how happy are the poor in spirit...'"

## **PRAY:**

*Spirit, You take how we understand the world and turn it on its head. You focus on the ones we're encouraged to overlook. Reform how we see Your world and those in it. Forgive us for following what seems to be right instead of following Your Word. Refocus our hearts on grace, mercy, and faith for the sake of Your church, Your world, and our neighbors. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

For those who would have every reason to give up, to lose heart and hope, Jesus calls them blessed. How does that happen?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 3: Prayer

by Jane Strybis

### READ:

**Luke 11:1-3** Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread...’”

Sometimes, through life’s challenges and heartaches, I find myself asking what exactly is prayer. The answer comes quickly and clearly when I open my heart and hear the Holy Spirit say to me that prayer is simply talking directly and honestly with Him.

This is such an important tool that we have been given and here are some thoughts that are shared in our New Member Class about prayer:

- Prayer is simply talking to God. Prayer is a gift given to us by God and He loves to hear from us. Prayer is what gives us a healthy relationship with Him and does not have to include fancy words or phrases. Just be honest and heartfelt whenever we pray.
- Prayer is our gift from God. We are invited to use prayer often in order to talk with Him to build our trust and our relationship with Him. We can talk with Him in a simple conversation just like we might have with a friend. Always remember that God answers our prayers and is glad when we take the time to share our life with Him.

Remember to pray – this is the best action we can take about anything that is happening in our lives. God hears us! What a wonderful gift we have been given so use it.

### PRAY:

*Heavenly Father, what a tremendous privilege You have given Your children to pray. Give us the confidence that You will always hear and answer our prayers for Jesus’ sake. Amen.*

### LIVE:

The One who holds all things in His hand does not lose track of you. How does this inform or reform your thoughts on what God is capable of doing? How does that impact how you pray?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 4: Parable of the Sower

By Bruce Volkert

### READ:

**Matthew 13:3 And [Jesus] told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow...”**

Today we reflect on the Parable of the Sower in Matthew chapter 13. You can also read this parable in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Few of us define ourselves as “sowers”. However, many of us do some amount of sowing – whether gardening, tending to a lawn or even actively involved in agriculture. We can agree that growing weeds is quite simple. You don’t have to work at it. Do nothing and the weeds will grow and even thrive. Weeds can grow in impossible settings and can flourish even when we do battle against them. Apply mulch, squirt them with poison, or pluck them and the weeds can still return. Weeds pop up in places in which we don’t care as well as taking residence in and among our beautiful flowers.

The seed of faith is freely available. The Parable of the Sower sheds light on some ways that interfere with this seed taking root. A main culprit is the weeds around us. The “cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke” the seed that has been planted. It is tempting to stay in the weeds and not experience the fullness of God’s grace. However, the weeds can be treated. Refocusing on God’s Word, daily prayer and devotion, avoiding “the cares of the world” all prevent weeds from taking hold. Spending time with Jesus defeats the weeds.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, send us Your Spirit to refocus our faith from the weeds in our lives. When our faith gets choked out, restore it. Thank You for the grace to begin and continue with You each day by faith. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What are some weeds threatening to go after your faith? How can you do a little “gardening” to nurture your faith?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 5: Love of Your Neighbor

By Lisa Troxel

### READ:

**Luke 10:36–37** “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

We have been blessed with some amazing neighbors in our many moves. We have lived near folks that cleared snow for us, cared for our pets and kids, shared their tools or treats with us. We have also been able to bless our neighbors with similar things. When looking to buy a house, people have asked, “How is the neighborhood?”

But this is just looking directly at our physical neighbors~ people that live near us. The point that Jesus was making was that our neighbors are not limited to the people that live near and live life with us. Anyone can be our neighbor. A neighbor is someone who looks like us and acts and thinks like us AND someone that looks different from us and acts and thinks differently. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors - all our neighbors. To show his love, kindness, forgiveness and grace to all neighbors regardless of where we live, how similar or different we are. We were all created in his image and likeness, yet that image has been corrupted by sin. Jesus also gives us the best example of how this should look: how He loves us unconditionally, even when we don't deserve it.

To be a good neighbor is to show love like Jesus, without looking for anything in return, even when our neighbors might not deserve it. Loving our neighbors in this way is a great way to introduce someone to Jesus, too. Building a relationship with someone, they see that there is perhaps something different about the way you show and share love with others.

### PRAY:

*Lord God, Thank You for Your grace and patience to love us when we forget or intentionally show the opposite of love to our neighbor. Reform our habits, our thinking, our schedules to love especially when it is inconvenient. Help us to love people well, for when we serve them, we serve and worship You. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What makes it difficult or awkward to be a neighbor? What makes it easy?

# Week 6: Reforming

## Day 6: Sermon on the Mount

By John Lucas

### READ:

**Matthew 5:43–44** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Why doesn't God just talk directly to me? Maybe this is a question you've asked when you read sections of the Old Testament where God speaks directly to His prophets or kings, or in the New Testament when Jesus speaks during His ministry. We desperately want to hear God, and the good news is that God *does* speak directly to us in His Word.

Focus on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. I don't think it's an accident that Jesus says over and over “I say to you.” Jesus is speaking to all people, not just the ones gathered on the mountain 2,000 years ago. In fact, what Jesus is saying to us covers our relationship with others and our relationship with God.

What He says is not always easy to process. We naturally want to be anxious. How can we not be during a pandemic and a divisive time in our country? We naturally want to retaliate, or hate our enemies. But over and over Jesus says “You have heard...but I say to you.” So focusing on Jesus' words, we see that living a Christian life is not always easy. It often goes against what we want. However, by the faith that we have in Jesus through the Holy Spirit, we can do these things and follow what God commands. God speaks to you; just open up His Word.

### PRAY:

*Father, when I long to hear Your voice, help me to trust the words You've already spoken, the words to which Your Spirit draws me. Thank You for faithfulness, forgiveness, and founding our faith which reforms my faith, hope, and love to return to You. Guide me to grow in what You speak to me through Your Word. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How does Jesus' authoritative reading of the Law change how you consider it? How does that impact your view of grace?

# Week 6: Reforming

Day 7: Going Home  
By Sheri Daniell

## READ:

**John 14:1-4** “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Sometimes heaven is expected, yet other times it is a surprise. One sure promise from John 14:1-4 is that when it is time for us to leave this world, Jesus will be ready for us. He promised to go and prepare a room for each believer. Sometimes on this side of heaven’s gate it is hard to believe that it is time. Some of us have watched an illness take our loved ones away. Others of us did not get a chance to say “Goodbye.”

What gets us through these difficult times is the promise of knowing that our great God has a place ready for us, and for our loved ones. That is how we can get through the sorrow on this side of heaven’s gate. I’m reminded of a favorite childhood song, “Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. I want to see my Savior’s face. Heaven is a wonderful place. I want to go there.” Some of our darkest times on this side of eternity are saved by the light promised on the other side of eternity. When it is time to go home, rest assured. Your room will be ready.

## PRAY:

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your reassuring promise that You are preparing a room for each of us. Until our rooms are ready, please help us spread Your word to all people. May they also know that You are preparing a room for them, as well. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.*

## LIVE:

What kind of confidence and courage does God give you by giving you certainty that you will be with Him?

# Week 7: Redeeming

Day 1: Palm Sunday

By Pastor Chris Troxel

## READ:

**John 12:16** At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Maybe victory is misunderstood. Victory happens after, right? That's when the celebration begins, *after* the victory. Except with Jesus. Jesus does it differently. He celebrates *before* the victory. Here's why we don't do that: we don't know who's going to win until the contest/battle/war has been won by someone. Here's why Jesus does it: He knows who's going to win.

Jesus redeems our idea of victory. All too often we look for victory *only* from our efforts, strength, logic, and energy, or maybe some mix of us plus God. Jesus shifts that. He reminds His disciples of what they have been missing all along. With God, all things are possible. With Jesus, it is possible to celebrate with a victorious king *before* His battle. With Jesus, if we can celebrate victory now, we will certainly also celebrate at the end of all things. It's not too early. Jesus has the victory. He gives it to you. Even with all the reasons to be weighed down, lift up your hearts. Lift up your heads. Lift up your hands. Jesus comes to bring you victory. Believe, rejoice. Celebrate.

## PRAY:

*Jesus, You alone give us the victory. In Your redeeming victory and deep grace, You make a way for us to celebrate before the end. Finish the work You began us, as we celebrate here in time, and there with You at the end of all things. Amen.*

## LIVE:

What victory do you need to see today? How does Jesus' victory over sin and death give you what you need right now?

# Week 7: Redeeming

Day 2: Just Imagine

By Paula Myers

## READ:

**John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Imagine being in the upper room with Jesus celebrating the Passover. Despite the chaos ensuing outside in the city, you are with your closest friends and Jesus. After the meal, Jesus stands up and you are watching Him as He walks across the room, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash the disciples feet. It does not say specifically that Jesus knelt to perform this selfless act, but it would have been difficult without kneeling. Just imagine sitting as Jesus kneels, takes your foot in His hand and begins to wash your feet while looking into your eyes.

You later listen as Jesus gives you a new commandment to love one another. Reread the verses above. We are to love one another just as Jesus loves us. We are His witnesses to the world. What an inspiration. We are the vessel for others to see and feel the love of Jesus. What better way for others to see and feel our Savior's love than to serve. We may not have the opportunity to kneel and wash someone's feet, but there are plenty of opportunities to love and serve others. So, let us change the world, let's show them Jesus.

## PRAY:

*Spirit, inspire us to believe. Inspire us to follow, to love deeply and sacrificially. Grant us the grace we need to daily be made new, to move forward in the life and love we receive through faith. Stir our souls to serve each other and the other people not yet a part of Your family. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Washing feet is gross and a bit awkward, but it serves a purpose: clean feet. Jesus did it to demonstrate something special and potent to those closest to Him. Most of the things our neighbors need are somewhat simple. Is there someone you know whose need you can meet, even if it might be a little unconventional?

# Week 7: Redeeming

## Day 3: Lord's Supper

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**1 Corinthians 11:24–25 [Jesus] said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

Stories are powerful. My great uncle shared with me once his story of becoming a pilot of a fighter-bomber during the Korean War. The way he shared with me about joining up and the missions he flew gave me a glimpse of a part of his life few people access. Imagine my devastation and my family's when I discovered my notes and work for an assignment based on those conversations were all lost. Sometimes when we lose that which is precious, there is no restoration.

Now consider the reading from 1 Corinthians 11. When Paul wrote this, it had already been nearly 20 years since Jesus spoke these words. Don't miss this: see how important the first Church held 1) the words of Jesus and 2) communion in particular. Paul writes these words to teach and correct. He passes on the words given to him by those who encountered firsthand, the apostles. Imagine the depth and emotion those eleven guys would have as they brought Paul into the experience. This is going through Paul's head as explains why this meal is far more significant than the Corinthians are treating it. In their rush to outdo one another, they lost the reason why Jesus was calling them together in the first place.

Do we lose focus on what Jesus is up to in communion? What mixture of pride and doubt and darkness distracts and dilutes the gift God brings? That is the best news about communion, grace, and Jesus. Jesus redeems communion for you. Jesus redeems all your acts of faith in which you fumble, falter, and fail. Jesus' right-ness continues to be yours because of grace through faith. The Spirit draws your eyes and faith back to the clarity of who God is and what He does for you in the person of Jesus. There may not be ways to recapture lost stories, but God has ways of restoring his lost, distracted people. Jesus redeems you, and his redemption continues to work to refocus your heart and faith. So the next time you come to the table, and you feel your

devastation more than anything else, Jesus is present redeeming that moment, redeeming communion, redeeming you.

## **PRAY:**

*Jesus, thank You for the grace to begin again and again and again. Thank you for entrusting me with Your very self, even when I fall. Give me the awareness to give that grace to others who so desperately need it. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

Jesus' last meal on earth was with His closest friends who still did not grasp what was about to happen. He didn't spend more time on lectures, He gave them what they needed: more of Himself. Who do you know, that may not get everything or anything about Jesus, but needs more of Him all the same?

# Week 7: Redeeming

## Day 4: Denied, Betrayed, Abandoned

By Wendy Hawkins

### READ:

**Mark 14:44, 50, 72** Now the betrayer, Judas, had given them a sign...they all left him and fled... and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And Peter broke down and wept.

Have you ever been denied something? I think that we can respond with a yes to that question. Maybe it's been an insurance claim, or credit, or that password that just won't work. In this Bible reading, Peter denied Jesus, not just once but three times.

Have you ever felt betrayed? Although this is not a word that is often used today, the feelings of betrayal can be felt deeply when a close friend or relative has shared our secrets or lied about us. Judas, one of the 12 disciples, devised a plan and betrayed Jesus.

Have you ever felt abandoned? I think that many of us can admit to moments or situations in which we have, if nothing less, have felt completely alone with no support. In this Bible reading, Jesus was abandoned by those who were closest to Him, 2 of the 12 disciples, and then eventually all of them.

There are many difficult situations that we encounter in our lives, sometimes on a daily basis. Friends, and family members can let us down. We can even feel abandoned by God when we are suffering or our prayers seem to go unanswered. Remember - Jesus has gone through it all. He understands your situation and your feelings. And God does not abandon you. Turn to Him in prayer and know that your answer will be what He knows is best for you.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, You know. Heal my hurts. Grant my faith to believe, especially when facing my doubts. When it all overwhelms me, stir me to remember that You allowed darkness to overwhelm You, too. Help me to trust that You did that for me, so that I will never be alone. You are with me, even in the dark. Shine Your light, O Lord. Amen.*

### LIVE:

One of the first and most difficult steps can be calling the pain what it is. Guilt, shame, betrayal, abandonment, hate, oppression, anxiety. What pain seems swell more than the others? How does knowing a glimpse of what Jesus faced for you give you hope in your suffering?

# Week 7: Redeeming

## Day 5: Crucifixion

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**Mark 15:24, 34, 39** And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take...And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”...And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Sometimes we're the soldiers. Sometimes we're the centurion. I love food. I love to eat to the extent that I have missed social and biological cues as to when to stop. I'm just there, getting as much as I can in the moment. Sometimes I'm exactly like one of the soldiers: unaware of the significance of the moment, completely distracted and invested in clutching as much as the moment affords, with no regard for the consequences.

Sometimes I'm all too aware of the tragedy I see before me. In working with families whose loved ones have died, I walk with them as best I can, but I cannot change what has happened. Death happened. I have faith or I don't, I utter words I may or may not understand, but they are no less true: Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Jesus is the One on the cross. He is the One who died in my place. His sacrifice means my failures no longer condemn me before God. In His presence, I'm simply His son, saved by the True Son. What was intended and used as the most brutal punishment, Jesus took for me. Because He did, His love and goodness transform a symbol of death and shame to a sacred reminder and daily call. Because of the cross and faith, no matter who I am, Jesus calls me back to God's family and calls me onward to follow him to love other soldiers and centurions.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, in Your death, in redeeming us You also redeemed the cross. It is now a permanent witness of the depth of Your love, and symbol of what our life becomes in You. Teach us how to die to ourselves, to the sin that so easily entangles, and run with You, the One who conquered sin and death with love and life. Show us how to live this life and love the ones who need Your light and Your peace. Amen.*

### LIVE:

How does the cross at the same time teach you about Jesus and about your new life in Him?

# Week 7: Redeeming

## Day 6: He Descended into Hell

By Miriam Hoerner

### **READ:**

**1 Peter 3:18-19 Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison...”**

About a year ago I bought several vouchers for Krispy Kreme donuts from a school fundraiser. In order to redeem a voucher I simply go to a Krispy Kreme store, hand them the voucher, and leave with a dozen donuts. The voucher confirms to the store that the donuts have already been purchased.

Eternal life for all people is much different than a dozen donuts. 1 Peter 3:18-20 tells us about Jesus’s descent into Hell after His death on Good Friday. As Jesus gave His perfect life on the cross, He paid for our debt. The blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross was redemption for our souls. After His death, Jesus went down into Hell to proclaim to the devil and all souls imprisoned in Hell that He had won. Jesus was and is victorious over death and the devil. Without the payment of His perfect life, we would have no hope. 1 Peter also tells us that the righteous was given for the unrighteous so that He might bring us to God. Our hope and our victory is in Christ alone.

### **PRAY:**

Lord, Your victory lap reveals the depth of redemption. Guide me to point to Your victory in what I say and do, that others may believe what You confirm by faith: we are forgiven and free. Amen.

### **LIVE:**

Jesus' victory lap to the spirits in prison was just one a few stops. Where did He go after proclaiming victory to these spirits? (Hint: we celebrate it every year.)

# Week 7: Redeeming

Day 7: Easter

By Pastor Chris Troxel

## READ:

**John 20:11-18** Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”

Mary’s grief outweighed her wonder. The presence of angels, of Jesus, even the voice the Savior did not rattle her from her wounded faith. In the face of unexpected suffering, death, loss - none of it seemed to matter. “Christ is risen” - but Mary’s heart was still in the tomb.

Then Jesus appeared. His appearance did not immediately solve all of Mary’s problems. Even though she did not perceive it, Jesus is present with her, as she still mourns her Easter mourning. Jesus hears her out. He receives her bewildered grief and responds with one word. A word filled with humility, familiarity, love, hope, power - *life*. He speaks her name. When Jesus calls Mary by name, it is as though Jesus calls *her* from the tomb of her grief. Jesus calls her name and she is set free. Jesus calls her name and she knows. *She believes.*

Jesus won to redeem the wonder. Jesus went up from the grave to redeem those weighed down by it. Sometimes we don’t respond the first time, sometimes we’re overcome by the weight of all we’ve lost. Then Jesus calls you by name. And He calls you by name again, and He calls you again, and he keeps calling. He calls you to set you free. He calls you to know the truth. He calls you to believe.

Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

## PRAY:

*Redeemer, thank you for new life! Thank you for doing everything necessary to earn our salvation for us, and then everything necessary to form faith in us. When we are overcome by darkness and despair, console and comfort us with Your light, life, and peace. Put our anxious hearts at ease in Your presence. Amen.*

## LIVE:

What do you wonder about regarding Easter? What questions tend to keep you in the tomb? What sets you free?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

Day 1: Are You Awake?

By Pastor Justin Krupsky

## READ:

In the Apostle's Creed, we say that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is certainly busy right now, but one day He will be the judge.

I remember the first time I read through Revelation as a 17-year-old boy. I was quite literally shaking in my boots as I read and received what God spoke in this vision. As I have had opportunities to read and study Revelation over and over again for the past 25 years I am realizing more and more the true purpose of the vision. Yes, we need to wake up, but once we are awake we are to live with courage.

The first time I stood before a judge was when I was also 17 after receiving a speeding ticket. Yes, I was shaking in my boots. What I knew though was that this judge was not against me, He was for me. He was not out to get me. Why? I knew I was not innocent.

**Revelation 19:11 says, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness, he judges and makes war."**

In standing before Jesus one day, I know that my sin led Him to be crucified. I know that I am not innocent of His blood. I am confident that when I do see Jesus face to face that He is not against me. I know that it is by His grace, not my works. This is what is true. He is faithful, I am not. He is righteous. I am not. He is I AM and I am not. One day He will re-establish everything and that includes us. One day we will meet our Savior Jesus; until that day let's stop hitting the snooze button. Let's get up, seize the day, and live in the truth.

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." – 1 John 1:7-10.

## **PRAY:**

*Dear Jesus You are the judge. Thank You that You are for us and not against us. Help us to walk in the truth that You have died in our place. Thank You for Your forgiveness and the humble confidence that we have as we wait to meet You one day in the joys of paradise. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

Knowing Jesus is for you at the end of all things, and is *with* you now, what kind of courage does that give you today? What can you do today with it?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

## Day 2: Builder

By Andrew Brazeal

### READ:

**Hebrews 3:3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

I have always felt a deep connection to my home churches. Growing up at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Flint, I felt drawn to the traditions of the church from a young age. As I grew up I fell in love with worship and singing praises. As I grew older and attended new churches, I always found joy in seeing how the churches were unique in their styles and in getting to know the people who belonged there.

Now that I am a member at Trinity, I've grown to love so much about it- the people, the traditions, the worship. Reading Hebrews 3:3, I'm reminded that as great as Trinity is - even if it was the greatest church in all of history, it is nothing compared to the glory of Christ our Savior. I'm encouraged that as my church grows and makes changes, the Architect of our faith is already perfect and unchanging. May God give us a love and connection to our church, but may He even more set Jesus as our focus and foundation.

### PRAY:

*Lord God, thank You for the gifts used to bring us to and strengthen us in faith. When we get distracted by blessings that carry deep meaning, refocus our hearts on the truth that one day You will re-establish Your creation and family that will never fade, centered on You. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What are some of the best ways to use practices and habits in worship, study, and serving Jesus without them becoming distractions *from* Jesus?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

Day 3: Intercessor

By Josh Britton

## READ:

**Romans 8:34 - Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**

I love it when I know someone has my back, especially when I feel defenseless and broken down. It is an amazing feeling when you can count on someone who not only says they are for you, but has actually done something about it to help stand in your place or speak on your behalf in a truthful way, thus proving their allegiance to you. I pray we all have caught glimpses of and experienced this at some point in our lives from people we know, love, and respect.

Isn't it even more mind blowing to know that this is how Jesus feels about us, acts towards us, and is constantly standing in the gap for us? He proved that He loves us by dying for us. I'd say that is a pretty good example of talking the talk AND walking the walk. If you doubt me, please - go and read the entire chapter of Romans 8 RIGHT NOW if you need more evidence. It is arguably one of the best chapters in all of scripture outlining the love that Jesus has and feels towards you.

Jesus is the one who stands in the gap for you, who intercedes for you, who has YOUR back, even when you feel like no one else does. Please know that Jesus is for you and desperately loves you and is fighting for you. May you live in confidence and strength today knowing that the God who spoke the universe into existence is the One who is speaking life-giving words of blessing over you right now.

## PRAY:

*God, even when we are faithless, You are faithful. Thank you for grace, for being present, and speaking up for us. Teach to love our neighbors this way. Amen.*

## LIVE:

Knowing God vouches for and vindicates you, what does that free you to do?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

Day 4: Coming King

By Pastor Chad Wright

## READ:

John 18:35-37

**Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “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.” 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.”**

Are there moments in your life that you wish you could redo? Are there choices that you wish you could undo – choices that led you to a dark place? I have often wondered if Pontius Pilate thought of this moment in time with such consideration. Pontius Pilate by the world’s standards was pretty great. He was a governor. He had power. He had wealth. He could tell people what to do and they would do it. He had financial security. He looked very kingly. Before him stood Jesus Christ, beaten and spat upon, on the morning of Good Friday. Jesus did not look kingly. But when he spoke, there was definitely more to the man that met the eyes. "My kingdom is not of this world." His kingdom is not about decorative palaces or mansions, or motorcades with security guards. His kingdom is not about money and military. He has no address where you will find his throne on this earth. "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting," Jesus said. He is the Lord of the angels! There are millions of them and they are incredibly powerful beings! Just think, one angel has enough power to destroy the entire military of our country in an instant. Imagine millions of those angels. Jesus is their King. "My kingdom, he says, is not from the world." His kingdom is heaven, a place that is more beautiful, more enjoyable, safer, better than any place on this earth. Jesus is the King of that place.

Yesterday, voters chose a leader for the next four years. It gets pretty intense this time of the year, with everyone talking pretty emotionally about who should be in charge, who should be the next president. The different policies, the different leadership styles.

Every election year, there is a big debate about which candidate is telling the truth - who can you trust? Who has your best interests in mind? Who will help you? I am not going to wade into politics. But I am going to tell you who is really in charge right now, who has always been in charge, and who will always be in charge, no matter who becomes the next president. That person is Jesus Christ. Presidents come and go, but Jesus has been the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has been so for thousands of years. He is the King of the United States, the King of North America, the King of Earth, the King of Heaven, and the King of the Universe. He is everyone's King, whether you believe in Him or not. He has been and always will be our King. Jesus is the King of Truth. You can trust Him. You can rely on Him. He never makes a promise He cannot keep. He never fails His people. Is he your King?

## **PRAY:**

*O Jesus, You rule the nations. Rule in my heart so that I might be faithful to You. Amen.*

## **LIVE:**

If you are reading this, chances are Jesus is your king. What does that mean for you in this country right now? What does that mean for your neighborhood today?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

## Day 5: Bridegroom

By Pastor Justin Krupsky

### READ:

**John 3:27-30** John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

**Revelation 21:2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

In ancient days and even some cultures today after a couple has been engaged to be married the bride waits eagerly not knowing exactly when her groom will come back to get her. She waits while he prepares. Now I am a man, a groom, so it is hard for me to wrap my heart around this truth of our faith. Namely that Jesus is the groom and we His people are His bride. Yet what I do know is the excitement of that day.

I still remember to this day a feeling like a hot flash about 10 minutes before our ceremony began and I still remember and have video to prove it that my lip was quivering from the time I saw Jenni at the end of the aisle until I said I do.

When I think about THE day when I see Jesus face to face I do not know if I will fall on my knees, if I will smile from ear to ear, if He will run to me with arms wide open like I just hit a game winning shot in basketball or greet me as I run home to him as if I just hit a game winning home run. What I do know is that I am looking forward to THAT day, when I see Jesus face to face. What a day it will be when we all see Jesus face to face for the greatest celebration that will last for eternity!

### PRAY:

*Holy Spirit, help us to wait and prepare. You continue to point us to Jesus. You continue to call us by the Word, comfort us with communion of saints, to free us with the forgiveness of sins. As You do Your work, help us to keep in step with You: loving our neighbors, sharing the stories that point others to Jesus. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What details about THAT day bring you joy and peace? What can you do with that joy?

# Week 8: Re-establishing

## Day 6: The Victorious One

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**John 16:31-33** Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Struggles do not mean defeat. Fear causes you to do weird things. I am scared to death of bees. We had yellow jackets in a gap next to our garage door. I kept putting off spraying the nest for fear of retaliation. As a disciple following Jesus at His arrest, fear means you run and hide, for fear of retaliation. Though Jesus’ disciples abandon Him, He comforts them *even before it happens* so that when it does, they are not astonished at their own failure, nor do they need to stew in it. They simply repent and believe. Struggles do not mean defeat, it means that you are not finished growing in faith. It also means God is not finished forming that faith - He’s still at work! Being scattered does not mean you’ve lost or that you are lost. When we react in fear instead of faith, or some odd mixture of both, it does not mean we’re finished. It does mean we struggle in the tension between the two, along with all the other tensions that fill our lives in the world. This is, I think, why Jesus says this next: “Take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus overcomes our fear, anxiety, the tensions that pull and twist us in all kinds of different directions. Jesus gives His disciples a glimpse of what will be and follows it with a promise. He does this so that when we condemn ourselves because of our failures and this world, we don’t need to fear. Jesus has overcome our failures. Jesus has overcome this world. He teaches us to call things what they are, repent from where we lost focus, and receive what He won for us. Jesus overcomes everything so that you may know and believe that nothing will ever separate you from Him. Jesus is the Victorious One because He overcomes everything - for you.

### PRAY:

*Jesus, because You are for us, nothing can stand against us. Lord, help us to understand that this is not You tagging along, rubber-stamping everything we do, but this is You calling us from death to life, from chains to freedom. As You empower us to refocus our lives, open our eyes to see who else needs to be set free by You. Amen.*

### LIVE:

When was the last time you lost, and you saw it coming? What comfort does Jesus give you today?

# Week 8: Returning

## Day 7: The Hope

By Pastor Chris Troxel

### READ:

**2 Corinthians 1:10 - He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again...<sup>1</sup>**

The Hope of [RE]FOCUS

I hope. I hope I catch a break. I hope things get back to normal. I hope I won't fail my test. Sometimes hope is what we mean when we wish. Wishes are nice, but that's not the kind of hope Paul meant when he wrote the words in the verse above.

The Hope is Jesus at work in His world, His church, His people - Jesus at work in you. It is a sure thing. The hope is that Jesus *will* return, and the Holy Spirit will nurture you in that hope until that day. It would be easy to confuse the source of our hope. It could sound like when we say "Jesus at work in you" that we place our hope in you. [RE]FOCUS happens when the Spirit empowers us to see that the focus, the hope is always in Jesus.

This is no mere wish. This is not a whim of children or starry-eyed adults wrapped up in a passing fancy. This Hope is *the* faith of the very young and very old. This Hope anchors the lonely or wounded person and the struggling parent. This Hope is etched in every ancient word passed on in scripture to point people to its very Author. Jesus, the author and perfecter, is faithful in fulfilling every word that points to him. He came. He lived. He died. He rose. He ascended. He will return. In *this* hope we confess with confidence: CHRIST IS RISEN! CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN!!

### PRAY:

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Thank you for hearing our prayers. Thank you for the work You do to daily refocus us on You. Keep stirring, moving, comforting, healing, forming, forgiving until You return. Give us faith to believe and follow. Amen.*

### LIVE:

What has brought you good encouragement over the last 56 days? What struggles has God seen you through? What can you make known about what God has done?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2-corinthians/1/10>