



# SEASON OF

# *Lent*



BROOKSWOOD  
CHURCH

# How to Use This Devotional & Prayer Guide

This Lent Devotional & Prayer Guide begins with an introduction to Lent, to orient ourselves to what Christ is inviting us to this Lenten season. Next, it includes Prayers in Preparation for Lent to seek God for how He is specifically inviting you to observe Lent this year. We recommend doing this **before February 18** (the first day of Lent). **Also this year, we recommend beginning the Lent season by listening to the “[Gentle & Humble](#)” episode of the [John Mark Comer Teachings](#) podcast** (click the link or visit Spotify to search the episode).

The rest of the guide contains daily devotions and prayers for the forty days of Lent, starting **February 18 until Easter Sunday**. Dates are provided at the top of each page. Each daily entry includes a rhythm of prayer, meditation on Scripture, reflection, and resting in God’s presence:

- A short centering prayer practice to help us slow down, become still and present to God, to ‘come to peace’ and to ask for and surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit.
- A few verses from Philippians for daily meditation with an accompanying devotional – we’ll be reading through the whole book over the forty days of Lent to encounter and meditate on the character of God, receive His love, press into the deep work of transformation He wants to do in our hearts, and learn to live out of the overflow of His love.
- Questions for reflection to listen to the Holy Spirit, receive the gifts of conviction, repentance, healing, restoration, and freedom in Him daily.
- A prayer prompt to help us respond to God, what He has spoken to us in His Word, what He’s spoken to our hearts in our time of meditation and prayer.
- And a closing rhythm of resting in God’s presence, laying down in green pastures, trusting Him to lead us beside still waters, and restore our souls.

Some will be blessed by doing each entry all at once; others will be blessed by spreading it over your day, perhaps starting in the morning and revisiting subsequent sections throughout the day. We encourage you to lean into what works best for you. The important thing is to slow down and commune with God in Scripture and prayer, allowing Him to speak to you, love you, and form you, day by day. If listening works better for you than reading, you can access an [audio version of this devotional at BrookswoodBaptist.com/Lent](#).

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

Lastly, if you miss a day, simply continue. There are no devotionals scheduled for Sundays – these can become catchup days as needed. Or you can do more than one devotional a day. Or simply do what you can between now and Easter. You will get out of this practice what you put in, and we do need to seek God to find Him; but, do what blesses, not what burdens.

For more information on Lent visit: [BrookswoodBaptist.com/Lent](http://BrookswoodBaptist.com/Lent)

*The introduction, preparatory prayers, and devotional content this guide has been curated from the following sources:*

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

*Philippians: Whatever Happens* by Calvary Chapel Ft. Lauderdale, available via: [bible.com/reading-plans/32973-philippians-whatever-happens](http://bible.com/reading-plans/32973-philippians-whatever-happens)

*On Calvary's Hill* by Max Lucado, available via: [bible.com/reading-plans/1428-on-calvarys-hill](http://bible.com/reading-plans/1428-on-calvarys-hill)

*Bible Study Tools: Uplifting Prayers to Embrace Lent:*

<https://shorturl.at/uVbYK>

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

<https://tinyurl.com/mtet3k4h>

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

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

*Knowing Jesus: Prayers for Worship:* <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Prayers-for-Worship>

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

## Introduction to Lent (read before February 18)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Prepare for Lent (complete before February 18)

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

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

Lent is celebrated over a period of 46 days (excluding 6 Sundays, which adds up to a 40-day fast), beginning on Ash Wednesday, **February 18 – April 2**. This number, 40, appears over 140 times in Scripture, symbolizing a period of testing, trial, or probation. Moses endured 40 years in the desert before God selected him to lead his people out of slavery. Jonah warned Nineveh for 40 days. Even the book of Exodus, detailing deliverance from spiritual drought, is 40 chapters.

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

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

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

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

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

## **A Prayer for Cleansing during Lent**

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

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

## **A Lent Prayer to Glorify God**

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

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

# Day 1 – February 18, Ash Wednesday

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Praying with our breath, a phrase or word from Scripture on the inhale and on the exhale, has been a common practice of meditating on and praying Scripture throughout church history. Today, as you breathe, pray: *God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your grace and peace.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Speak to me through Your Word. Help me to know You, receive Your love, and be transformed according to the Father's good and perfect will. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 1:1-2*

### Grace and Peace By Danny Saavedra

Have you ever met twins—two babies who are miraculously conceived at the same time, share a womb, and sometimes even look exactly alike? It's amazing!

One of the things I find so interesting about twins is the unparalleled kinship they usually share. There's this uncanny bond between them. I recently read an article from a writer who had attended a twins' festival and asked about 15 twin pairs the same question, "What's the best part about being a twin?" The overwhelming answer? "It's like having a built-in best friend for life." Scientific evidence actually suggests that twins enjoy lifelong benefits from having each other.

So, why am I talking to you about twins, right? Well, because in the New Testament, we see a pair of twins—a set that's inseparable and always joined at the hip. Their names? Grace and peace.

Check this out: 15 of the 27 New Testament books contain these words paired together in their introduction! They've been called the Siamese twins of the New Testament because they're so commonly coupled together, particularly

by Paul. It's an ingenious combination of the common Greek and Hebrew greetings.

Grace (*charis*): This word was used like the Hawaiian word *aloha*, both in greetings and departures. The word means joy or favor; a leaning toward sharing benefit. In the New Testament, it's used to describe the Lord's favor, which He freely extended to give Himself away to people because He is disposed to bless and be near them.

Peace (*shalom*): A term used to this day, *shalom*, of course, means peace, a state of harmony and restoration. I love the way one Bible scholar put it: "The tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."

I believe Paul so frequently pairs grace and peace together because these two powerful ideas go hand-in-hand; they're inseparable. You truly can't have one without the other. And here's something to think about:

Whenever we see these two together in Scripture, grace always comes before peace. The reason is that you can never know, experience, or walk in the peace of God until you have received and been changed by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God's grace in us is the source of our peace. It brings us into harmony with our heavenly Father through the restoration of our souls by the saving work of Christ. And as you receive, grow in, and are changed by the grace of God, you can experience that true peace, the peace that surpasses understanding, the peace that comes from the freedom from sin and death that Christ Jesus died to give us, according to the will of God and for the glory of God.

So today, let us bask in this grace and let His peace wash over us.

## Reflection

The Holy Spirit, through James in James 1:22-25, tells us

*But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

Now that we've read Scripture and we've received some help in learning and thinking about it, we also want to take time to reflect, to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us personally. We use the reflection questions to prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to lovingly and gently search our hearts, convict us of any sin (anything in us that does not align with God and His ways), lead us to repentance, minister healing to the wounded parts of our souls, and bring us to deeper freedom as we walk with Him.

While reflection and conviction can be uncomfortable (Paul literally describes it as 'dying to ourselves'), these are among the most precious gifts of the Lenten season; we do not need to be afraid of the Holy Spirit, for He loves us and wants only good for us, nor do we need to fear Jesus for He tells us His heart is 'gentle and humble', nor either do we need to fear the Father for His heart is always inclined toward us.

This is how the Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus and the cross again and again, so we receive His forgiveness, we receive His love in abundance until it floods our whole being (our soul), we receive His healing in our broken and wounded places and help in the areas we feel burdened, and we press into His transformation as He helps us die to ourselves and makes us more and more like Christ. Again, we recommend journaling as it will help you process more deeply and these will be precious encounters with Jesus that you may want to go back to later.

*How have you seen the grace and peace of God show up in your life recently?*

*What area(s) of your life do you most need the peace of God right now?*

### **Respond in Prayer**

*Father, Lord, God of grace and peace, I thank You for who You are and what You've done. I thank You for giving me Your Word and the Holy Spirit that allows me to know and enjoy You! I thank You for Your grace in me that is the source of all peace, joy, and power in my life. Help me walk firmly in the sanctifying grace of Christ and enjoy the peace of Christ daily. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Psalm 23 begins, "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul.*"

There are several times in Scripture God lovingly calls us His sheep because we are like them in so many ways. Sheep will graze until they are full and then lie down in the green pasture to digest their food properly (chew the cud) and rest. This is essential to their health, or they will be both malnourished and exhausted – not happy sheep.

We are like sheep. Now that we've eaten from what God has provided us in His Word, through the devotional, in our time of prayer with Him, we need to lay down in the green pasture so we can digest and rest. Take a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence, to simply be His beloved sheep and rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Let Him love you. He will restore your soul.

And when you are ready, continue on in your day knowing you belong to the One who calls you His Beloved.

## Day 2 – February 19

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *You, Lord, will complete the good work You have begun in me.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, You have begun the good work of sanctifying me, transforming from the inside out so I am like Christ. Continue this work in me until Jesus returns. I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Help me to press into Your transforming work today. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:3-6***

## Prayer and Partners in the Gospel By Danny Saavedra

Did you know Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter? He wasn't lying on a beach. He was essentially in a dungeon chained to a Roman soldier at all times, with his body torn up and his back covered in scars from being whipped and beaten with a rod. This is a man who, by this time, had been shipwrecked, robbed, betrayed, mocked, hated, beaten, and even stoned to (almost) death by the Jews.

He had every right to be miserable, angry, depressed, hopeless, resentful, and so many other things. How would you feel? What would your demeanor be like?

If I'm being honest, I'd probably be a combination of miserable, angry, dejected, and even a little bitter about it. But not Paul. Why? Because as he said in chapter 3, "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Philippians 3:8–9 NIV). Because of this, instead of feeling sorry for himself and letting his present situation consume his every thought, Paul was able to recognize God's love, grace, and mercy at work through the Philippians.

Sometimes, when something bad happens, all we can do is talk and think about it. Our lives become consumed with it. This is our nature. But Paul is showing us a different nature, one surrendered to Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. Instead of focusing on all the negative, Paul goes out of his way to thank the Philippians for their love, faithfulness, generosity, and for sharing the gospel with him. And he also tells them he is constantly praying for them and thanking God for them.

Again, it's easy to be consumed by our own struggles and trials, but when we shift our focus on others (when we, through spiritual eyes, look for the blessings of God and pray for others and lift them up and intercede for them), the Lord ministers to both them and us! But as we saw in Philippians 3 (and as we're about to see), the key to our attitude to our situation, the world, and those around us is to walk in an intimate relationship with Jesus!

In Philippians 1:6, Paul offers the Philippians encouragement saying that he knows God will continue to love, grow, guide, and bless them, sharing that what God has done in our lives up until now is only the beginning!

The best days of your life with Jesus are always ahead of you. Why? Because even when things are bad, you can have joy when you know that God is with

you and in you. Because each day, you can know Jesus, experience a deep intimate relationship with Him, and enjoy Him a little more than you did the previous day! And as you walk in this abiding, intimate relationship, He will transform you, renew you, and fill you with peace, joy, patience, and every spiritual blessing!

## **Reflection**

*What can you thank God for today regardless of trying circumstances?*

*Who can you thank God for?*

*What can you do today to continue to abide in God and receive the renewal, peace, joy, patience, and every spiritual blessing you need? (if you aren't sure, connect with a fellow believer and discuss this with them)*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I thank You for the believers in my life whom You have blessed me with. I thank You for their partnership in the gospel and for how You've used them to minister to me and draw me to Yourself. I pray You would continue to bless and pour into them and sanctify them by Your Word and Your Spirit. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 3 – February 20

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, give me Your tender compassionate love for others.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Speak to me through Your Word. Give me understanding to know You and Your ways. Make me like Jesus. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### Read: *Philippians 1:7-8*

#### **I Swear to God . . . By Pastor Dan Hickling**

As a young kid, there were times when my parents had to educate me when it came to my use (or rather misuse) of words. In my innocence, I recall using the word “hell” in a way I had heard on television . . . and it brought a swift and strong response from my father! Here’s another one, I once casually said, “I swear to God...” within earshot of my mother. I don’t even remember my next words, but I’ll never forget hers: “Son, you shouldn’t say that because it’s a very serious thing whenever you talk about God.” It took me a moment to process this. Everyone at school said that all the time. Was it really as big a deal as my mom was telling me?

I’m so thankful she spoke up and corrected me that day because it *is* a big deal whenever we involve the Lord in anything that flows from our lives. When God is invoked in our mode of communication, it should be thoughtful and respectful, not careless or inconsequential. If we blur that line and we “swear this to God” and “swear that to God,” it really cheapens what should be sacred in our lives . . . it loses its weight and meaning.

Why the preamble? Because I want to emphasize this as there are instances when it’s alright to say, “I swear to God,” like when we’re sharing something we mean with every ounce of our heart. It’s when we want to get across that if we stand for anything, we stand for this. That’s essentially what Paul is saying here in Philippians when he uses the expression, “God is my witness.” It’s

Paul's way of saying, "I'm bringing the authority and gravity of God, Himself, into this . . . I truly mean this!"

And what was it that Paul wanted to get across so powerfully? He wanted the Philippian Christians to know just how much he loved them and longed to see them. In fact, he wanted them to know they were in his heart, and he didn't hesitate to state this with God presiding over everything. If I may paraphrase somewhat, Paul was basically telling the Philippians, "I swear to God I love you!"

Now you might be thinking, *Wow, Paul, way to go! You really get a gold star for loving those people so much!* But hang on! Paul's love for the Philippians isn't something reserved just for him or them. It's to be a way of life for every follower of Christ. Paul would share elsewhere that God's love is poured out by His Spirit, which enables him (and every other Christian) to love others (Romans 5:5).

Do we love others to the extent Paul loved the Philippians? If not, it's only because we haven't opened ourselves to the work God's Spirit desires to do in us. He loves to fill us with His love, which is the only way we will truly embody His heart for others.

## **Reflection**

*How was Paul able to love the Philippians as he did?*

*Who do you need to love according to God's love? Who has He entrusted to you in your church family, in your biological family, in your community?*

*How will you make loving each of those people the Holy Spirit brought to mind a reality in your life?*

## **Prayer**

*Lord, I ask You to show me how to open myself to Your love, not only to receive it but to extend it to those You have placed in my life. Help me to love well as I draw closer and closer to You. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back

to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 4 – February 21

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, make my love abound in knowledge and discernment.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, please fill me with Your love, so I can love others with the love of God. Please transform me by Your love, so I reflect the heart and glory of God. Show me who You are and help me to love You well. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### **Read: *Philippians 1:9-11***

### **Just Grow With It! By Pastor Dan Hickling**

In this passage, Paul makes a transition in his letter to the Philippian Church. He moves from his introduction and declaration of his love for the Philippians to expressing a very specific prayer for them. And as we will see, this prayer penned by Paul for the Philippians is also a prayer that reaches across the centuries to us, as well.

First, Paul prays the Philippian's *love* would grow. By "love," we aren't talking about earthly affection. It's not a "birds of a feather flock together" sort of situation. Instead, he's praying for an increase in the supernatural "agape" type of love. This love is unconditional and comes to us directly from God,

Himself. Notice how Paul puts this at the head of his prayer list, which reminds us that in the Christian life, nothing is more important than love. Love makes everything else fall into its proper place. And if we're going to do anything well, we need to love well!

Paul then prays the Philippian's *knowledge* would grow. As strong as the Philippians were in their understanding of the Lord and faith, there was still room to grow. In a wonderful way, the Christian is always a student. There's always something new for us to learn about our eternal and infinite God. Ours is a lifestyle of discovery, and as we discover more and more about the Lord, we grow closer to Him.

Next, Paul prays the Philippian's *discernment* would grow. This prayer has a logical progression because discernment is the practical application of spiritual knowledge. It's taking spiritual information and truth and then putting it to use in real-world scenarios of life. We make our decisions about things based on what we discern about them. This is why some have a lot of knowledge, yet their lives are in shambles. They have the data but lack the discernment on how to use it to their advantage. Paul wanted something so much better for the Philippians, which is why he prays for an increase in discernment. This would allow them to approve of what was right and live sincerely and inoffensively in the eyes of God.

Lastly, Paul prays the Philippian's *fruitfulness* would grow. The fruit he's referring to is the Christ-like character that comes from being connected to Him. We can't help but be reminded of Christ's promise that all those who abide in Him will also be fruitful (John 15:5). Jesus is saying those who are in Him will also be like Him, and that's the very outcome Paul is praying for here—that they would grow more and more like Jesus, which results in our main mission here on the earth which is to glorify God!

What Paul wanted for the Philippians, the Lord wants for us. He wants us to grow in love, knowledge, discernment, and fruitfulness. May we continue growing according to God's will as He continues His good work in us!

## Reflection

*What four areas of growth did Paul pray for the Philippians, and why are each important?*

*How are you growing in your spiritual life? How might you change things to allow for greater growth in these areas, pressing into the work the Holy Spirit is already doing in you?*

*Where do you need knowledge and discernment to love others well?*

### **Prayer**

*Father, You are so faithful to grow Your children. Help us to submit to the growth process You have for us. Help us to grow in the things that are good for our relationship with You and others, and may we live in a state of ongoing abundance. Give me knowledge and discernment to love well. And fill me with Your perfect love until it overflows constantly to others. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 5 – February 23**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, help me speak God's message without fear.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love. Fill me to overflowing. Give me the strength and wisdom to understand, grasp, and live out Your Word. Bless me today. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:12-14***

### **Trials and Testimonies By Danny Saavedra**

“Where is God in my trouble? Why isn’t He taking me out of this? After all, I’m only here because I boldly shared the gospel.”

It would be reasonable for Paul to ask these kinds of questions, right? Remember where he is (in jail) and why (for preaching the gospel). Many of us ask similar questions when faced with difficult situations and suffering.

But Paul shows us a better way. In the midst of his hardest season, he never lost sight that God was with him. Paul never retreated from God but pressed into Him. This allowed him to see that every trial has a testimony, every grief has a God story, and every pain has a purpose.

So, what was the purpose of what was happening to Paul? Today’s passage clearly shows us that God was using Paul’s chains to advance the gospel!

In all things, even bad things, “God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 NIV). Those things were intended for evil, “God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20 NIV). So, God accomplishes His purposes and brings about our good in all things!

When we understand that God loves us, that He’s sovereign over all, that He’s our good shepherd, that in Him we are whole and experience fullness of joy, peace, and power, that “[we] can do all this through him who gives [us] strength” (Philippians 4:13 NIV), that He redeems all things and works His good purposes in all things, then we can see our trials for what they are and recognize His good work in our lives. And not only that, but we also learn how our trials and the way we go through them can impact the lives of the people around us.

The way Paul endured his chains allowed those around him to see Jesus and emboldened other believers. His influence on them caused them to become bolder in sharing their faith. And the same can be true for you!

I don't know what you're going through right now, and I don't want to minimize anyone's suffering or struggles. But in this world, we'll all experience unspeakable pain and hardships. But we can take heart because He has overcome the world (John 16:33). And we can also "glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3–5 NIV). And as we press into Him and experience His love being poured into our hearts, He can redeem our suffering and use it to transform the lives of the people around us and serve to minister to other believers who are also suffering.

## **Reflection**

*How have your present and past circumstances opened doors for you to share the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and the goodness of knowing Him?*

*What hard things are you going through that you can give to God for His glory?*

*Have the testimonies or examples of others going through trials ministered to you? Pray for them and encourage them by telling them how they've impacted your faith.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I pray in whatever trial I find myself in—today, tomorrow, and all the days of my life—that I would not lose sight of who You are. I pray I would remember Your faithfulness, goodness, and love. I pray that, like Paul, I may see every trial as an opportunity to advance the gospel. And I pray You would use me, in trial and triumph, to reach people with the gospel and serve as a testimony to other believers. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 6 – February 24

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Dear Jesus, purify my motives. Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender my heart, my inner being to Your love and transforming power. Please fill every part of my soul and life, and change me according to the Father's will. Search my heart and show me where I need repentance and Your healing and restoration. Help me hear Your Voice and trust You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:15-18***

### Comparison and Motives By Samantha Rodriguez

Have you ever been part of a school or a job where everyone wore a uniform? I grew up attending schools that required uniforms, and although it helped lower the ease of comparison in regards to clothing or style, I still found myself falling into the habit of comparing other parts of myself. I would compare how my uniform looked on myself versus other girls. I would compare the kinds of backpacks, shoes, or jewelry they would wear. I think as human beings, especially in this day in age, we're just prone to comparison in any situation. It's unavoidable, so we must address it for that very reason.

I bring up this issue of comparison because this is what some of the people Paul is talking about were most likely struggling with. Comparison is a game we play not only with our physicality or personality, but it's a game we even play with our spirituality. We compare our faith and gifts all the time, which then leads to a distortion of motives in our ministries. Suddenly, our ministries become selfish and self-motivated, competitive and isolated, as we focus too

much on how we can be better than other Christians. This is why Paul warned how some people preached Christ “out of selfish ambition.” Nonetheless, by including this in Paul’s letter, we see not only a warning to beware of this in our own hearts but the attitude we should take with it moving forward.

Paul’s desire was for the true gospel of Jesus Christ to be preached to all. Despite the frustration of seeing people serve or preach from selfish and envious motives, Paul never lost sight of the omnipotence of the Lord. He knew God was greater than man, which meant he could trust, regardless of man’s motives, that the Lord would work and deal with their hearts in His own timing and manner.

Although it’s our responsibility to keep one another accountable within the body of Christ, it’s also not our place to bring condemnation down upon others. We discern whether actions and behaviors are godly or ungodly, and we may need to seek to bring loving correction and rebuke in order to help our brothers and sisters turn from their sins and walk in obedience. This is right and biblical. But just as Paul demonstrates here, we can’t get bogged down by it and let it distract us from the calling of God in our lives. As we live for Christ, we must live with grace and authenticity, regularly checking our hearts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to lead us in everything we do for the Lord and every interaction we have with His people.

## **Reflection**

*Have you ever experienced what it’s like to serve from a selfish or envious place? Have you seen it in someone else? How does it taint the service you’re offering to the Lord and set a bad example to those watching?*

*Where are you currently struggling with spiritual comparison? Can you ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand why you are tempted toward spiritual comparison in these ways? Remember, the Holy Spirit only convicts us to love us, heal us, and free us.*

## **Prayer**

*Father God, I repent of my own pride and envy. It’s so easy to fall into these sinful behaviors because of how easy it is to compare. I need Your Holy Spirit to help me battle these thoughts and tendencies with the power of Your truth and Your humble example. Holy Spirit, I’m here to follow Your lead. May You illuminate my motives and lead me in the right direction. Heal the parts of me*

*that are prone to such comparison. Help me keep my eyes on You and seek Your approval alone. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 7 – February 25**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, let my life bring honor to You.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your will and ways today. Change my desires, that I would want whatever will bring honor to Christ and rejoice over every testimony of who He is and what He has done. Speak to me through Your Word. Help me to know You and receive Your love. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:18-20***

## Trust God and Get Going! By Jimmy Purchase

“Can you be out by September?”

Those words were spoken by the kind gentleman who let us rent his home for a few years. He gave us plenty of time to find a new home, but some things were going on in his life, and he needed to sell his home before the end of the year.

At the time of this phone call, we were in the COVID housing boom. House prices and rentals were 30% higher than the previous year and climbing. After an hour of searching, I felt desperate and hopeless. Where would we stay? Where would we go? And even if we found a home, how could we afford it?

My wife Erin looked at me and said, “God provided us this home; he’ll do it again. We’ll keep looking, and He’ll provide.” We continued to search with that in mind.

Sometimes, things just seem out of our hands, right? It could be an unexpected expensive car repair that depletes our bank account or health test results that will shape the rest of our lives. Whatever it is, we regularly navigate things that seem completely out of our control. How do we handle these things as Christians?

Paul is writing the book of Philippians from a jail cell. He’s in chains with no real sign of release. What does he do while he remains in prison? *He continues to minister!* He perseveres. In fact, he writes that because of the God he serves, he can press on while expecting God to work on his behalf.

We often come face-to-face with things that seem out of our hands. However, because of our faith in a sovereign God, we can navigate our difficult circumstances while eagerly waiting for Him to work.

Faith in God isn’t easy! In difficult times, it’s like walking a dark path with a flashlight. We may not know the way ahead, but we can walk in confidence because the flashlight shows us the way forward. We can keep walking in faith.

The theologian J.I. Packer once said, “The Christian motto should not be ‘let go and let God’ but trust God and get going.” Instead of feeling hopeless and giving up, we can navigate through our difficulties while eagerly waiting and trusting God to act on our behalf. We can’t walk away from our problems, but because of the God we serve, we can surrender our problems to Him *while* we live through our circumstances. He is sovereign and holds all things together.

One of the best examples of “trust God and get going” is how Paul continued to minister and encourage others during his imprisonment. He didn’t allow his circumstances to hinder or dampen his ministry. Paul’s life shows us that situations can seem completely hopeless and out of our hands, but we can trust God is still active and working all things together for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28).

Wherever you are and whatever you’re navigating, you don’t have to let go; you can trust God and get going. He is faithful.

## **Reflection**

*What current circumstance do you need to surrender to the Lord?*

*What has God placed in front of you in this season? How can you be faithful to Him right where you are?*

*What is making it hard to surrender to God? Where do you need His help to let go and let God love you?*

## **Prayer**

*Gracious God, I want to trust You above all things. Often, problems steal my attention and rob me of my joy. Today, I surrender them to you. I want you to take \_\_\_\_\_. You can do more with it than I can. You are sovereign, I am not. You are in control, I am not. I eagerly expect Your healing hand and Your faithful provision. Fill me with your Spirit and help me walk in your ways.*

*Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 8 – February 26

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, help me live for You.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, help me surrender more of my self and my life to You today. Fill me more and more, until You define all of me. Teach me to live for Christ now. Give me the hope of looking forward to eternal rest and joy with Him. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 1:21*

### Living and Dying By Danny Saavedra

What an interesting dichotomy of thoughts the apostle Paul presents in *Philippians 1*! First, we're told that Paul is in prison, but he's joyful about it because his chains have served to advance the gospel. Then, in verses 18–26, Paul breaks down his thought process concerning his own life. He says that all of this has worked out for his deliverance, giving him "sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."

Translation? Paul knew his deliverance would either come in freedom from prison to continue to do the work God had for him or in freedom from this fallen world into the presence of Christ forever! In light of this, Paul makes one of the most powerful statements ever recorded: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Jesus Christ is our life. He's everything good, beautiful, and wonderful. In Him, we find our identity, belonging, and purpose. Our chief end and divine design are to know Jesus, enjoy a relationship with Him, and make Him known. Apart from Christ, life cannot exist and is not worth anything. To live in this world is to live fully in Christ and for Christ.

Paul didn't desire to advance himself, live his best life, or seize the day. He desired to be with Jesus, grow in Jesus, know Jesus as intimately as possible, and glorify Jesus. And if it was God's will for Paul to best glorify Jesus by laying

down his life, then Paul would be well pleased by the opportunity. Because for the Christian, death is not a defeat but graduation to glory! It's of infinite and ultimate gain (*kerdos*: profit, advantage, a winning trade). How so? Because *then* we will have true, eternal union with Christ without our sinful human nature standing in the way. We'll be free from distractions, sin, perils, pain, decay, and death. Christ will be right before us to behold with our eyes and worship at His feet. As 2 Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV) says, "To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

Paul's experience in prison—seeing how Jesus had used his chains to advance the gospel, embolden believers, and grow the kingdom in a way he hadn't previously considered—had cemented for him the understanding that Christ would be exalted whether by his life or death, giving him the "sufficient courage" to face possible death without hesitation, reservation, or regret.

Friends, I pray Paul's statement would be on every Christian's heart and mind as they wake up and go to sleep! In the morning, may we pray, "Thank You for this new day, Lord. May everything I do today be for Your glory. And through it, I pray I grow deeper into a loving and close relationship with You." And in the evening, may we pray, "Lord, I pray for Your will. If I'm granted a new day tomorrow, may it be to Your glory. If You choose to call me home tonight, I will enter eternity with joy to be in Your presence!"

## Reflection

*Is being with Jesus, growing in Jesus, knowing Jesus, and glorifying Jesus your chief desires and goals? If so, how is the Holy Spirit leading you to pursue these today?*

*If not, can you surrender your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to give you these desires?*

*What gets in the way of you being with Jesus, growing in Jesus, knowing Jesus, and glorifying Jesus? Surrender these things to God too; ask for His wisdom in dealing with each.*

*Have you experienced Jesus Christ as your Life, your identity, your belonging, your purpose? As everything good, beautiful, and wonderful? You aren't alone if you haven't—many Christians settle for less than a completely literal experience of this, thinking that is all there is. Ask Him for more, to show you how good, beautiful, and wonderful He is. God is wonderfully infinite; there is always more.*

## Prayer

*Father, thank You for every day You give me to live in Christ. Thank You for calling me into Your marvelous light and receiving me into Your family. I pray today and every day I may love You with all my heart, mind, and strength. I pray each day I may seek to know, enjoy, and exalt You more and more. I pray My life would glorify you, and when You call me home, I may have the same courage and clear vision to understand how much better it is to be with You than anything I could have or accomplish here. I know that every day I go on living is a day You have ordained for me to walk in a beautiful relationship with You and accomplish the good works You have prepared for me. Thank You, wonderful Lord. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 9 – February 27

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, I want to be with You.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, You know the desires of my heart, that deep down what I long for most is Jesus. Show this to me, how wonderful and satisfying He is. And help me surrender any desires to You that are only inferior substitutes for Him, to trust that the will of God is best... even when being here is hard and I long to be with Christ as Paul did. Love me and strengthen me today in Your Word. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:22-26***

### **It's About the Journey and the Destination By Samantha Rodriguez**

Have you ever been on a long car ride and just really wanted to go home, yet you also felt like the car ride was an important time connecting with those around you and stopping to see different places and people along the way? Maybe it's just me, but sometimes this tension of wanting to be home yet exploring and living on purpose wherever I am is difficult to navigate. That's exactly what Paul was experiencing here.

Writing from prison, Paul is currently in a state that makes it understandable for him to want to be home with Jesus already—completely restored and in perfect communion with Christ. Nonetheless, he knew the importance of his ministry on Earth. He knew God was still using him and working in and through him.

While he acknowledged this desire, he didn't let it prevent him from living on purpose. He allowed the promise of one day being with Jesus forever to anchor him and give him perspective and hope in difficult situations. Instead of becoming a distraction, this became his fuel to keep living for Christ. As he had just written in verse prior, “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (*Philippians 1:21 NIV*).

Often, we can struggle with this tension, too. Living in such a broken and confused world, I've been hoping for Jesus to come back multiple times. I've found myself thinking of what it would be like to be in His presence, yet the Holy Spirit ensures that these thoughts lead to productivity in my faith. These thoughts allow me to be hopeful and strengthened to continue seeking Christ, dive into the Word, make His name and truth known, and live on purpose to love God and others.

You may have heard this saying, “It's not about the destination; it's about the journey.” I believe it's about both. The destination is what we can be excited

about when the journey feels difficult or lengthy. Yet, the journey is just as valuable and sweet as the destination because it's where we get to know our Savior personally and trust Him every step. The destination is where we meet our Savior, Jesus Christ, face to face!

Praise God for His faithfulness to us in every part of our stories! May we never forget to look at the destination with hope, yet set our eyes on what the Lord has for us right now.

### **Reflection**

*Where have you struggled to anchor yourself in the hope of your future with Christ?*

*Where have you perhaps focused too much on that destination and forgotten about the journey and purpose God has for you on Earth?*

*How do God's promises and faithfulness help you keep moving forward?*

*What else do you need from God to keep going?*

### **Prayer**

*Good and faithful Father, thank You for granting me hope in this life that can sometimes seem hopeless. Thank You for a firm foundation I can build my life, so I'm not completely broken when the storms come. Although I may get shaken up, You won't. May I trust in You today and set my eyes on Your hope and truth so I can continue taking the steps you have for me to take here. To live is Christ and to die is gain, Father. I love you. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 10 – February 28

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, help us stand firm in one Spirit.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, Thank You for giving me the ability to believe in Jesus. Thank You for revealing Him to me. Thank You for pointing me to Him. Thank You for transforming me and strengthening me that I might live and share in His sufferings to the glory of God. Speak to me today. Convict me, that I may repent and seek healing in You, according to Your incredible love and grace. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 1:27-30***

### Worthy Walking By Danny Saavedra

After telling the Philippians he believes his imprisonment won't end with his execution, Paul says, "Whatever happens . . ." Basically, whether he lives and comes to visit them or he departs to "be with Christ," he instructs his spiritual children by saying, "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

The Greek word for conduct yourselves is *politeuomai*. Notice anything interesting about that word? It's where we get the English word *polite*. This word—which refers to a productive, praiseworthy, upstanding member of society, one who abides by and has pledged to the laws of the land—is used here by the apostle to describe how a believer should live. He directs us to live as good citizens, but as we find out in Philippians 3:20, he wasn't talking about Roman, Greek, Israelite, or any other earthly citizenship. Instead, he's instructing us to operate as citizens of heaven, as people who abide in and have pledged ourselves to the gospel's law.

Often, people think that being a Christian requires us to follow an impossible set of laws and behavioral standards. Truthfully, it's not that complicated. A Christ follower simply needs to love Jesus, follow Jesus, and have an intimate

relationship with Jesus. And as we walk with Jesus in this manner, we will learn to think, speak, act, and live like Jesus more and more each day. So, to live in a way worthy of our heavenly citizenship, we must learn from the King of heaven!

When we, through relationship and devotion, allow He who began a good work in us to carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6), particularly in the face of hardship, trials, persecution, and animosity from the world, then our lives will let everyone know our faith is real, and that our salvation and hope for the future are secure! This was important for them to hear because the persecution of believers was beginning to ramp up at this time, and the Philippians themselves were experiencing it (Philippians 1:29–30).

The same is true for the Church today. All around the world, believers are experiencing intense suffering for their faith in Jesus. We see increasing pressure and hostility toward true believers, even in Western culture.

In light of this, I encourage you to abide in Christ by walking in intimacy and devotion to Him, whether you find yourself today in triumph or trial, peace or persecution. As you do, the Spirit will empower you to walk worthy of the gospel, to live like Christ, and to “have the same mindset as Christ” in your interactions with others. Remember, your life is a testimony that can make a difference because the Lord can use your gospel-worthy conduct to draw people away from destruction and toward salvation.

## **Reflection**

*Take time to sit with the Holy Spirit as you reflect on these questions today; as He brings things to your mind, confess them and surrender them to the grace and love of Christ, inviting His healing into those places:*

*Are there any areas of your life that do not show the love of Jesus? Where you struggle or are reluctant to follow Him?*

*As you think back over the past season, have your actions and choices reflected the character of Christ?*

*Have your words reflected the character and heart of Jesus?*

*Have your thoughts conformed to who Jesus is and what He says is good? Including your thoughts about yourself?*

## **Prayer**

*Father, help me to conduct myself in a manner worthy of the gospel. By Your love, draw me deeper into the grace of Jesus and fellowship with the Spirit so I may be able to live like Jesus and “in every way” “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10 NIV). Amen*

*Take time today to also pray for believers worldwide who have been granted “not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for Him” (Phil. 1:29). Pray and ask the Lord to be with them :that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen [them] with power through His Spirit in [their] inner being” (Ephesians 3:16) and that He would use their suffering to actually serve to advance the gospel (Phil. 1:12) and lead people away from their destruction and wrath and toward repentance and salvation.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 11 – March 2**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, unite us in Your love and Your Spirit.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Help me be united with my brothers and sisters in Christ. Teach me to receive comfort from His love. Make me tender and compassionate, humble, thoughtful, generous, to honor the love of Christ. Remove from me any*

*selfishness and vanity. Satisfy me with Your love, peace, hope, and joy. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 2:1-4***

**Shared Experiences By Denise Trio**

In my life as a believer, I've had the privilege of serving on a few short-term mission trips. I always love going because I enjoy traveling internationally, putting my faith into action through serving, and making friends I'd never get the chance to meet if I hadn't gone on the trip. An unexpected benefit is a camaraderie built with the teams I've traveled with—you create a deeper bond over the shared experience!

That shared experience, specifically about being a Christian, is what the apostle Paul refers to in today's passage. It's almost set up as a series of rhetorical questions. Paul is encouraging the church in Philippi to live like Christ because of their shared experience as Christians.

If you're a Christian, you likely have experienced encouragement from your relationship with Christ, comfort from His love, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This word fellowship in the original Greek is *koinōnia*, which implies community and intimacy, deep friendship and communion. You can't have *koinōnia* alone. Christians have *koinōnia* with other believers and with the Holy Spirit. That *koinōnia* brings encouragement and comfort. Similarly, because of your Christian faith, you care and have compassion.

In your everyday life, as a Christian, you experience the same thing as other Christians form your relationship with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, just like being on a mission trip with a group of others. Paul is exhorting his Christian audience here that since they've experienced all of these benefits, their lives should reflect that shared experience.

Any shared experience creates unity - you think similarly, look out for one another, and put your needs after others. You create memories together that you can look back on. You comfort one another. You love sacrificially.

This is how we were designed to live. This is the mark of total and complete joy. This is the type of living Christ demonstrated, which contradicts how the world expects and encourages us to live! This was true to Paul's original audience in his letter, and it's true for us today.

David Guzik commented on this passage,

*When we live with the feeling that we are so important, or so able, or so talented, we are out of God's will. We are working against the unity Paul pleaded with the Philippians and all Christians to have.*

I plea you lean into that shared experience you've had if you're a Christian. Peace, comfort, compassion, and fellowship ought to create unity between you that overflows as care to the world. Make sure your motivation is not self-seeking. Look out for each other's interests before your own. In this way, you'll follow the example of Christ, who considered our interests before His own.

## **Reflection**

*Consider your thoughts and motivations for a moment. Are you motivated by your needs only? Who might God be calling you to love and serve before yourself in this season?*

*Where are you tempted to think and feel you are "so important, or so able, or so talented" that you are set apart from the kind of humility, love, and unity God has called each of us to as followers of Jesus?*

*How might you share in experiences with other believers, especially in your church family, that you might experience unity in likeness of mind, shared memories, mutual comfort, and sacrificial love?*

## **Prayer**

*Thank You, Jesus, for setting a perfect example of how to live as a Christian. Thank You for Your fellowship, comfort, compassion, care, and kindness. Please help me to live like You. Give me more of Your Spirit to guide and care for me so I can care for others. Fill me with Your love that it might overflow to others in tangible ways. I trust You with all of my needs. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has

provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 12 – March 3

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Dear Jesus, teach me Your humility.*

*Holy Spirit, help me surrender my whole self to You today. Give me the same mindset as Christ Jesus, of humble obedience to the Father in all things. I know this is too hard for me to do on my own; I need You to change me, teach me, and guide me in the Way of Jesus. Help me trust in Your love and goodness. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 2:5-8***

### **The Greatest Expression of Love By Gabi Silva**

There's nothing quite as catchy as a good song. The lyrics and melody become engraved almost instantly in your head. Scholars consider today's passage one of the early church's first songs, and the truth it echoes carries a timely message for us today.

In the preceding verses, Paul writes Christians should relate to one another with humility, considering others above themselves. He then goes on to explain that humility should be a characteristic of God's people because it's the character of Christ.

This Christ hymn reveals a profound truth: Jesus Christ, being One with God, did not cling to His glory's privileges but humbled Himself when He became man. Vincent's Word Studies Commentary says it this way: "Christ, being before his incarnation, in the form of God, did not regard his divine equality as

a prize which was to be grasped at and retained at all hazards, but, on the contrary, laid aside the form of God, and took upon himself the nature of man. The emphasis in the passage is on Christ's humiliation. Had he come into the world emphasizing his equality with God, the world would have been amazed, but not saved."

Christ's incarnation is the ultimate depiction of humility because He thought not of Himself but of us when He put on flesh. The purpose of Christ entering time, becoming human, and suffering to the point of dying on a cross was to serve *us*. We—who had no title, no merit of our own, no status to claim, no deeds to make us holy—were served by the One who spoke the world in existence. Christ, who existed with God before the foundation of the world (John 17:4), did not cling to His divinity but laid its privilege aside to serve us, the helpless who desperately needed redemption. Jesus displayed the greatest expression of love when He died for you and me on the cross.

Paul's exhortation then is powerful! We have nothing to boast about except the cross (Galatians 6:14), so Christians have a new way of thinking about humility. C.S. Lewis writes, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less." We model Christ not by belittling ourselves but by setting aside whatever status we claim to serve our neighbor. Out of love, Christ set aside His glory and majesty to be crucified for us, and we, His followers, are now commissioned to go and meet the needs of the helpless. Jesus saw our greatest need as more significant, so He served us. How can we do the same for others?

May our lives sing a song as melodious as this ancient hymn. May we be known for our selflessness, the way we give of ourselves for others. May we impact the lives of others with our service and generosity and, in doing so, live as Christ lived. Now *that* is a song to have on repeat.

## **Reflection**

*Is there something in your life you're holding onto (ego, comfort, control, fear, etc.) that is holding you back from serving others and loving them the way they need to be loved? Where is it holding you back from rejoicing in the work and blessings of others?*

*Both pride and insecurity have the same root issue: too much focus on ourselves. Tim Keller explained that this is the ego drawing more attention to itself than is healthy for us, like a stubbed toe. Where do you feel tempted*

*toward pride or insecurity? Why do you think this is happening? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you surrender these and rest in the complete grace and love of God, where you are safe to release all pride and insecurity for you belong to God as His dearly beloved child.*

## **Prayer**

*God, thank You for Your Son Jesus, who served me when I needed it most. I am amazed by Your generosity and the gift of grace You lavish on me, Lord. Teach me by Your Spirit to walk as Jesus walked, give up my status, comfort, and whatever else I may cling to, and give my life for others just as You gave Yours for me. Show me where anything has a hold on my heart it should not, and help me to let go of anything getting in the way of receiving Your love and giving it freely to others. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 13 – March 4**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *I praise, Lord Jesus; all glory to God the Father.*

*Holy Spirit, please teach me to live under the wonderful Lordship of Jesus Christ – and to truly believe from experience it is wonderful. Help me to surrender the parts of my self and my life that still need to come fully under*

*Christ's Lordship. Help me to trust He is good, loving, wise, gentle, kind, and altogether worthy as Lord. Heavenly Father, may Your kingdom come and Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven; that every knew should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to Your glory. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### **Read: *Philippians 2:9-11***

#### **Our Example, Our Exalted By Jimmy Purchase**

Philippians 2:1–11 is the section of Scripture that has made the biggest impact on my life. I've read through this section countless times. Each time, I'm so stirred by the life and humility of Jesus! He was fully God, yet fully man. He was God, and still, as my favorite Advent hymn says, He would "come to earth to taste our sadness, He whose glories knew no end." God Himself would choose to enter our world, taking the form of a servant.

Philippians 2:1–8 shows Christ as our example. We're to have His mindset, one of servanthood, obedience, and humility. However, Philippians 2:9–11 shows that Jesus, while our example, is also God—fully divine and fully human. He has the name above all names—and all creation will bow at His name alone. He is both our example and our Lord. We seek to live like Him and fully surrender to Him.

If you've been around any of the worship services at Calvary, you may have heard our pastors use the phrase "the person and work of Jesus" in a sermon. You may have heard a worship leader say, "because of who Jesus is and what He's done," or something similar. That language points to the Christian's amazement that Jesus, as fully man and fully God, chose to live a perfect life on our behalf and offered Himself as the One who would defeat sin and evil. Jesus is God the Son, exalted above all things.

As Christians, we don't get to pick which part of Jesus to follow. Maybe you resonate with the teachings of Jesus but struggle to submit to Him as Lord over your life. You might read about how Jesus healed a blind man and say, "That's amazing!" Or maybe you see how Jesus confronted the religious elite and think, "Wow, if only more people did that!" But as soon as Jesus demands that you submit your dating life to Him, you might push back and say, "Nah, I'm good."

There are very few who would have problems with Jesus' moral teachings. His kingdom principles point us to a way of living that makes the world better. The way of Jesus, however, is a call to come and die to yourself—in every way—and surrender it under His rule and reign. Jesus wants every part of you! Why? Because He is Lord.

Jesus is not just a moral example or a wise teacher with great information. He's God, exalted with a name above all other names! This God would choose to come to us to serve, not to be served. In humility, He would lay down His life to death on a cross.

The way of Jesus is compelling and attractive but requires full surrender. It requires making Him Lord over every part of our lives. We must bow our lives to Him. We must live in light of who Jesus is and what He's done for us. There can be no kingdom without the King.

## **Reflection**

*Take time to sit with the Holy Spirit as you reflect on these questions:*

*Is Jesus Lord over every part of your life? Where do you feel resistance or see avoidance of whole-hearted obedience to Him?*

*What would be different in your life if you did surrender those things fully to Jesus? What freedom, rest, peace, joy, intimacy with Him, freedom, etc. would you receive?*

*What is making it difficult to follow Him? If you aren't sure, ask the Holy Spirit to show you in His time. If anything does come to mind, ask Jesus for His help and for everything you need. Talk to Him about your struggle. Like David in the Psalms, we please God by praying honestly and bringing Him our full selves.*

## **Prayer**

*Jesus, forgive me for making ME the Lord of my life. Your Name alone is the name above all other names. Help me move from being self-centered to being Christ-centered. I want to surrender everything to You. Have my \_\_\_\_\_. This is one area I can't seem to handle on my own. I need You, and I give myself wholly to You. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 14 – March 5

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *God, work in me to will and act according to Your good purpose.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, please give me the desire to do what is good and pleasing to You. Please give me the strength and courage and wisdom to act according to what You reveal to me in Your Word. I cannot work out my salvation alone; I need You, my Teacher, my Guide, my Comforter. Make me faithful like Jesus. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### Read: **Philippians 2:12-13**

### **A Workout Plan That Works! By Danny Saavedra**

We can all agree that the best way to experience lasting, sustainable results is through discipline and devotion to healthy living. This is especially true of our walk with the Lord, as we're told clearly in today's passage!

Here, Paul shows us that grace and works are not mutually exclusive. You see, the word for "work out" is *katergazomai*, which means to carry out to its full perfection. Now, please note Paul doesn't say work for your salvation. The

work of Jesus has saved believers. Our salvation is secure. We can do nothing to add to it or improve it. That's not what Paul is saying. What he said was to work *out* your salvation. He's describing *sanctification*.

What is sanctification? It's the ongoing process through which a believer is transformed and conformed into Christ's image, where we become holy and Christ-like, *fit* for the holy purposes of God. What does this look like? In the same way, becoming fit physically involves the consistent practice of certain habits and disciplines. Becoming healthy and fit spiritually involves spiritual disciplines—the life-giving habits of studying Scripture, prayer, worship, fasting, silence and solitude, fellowship, service, generosity, and evangelism! These disciplines are to your spiritual health and vitality what exercise and diet are to your physical health.

Paul instructs us to dedicate ourselves to this process with “fear and trembling.” Some have translated this to say, “with a holy care to do all acceptably; implying earnest surrender, deep humility, and complete submission with a sense of awe towards God.” The trembling comes from the idea of being separated from the Lord by disobedience, rebellion, laziness, or apathy. Basically, not being in a close relationship and abiding in the Lord due to disobedience should scare us and spur us to live with devotion and discipline.

As you read this, you may feel carrying your sanctification out to its full perfection is not only difficult but impossible. Verse 13 offers good news: It's not you who carries it out! This is one of the most amusing and inspiring paradoxes in the Bible. A few words before, Paul instructs us to work, only to tell us that God provides the Spirit who instills the desire to accomplish this and the power to carry it out. Our part in this process is simply to seek Him, abide in Him, have intimacy in relationship with Him, and strive to know Him a little more each day through spiritual disciplines. As you “work out your salvation” by spending time with Him, as you grow to know Him deeply through devotion to the disciplines, He will work in you to change you and renew your mind and heart, and He will work in you to accomplish His will and good purposes for you, in you, and the world!

## Reflection

*Why are spiritual disciplines so vital to the overall health of our relationship with the Lord? How does God work and accomplish His will through our devotion to relationship and engagement in spiritual disciplines?*

*How close have you been to God in this season? Which spiritual disciplines have helped you draw near to God that you can continue to press into? Which have been more burden than blessing, and may need a change this season?*

*Of the spiritual disciplines listed above, are there any you have not tried, or not done in a long time? If you feel the nudge of the Holy Spirit regarding any of these, begin practicing it right away where you are (not where you think you should be). He has goodness in store for you.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I know it's You who wills and works in me to accomplish Your good purposes. I also know that it's You who changes me, renews me, transforms me, sanctifies me, and conforms me to the image of Your Son Jesus. Hebrews 13:21 says, it's You who equips me with all I need for doing Your will, and it's You who produces in me every good thing that is pleasing to You. All I need to do is devote myself to a relationship with You—to know You deeply and grow in intimacy with You! So, Lord, I pray for a renewed daily passion for knowing You! I pray that by Your Spirit, I may prioritize my relationship with You and make living in Your presence and walking by the Spirit the central focus of my life. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 15 – March 6

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Holy Spirit, help me hold firmly to the Word of Life.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Help me to see myself clearly, that I may repent of anything that should not be a part of who I am in You. Make me blameless and pure and teach me to walk in Your ways. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 2:14-16*

### **Stars and Torches By Danny Saavedra**

Dr. Seuss once said, “Why fit in when you can stand out?” It’s a strong statement about conformity and peer pressure, which the apostle Paul would have wholeheartedly agreed.

Here in this passage, Paul tells the Philippians to “become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’” Why? So that by their lives and testimonies, they would “shine among them like stars in the sky.”

You may be saying, “Easier said than done, Danny! Especially nowadays, how can we possibly hope to shine like stars and be blameless and pure when the world is so full of darkness and depravity?” Well, luckily, Paul tells us!

This passage continues to hit at the heart of what Paul expressed in *Philippians 2:3-13*, providing further instructions regarding our interactions with believers and nonbelievers. In these verses, Paul:

- 1) explain and encourage them to walk in humility—the mindset of valuing the needs of others first, which Jesus Himself demonstrated through His life, ministry, and death. We see this in Paul’s command to “Do everything without grumbling or arguing.”
- 2) instruct them to continue to be sanctified through devotion and discipline as the Lord works in them to conform them into His Son’s image and

accomplish His good purposes. This devotion and discipline require us to “hold firmly to the word of life.”

As we do this, as we grow in relationship with Jesus and begin to imitate Him in our interactions with believers and nonbelievers, we will become “blameless” as it pertains to the laws and judgment of man (Luke 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:10) so no one can bring any charge or claim of hypocrisy against us, and we can remain “pure” in internal purity and simplicity (“harmless as doves” like Jesus said in Matthew 10:16). As you examine this sentiment Paul espouses here, you can also see the clear connection to the statements Jesus made in John 13:35.

This life stands out in a world full of selfishness, division, discord, strife, anger, malice, and depravity. Believers who live like this will shine brightly like a star in the sky in a dark, wicked, and lost world.

Paul hammers home this metaphor of stars and light by reminding the Philippians to “hold firmly to the word of life.” In Greek, this expression is meant to evoke the image of holding a torch, which was done for guidance. Do you see that? Paul is reminding us we’re torchbearers.

So, by living humbly in devotion to Jesus and holding forth the light of the gospel for all to see through our testimony, we can light the way for the people God has put in our lives who are lost in the darkness to see Jesus clearly and have the light of Jesus shine in their hearts to give them “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV). In this, God is indeed willing and acting “in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13 NIV).

## **Reflection**

*How does doing “everything without grumbling or arguing” validate your witness for Christ and enable you to “hold firmly to the word of life”?*

*Examine your attitude this past week. How often do you find yourself complaining or grumbling, whether out loud or simply in your heart? Are you valuing others above yourself?*

*Are the complaints and grumblings worth losing your ‘shine’ as a believer? For the things that you are convicted are genuine problems, have you brought them to God and then to the appropriate person? Or talked to others instead?*

## Prayer

*Father, give me the heart of Jesus. Help me walk in humility and gratitude, free from a grumbling and discontented spirit. Forgive me for when I have not dealt with problems directly, for grumbling and complaining instead of choosing thankfulness for what You have provided and trusting in You. I want my life to show others Your glory. May my life be centered on You and my relationship with You so that I may become more like Jesus as the Word of life guides and shapes me. May my testimony be blameless before believers for their edification and sanctification and nonbelievers for their salvation. May this all be to the praise and glory of Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 16 – March 7

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, I rejoice in serving You.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your sanctifying work, the love of Jesus, and the Father's good and perfect will. Speak to me, and help me to hear Your Voice. Love me, and help me to receive Your guidance and care. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 2:16-18***

## **Happy to Do It By Kristen Hollis**

Did you hate doing chores when you were a kid? I certainly did. Like many kids, I would've rather spent my time doing something that brought me joy, so when it came time to do the work my parents asked me to do, they'd often be met with a passive-aggressive eight-year-old.

As a pastor's kid, I was no stranger to what my dad loved to call a "teaching moment." Sometimes these were long-form lectures; other times, it was just him calling out the phrase "happy to do it!" He was always referencing the same point—it was not only dishonoring to my parents but the Lord when I approached servanthood with grumbling. I had a hard time wrapping my head around that concept when I was a kid, but after reading this passage from Paul, I can see a true example of this practice.

Paul's life at this point wasn't going great by our standards—he was in the depth of persecution and was looking at death because of his faith in God. During this correspondence with the congregation in Philippi, Paul is describing his time in prison not as a time he views as suffering with no cause but as something even to be celebrated. So many in Paul's situation would probably grumble and think this was all for nothing, but he reminds the church that this labor is not in vain.

Next, Paul refers to himself as "being poured out like a drink offering," which is an Old Testament practice of worship (Numbers 15:1-10, 28:1-8). In that time, once a sacrifice was made (usually some animal), the priest would pour wine next to the altar to symbolize the dedication of someone in worship to God. Paul relates his life as this wine being poured out for those he served. He finds joy in this because this service is all in the name of God. Paul ends this passage asking the church to join him in his joy for these sufferings as they will never be in vain, which should truly be celebrated.

So, what can we learn here? There will always be times of servanthood in our lives that aren't very fun or glamorous, whether directly related to our faith or not. Therefore, we should approach every moment as an act of worship to God. In my dad's words, in everything we do, we should be "happy to do it," for it is all for our Creator.

## **Reflection**

*Has God ever called you to serve someone in a way you found yourself grumbling? Where has it been difficult to find joy in serving?*

*How can you reframe those times as an act of worship to God in gratitude and love for Him?*

*Is God calling you to serve differently in this season? Pray about this and take time to listen for the direction of the Holy Spirit – not our emotions, but His good and perfect will.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I may not always understand why I'm called to do something, but thank You for the opportunity. Even in my suffering, You call me to have a posture of joy and humility. Make my heart soft in these moments, and help me reflect on this gratitude. Give me wisdom and guide me in my service, that it may always be in worship of You and according to Your will. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# **Day 17 – March 9**

## **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, make me sincere and trustworthy.*

*Holy Spirit, please fill me with Your love – I want to abound in it. Give me wisdom and discernment so I can love well, that people would see Jesus in*

*me. Transform me into one who is genuine and faithful – test and purify my character so I am like Christ. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 2:19-24***

**When People Are a Priority By Pastor Dan Hickling**

Each epistle has its particular tone or “flavor.” Some are more corrective (see Galatians and 1 Corinthians), while others tend to be more instructive and theological (see Romans and Ephesians). This is because each letter was written to deal with a particular issue or need of its audience, and these were different from audience to audience. Collectively, they add up to cover the full range of what the Church of God needs through every spiritual season. But as we come to the epistle to the Philippians, one can’t help but pick up on the tone being notably personable and encouraging. In other words, Philippians has a very friendly feel.

While Paul deeply loved everyone he ever wrote to, he was on especially friendly terms with the Philippian Christians. We see powerful evidence of this here in his epistle to them as he reveals his plan to send Timothy to them as his representative. This was a big deal because Timothy was at the top of the list of people who were important to Paul. He even mentions this, in no uncertain terms, by declaring, “I have no one like-minded.” In other words, nobody “got” Paul more than Timothy. So, by sending Timothy, he was sending the Philippians his very best.

Let’s take this to another level by recognizing that we tend to establish our sense of value according to our relationships. As we mature, we realize things don’t matter as much as they seemed when we were younger. Christmas becomes less about the gifts under the tree and more about the loved ones who gave them. This is fitting because it reflects God’s nature. He values people and relationships above all else. So, we become more like Him as we prioritize people.

Now, overlay this principle in this passage. By sending the Philippians his most valued ally and friend, Paul is clearly stating how much he valued them. He’s demonstrating in the most meaningful way that they’re a priority to him; otherwise, he wouldn’t be sending Timothy to them!

When people are a priority to us, it’s going to show. Among other things, it will show in what we’re willing to sacrifice for them. Paul sacrificed his closest

companion because he knew it would benefit believers wanting to grow in God's grace. This begs some questions: Are we prioritizing people? What are we willing to sacrifice on their behalf? What are we willing to let go of because we place more value in the relationships that will be blessed?

## **Reflection**

*Are you prioritizing people? Who is God calling you to prioritize in this season? Who is God calling you to prioritize specifically this week?*

*What is God calling you to let go of to place more value in the relationships that will be blessed?*

*How might God be calling you to mature in making people a priority in your life? What specific action will you take in obedience to His guidance?*

## **Prayer**

*Lord, I ask Your Spirit would continue to fill me with Your love for people, that I would see and value them as You do and demonstrate this in what I'm willing to sacrifice for them, even as You did for me. I pray my love for others would not merely be sentiment and intention, empty words, or performative gestures; Your love is true and good and pure and generous, and I want to love with Your love. Help me, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 18 – March 10

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, help me to have a holy expectation that You will speak to me in Your Word today, that You will guide me, that You will love me, that You are at work transforming me. Give me all I need to hear You, obey You, and love You, Lord. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen*

## Read: *Philippians 2:25-30*

### About Epaphroditus By Pastor Dan Hickling

Yesterday we saw how Paul's compassion towards the Philippians moved him to send his most valuable earthly companion, Timothy, to them. But as we move on today, we see the apostle sent someone else along with Timothy to minister to their needs: Epaphroditus. Now, chances are you know many more people named Paul and Timothy than Epaphroditus because his name's sake here is a much lesser-known Bible character with a lower profile. Yet, what Paul writes about him here is worthy of our consideration.

Here's what we know about this man based on what we see here, along with what Paul will share later on in this book (Philippians 4:18). Epaphroditus was originally part of the Philippian church but was sent out from the church on a "mercy mission" to deliver an offering to Paul who was imprisoned in Rome. Once there, Epaphroditus remained by Paul's side to care for his many needs. If his story ended there, he would be defined by a strong sacrificial spirit. To willingly leave your home and way of life to resettle in a strange setting for the sake of someone else's needs certainly takes an others-oriented outlook on life!

Something happened at some point during Epaphroditus' ministry towards Paul. He got very sick. He came close to dying due to whatever his body was battling. Of course, word got out about him and made its way back to the Philippians, who were understandably worried that they would never see him

alive again. Even in his illness, Epaphroditus worried about how this news hit everyone back home rather than himself, which further illustrates his others-oriented heart!

This also caused considerable anxiety for Paul because he was an indirect cause behind Epaphroditus coming so close to death's door. It's at this point, though, that we get those two wonderful words: but God. The Lord had mercy on Epaphroditus, and with this new lease on life, there seemed to be only one appropriate thing to do. Although Epaphroditus' service blessed Paul, he knew it would bring an even greater blessing to the Philippians to see their favored son returned to them. So, the apostle sends him and Timothy to them along with this letter.

Again, we don't run into many people named Epaphroditus these days. But based on what the Bible tells us here, it's an honorable name! For in this man, we see the qualities and characteristics that should come to define every one of us who aspires to represent Jesus. If we are to walk as He walked, a sacrificial spirit and others-oriented attitude must be present. It must be formed in us as the Holy Spirit fulfills His lifelong work of conforming us into the likeness of our Lord.

## **Reflection**

*How would you describe the character of Epaphroditus? In what ways did he demonstrate Christ's love?*

*Consider the characteristics you listed; do you see these traits in your own life? Are you increasing or decreasing in a spirit of sacrifice?*

*If decreasing, what is holding you back? Surrender these to God and ask Him for His help, His healing, and His transformation.*

*If increasing, what is helping you increase? Thank God for these gifts and consider how to press into the work of the Spirit.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I confess my natural bend towards being selfish and preoccupied with myself. By Your Holy Spirit, break this in me, change this in me, transform this in me into Your character and compassion for others. Make me more like Jesus. Thank You for how You have loved me sacrificially. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 19 – March 11

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, help me rely on You more.* Breathe and pray until you are settled and present to God.

*Holy Spirit, I lay down my self, my own will, ideas, effort, strengths, ego. Help me truly see how finite I am, and how infinite and all-sufficient You are. Teach me to depend on You completely, in all things, at all times, trusting You completely and serving God with my whole self. I want to rejoice in You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### Read: *Philippians 3:1-3*

### No Confidence By Danny Saavedra

In today's passage, Paul once again reminds the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord in all things and at all times! So far, in the first two chapters, Paul has used the words joy and rejoice eight times.

He's not saying we should be happy about the things or pain we must endure. Instead, he's saying that whatever happens, we can choose to live with joy because when we have Jesus, we have everything we could ever possibly

need, and we can endure all things through the strength Jesus gives us. We have the eternal hope of future glory and peace that passes all understanding.

He then calls this repetitive encouragement a safeguard because it helps to keep us from tripping or stumbling. This was timely encouragement because a group of false teachers called the Judaizers were doing a lot of damage in the early church.

Paul called them “dogs,” equating them to a group of wild, ferocious killer dogs that used to roam around Israel, like the hyenas in *The Lion King*. So, what were these wicked dogs doing? They were seeking to deceive believers into forfeiting their freedom in Christ and cutting themselves off from experiencing the power and presence of God by adding works to God’s grace, particularly circumcision. Paul warns the Philippians and reminds them that we are the *true* “circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

This teaches us something very important: Our rituals are empty apart from a changed heart. Apart from the salvation that comes by grace through faith, circumcision means nothing. It doesn’t save you or get you into heaven. It’s just an empty cutting away of flesh. What matters is that “when you came to Christ, you were ‘circumcised,’ but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature” (Colossians 2:11 NLT).

The same goes for baptism, Scripture memorization, mission work, outreach, or any other kind of work, accomplishment, or accolade. As Paul says in Galatians 5:6 (NIV), “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

So, he puts “no confidence in the flesh,” which means he isn’t going to bet on himself. He isn’t going to rely on his efforts to earn heaven because no matter how many good things we do and how many laws we follow, we’ll never be perfect, never hit the target, and never meet God’s standards. Instead, we have security in the finished work of Jesus, who forgives our sins and casts them as far as the east is from the west. We have peace and reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus. This is why we can have joy in all things because no matter how much uncertainty exists in the world, we can have confidence in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Reflection

*When you consider the spiritual practices and activities you engage in, those listed above and any others, are there any that are only works without a changed heart? Are you relying on your self, your willpower and giftings? Or on the Holy Spirit?*

*What would it look like for you to completely rely on God in this season? What good would it bring into your life and experience if you no longer had to rely on yourself and your accomplishments at all?*

*Where is a shift needed to rely on the Holy Spirit? What is He inviting you to lay down to learn to depend on Him? Ask for His help wherever you feel resistance. Praise Him for where you feel peace, freedom, and joy.*

## Prayer

*Father, may I never put confidence in my work and instead always find myself firmly reliant upon and living from the finished work of Christ. May I never add anything to the gospel; may I never distort or pollute, or complicate the simple good news of Jesus' reconciliatory work. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 20 – March 12

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, You alone are my confidence.*

*Holy Spirit, help me to lay down any self-reliance, confidence in my own effort, any accomplishments and status the world affirms, human beings affirm, but are not what You value. Teach me to love what You love, to seek Your approval, to trust in what You say is good, and to let go of standards, appearances, statuses, and pursuits that tempt me to elevate myself instead of trusting in and glorifying Christ. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 3:3-6***

### **Experts and Efforts By Danny Saavedra**

Why do people listen to expert opinions? Because they have greater understanding and experience. If you want a pizza recipe, would you listen to a Michelin star chef or a Michelin tire salesperson whose idea of pizza making is microwaving a pizza Lunchables?

In this passage, Paul plays the expert card, building off the instructions he just gave not to listen to the “dogs” and to put no confidence in our works to earn God’s favor. He shows that it would be him if anyone could rely on their efforts and accomplishment to earn salvation.

Think of the most-holiest, upright model of morality you know. Whoever you’re thinking of isn’t even close to what Paul was. He was . . .

- circumcised in accordance with Leviticus 12:3;
- a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;
- a Benjamite, one of the most distinguished tribes of Israel;
- a Hebrew of the Hebrews in a time when many Jews were ashamed of their Jewish heritage and tried to live and act as much like Greeks as they could;
- an ultra-religious Pharisee who followed the Mosaic Law to the letter and knew the Scriptures so well he could probably recite the Torah in his sleep;
- as zealous and passionate as they came, even persecuting the Church to defend Judaism;

·a man who superseded the standard of righteousness (based on the way the law was interpreted and taught at that time), which was accepted among the people of his day.

To sum up, if *anyone* could lay claim to earning God's favor by accomplishments, accolades, law-keeping, and the works of the flesh, it was Paul. He was far more qualified than his Judaizing opponents were to make such a claim.

Friends, may this be a lesson to us when we become judgmental toward nonbelievers and believers or when self-righteousness rears its ugly head. We are no better or more accomplished than the worst and most wicked person out there.

It's important to remember that no matter what we do, who we are, or what we accomplish, God's love for us isn't based on what we do for Him but on what Christ has done for us! Apart from Jesus, we have nothing, are nothing, and can do nothing for actual moral good. Isaiah 64:6 (NIV) goes as far as to say that apart from Him, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

Nothing we could ever do would be enough to revive our dead spirit, cut away our sinful nature, and earn right standing with God. We're all inescapably trapped in spiritual and moral poverty in the economy of eternity.

*"But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life"—Titus 3:4–7 (NIV)*

## Reflection

*How easy and natural is it for you to believe that God's love for you is not based in the slightest on what you do, but solely on His own character and what Christ has done?*

*What makes it difficult to believe this? Can you surrender these things to the God and ask for His help in knowing and trusting in His love?*

*Where have you seen, heard, felt, experienced the unconditional love and grace of God? If you aren't sure you have, can you ask Him to show you His love in ways that will speak to your soul?*

*Where have you imposed a standard on others that does not reflect the unconditional love of God? Is there a person or group you have judgementally written off, become calloused toward, or simply have given up on? Can you pray for them with the compassion of Jesus, remembering no one is beyond God's salvation, grace, and mercy in Christ, and your Father loves them dearly?*

### **Prayer**

*Father, help me have a proper view of myself. Help me never to become self-righteous. Instead, I pray I would walk in humility and compassion, that I would never forget that it's by Christ alone I'm saved, and it's in Christ alone that my worth, inheritance, right standing, righteousness, hope, and confidence are found. Deliver me from any traps of the enemy that tempt me to put faith in my efforts to earn your love in any way, instead of resting in Your love and trusting You. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 21 – March 13**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, show me the surpassing worth of knowing You.*

*Holy Spirit, I want to know Christ, to desire Him above all else, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, to become like Him in His death and resurrection. I can't even truly want these things without You transforming my heart and my desires. Please help me. Please speak to me through Your Word. Please love me to wholeness and give me what I need to follow Christ in all things. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 3:7-11***

### **Meaning and Worth By Danny Saavedra**

Everything in this life and world is meaningless and worthless apart from a relationship with Jesus.

In this passage, Paul explains when he came to Christ, the things he saw as valuable were worthless. All of those advantages he had, as far as accolades, accomplishments, possessions, morality, and religion were concerned, were empty and meaningless. Even deeper, the Greek word for loss more accurately describes these things as being damaging. He now realizes what he once considered good, meaningful, and fulfilling was doing him harm.

Whether it's the work of religion, secular humanistic morality, pleasure-seeking, or living our best life, these things will never bring wholeness, satisfaction, purpose, or meaning. Instead, they'll produce an endless, fruitless pursuit of a purpose that will never come and often leaves us feeling even emptier than we did before, which will lead to an even deeper feeling of purposelessness and hopelessness and keep us so busy in our pursuit that we drift further and further away from the simple truth that wholeness, identity, joy, hope, and purpose are found in knowing God and enjoying Him forever.

Everything we could ever hope to have, do, or gain in this world pales in comparison to the eternal, priceless, immeasurable gain that it is to know Jesus, be known by Jesus, and make Jesus known! Paul continues by saying he counts all the most valuable things in human existence as worthless compared to knowing Jesus, "for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8 NKJV).

When Paul tells us all the riches and glorious things of this world are rubbish compared to Christ, he speaks from experience because he had it all and lost it all for the sake of Christ. He lost his wealth, status, title, old friends, nice house, family, health, and freedom. But he still rejoices because he has Jesus.

He finishes this thought by saying, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Did you know that we must first know the cross to experience the power of the resurrection? Jesus wasn’t resurrected until after He first went to the cross. Paul is telling us the resurrected life always follows the crucified life.

We should all want to know the power of the resurrection because we all want heaven, but we must recognize and embrace that to experience resurrection, we must first die to our old selves. When we do, when we die to our sinfulness and selfishness and surrender to Jesus, we will see how worthless it all is compared to knowing and being found in Christ. In this, we can rejoice in any and all things because even if we have nothing else, when we have Christ, we have EVERYTHING! Not because of our net worth or worthiness, but because of Jesus’ worth and the pricelessness of knowing Him and walking with Him.

## **Reflection**

*What did you once value that you now realise, like Paul, is loss and rubbish compared to knowing Jesus?*

*What are you still tempted to place value in as greater than or equal to knowing Jesus? What might be keeping you from knowing Christ in a deeper way?*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I know Your Word tells me everything is meaningless and worthless compared to and apart from knowing Christ Jesus. For the times when I place a higher value on the things of this world, on my desires, accomplishments, pleasure, or even my own merits to earn your favor and find purpose and meaning in life, I repent and ask You to forgive me. Keep my heart and mind aligned with the truth. Reshape my desires and worldview so I may always value You above all else. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back

to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 22 – March 14

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, help me press on.*

*Holy Spirit, I need Your help to take hold of, like Paul, that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Help me forget what is behind, let go of what is not meant to be part of my life and identity, the things I was tempted to value above knowing Christ, and to seek and run after Jesus. Help me know Your love and desire to be with You more than anything else. To the glory of God the Father. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 3:12-14***

### Pressing On Toward the Goal By Danny Saavedra

Have you ever had a goal? Maybe it's buying a house, being debt free, owning a business, getting married, having kids, or having a restaurant menu item named after you. I once heard it said, "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." Goals are important, essential even. They help to give us purpose.

In Philippians 3:8–11, the apostle Paul shares his life's goal with us: "to know Christ," to "be found in Him," and to experience "the power of His resurrection." His ultimate goal was to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

Here's the thing, though, to *know* Jesus is not the same as knowing about Jesus or knowing the content of His teaching. The Greek word used in this passage for *know* describes intimate, first-hand contact knowledge, similar to the language used to describe the intimacy between husbands and wives. It's personal, deep, and experiential; the kind of knowing that can only come through devotion and relationship.

We can experience the power of Christ's resurrection as we know Him. "That is . . . to experience the same power that raised Christ from the dead surging through [our] own being, overcoming sin in [our lives] and producing the Christian graces" (Kenneth Wuest). To know this resurrection power, though, we must first know the way of the cross and die to ourselves, forsaking our old life, self, and ways and surrendering to Christ and His will.

So, now that we understand the goal, what does Paul tell us about the process of achieving the goal? Well, he explains it's a lifelong process. This goal cannot be reached until we get to heaven. No matter how mature we become as believers, no matter how much fruit is produced in our lives, no matter how intimate our relationship with Jesus becomes, there will never come a point in our earthly lives when we have ARRIVED when we reach the point of completion and exhaust all room for deeper intimacy and greater growth in our relationship with Him.

I pray we never become complacent and satisfied with our level of depth in knowing Jesus because that place of complacency is so dangerous! It's where pride, self-righteousness, laziness, and legalism can take hold. It's a place of temptation that will always result in a fall. Instead, may we follow Paul's example and press on "toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus." And what's the prize? It's Jesus Himself—eternity with Him in His presence! He's our great reward!

So, what should our goal be? What should we press on toward? Here's a simple daily goal: Today, I will know Jesus better than I did yesterday. Today, I will walk with Jesus a little closer than yesterday. Today, I will look a little more like Jesus than I did yesterday. Repeat this until He calls you heavenward.

## Reflection

*In what ways do you desire to know Christ and His resurrection power better in your life?*

*What in you and in your life needs to know the cross – dying to your old self, old ways of living – so that you can know the resurrection life of Jesus?*

*Consider some simple, daily spiritual practices that would help you press on to that goal of knowing Jesus: 5-10 minutes of silence in God’s presence letting Him love you, daily prayer at a particular point in your day, a time of gratitude and praise in the evenings, Scripture memorization, Bible study, time in nature contemplating God, etc. Is Jesus inviting you to start exploring a simple daily practice of being with Him?*

## **Prayer**

*Father, I pray the words of Paul today. I pray I may “gain Christ and be found in him,” that I may “know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.” I pray this may become a more tangible reality in my life every day. I pray by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit that I may never become complacent or satisfied with the level of fellowship and intimacy I have with Jesus. I pray that daily, You would draw me deeper into relationship, enable me to experience the power of the resurrection to overcome the power and presence of sin in my life, and make me more like Jesus! Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 23 – March 16

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *God, make Your will clear to me.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul. I want to continue to grow, to mature, to become like Christ. Guide me and teach me to rely on You, that I may know Christ and reflect His glory. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 3:15-16*

### **Unified Identity and Purpose By Samantha Rodriguez**

Let's start today by thinking about the theater. Perhaps you went as a kid to see a live play in the theater, have been to Broadway, or have seen a sweet and simple show at your local school. Whatever the case, it's understood that in a theatrical performance, there's a unified purpose amongst the people to perform excellently and tell their story well. To do this, everyone must take on different roles. There are different acting roles within the actual show, and there are even different roles in who manages the stage, runs production, or makes the set and costumes. Each is important to the show's success, and each is united by one purpose.

When we think about this, we can better understand what Paul was trying to say as he reminds the people in Philippi that everyone can agree, "whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7 NIV). This is what unites them: their purpose is to know God more and therefore make Him known, to reach maturity in the faith. What does that look like? The Greek word for mature is *teleioi*, which means "fully-grown; complete in all its parts; mature from going through the necessary stages to reach the goal."

Now, he's not saying mature people are perfect or sinless. Instead, he's saying they will live in a way that's "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27 NIV), be "one in spirit and of one mind," and "in humility value others above [themselves]" (Philippians 2:1–4 (NIV), work out their salvation (Philippians

2:12), see things the world values as “loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:8 NIV), and know they hadn’t yet arrived and needed to continue to “press on toward the goal” (Philippians 3:14 NIV).

Nonetheless, he addresses there will be differences in opinion on other issues. His encouragement in this is simple yet profound. We must allow God to make it clear for us. We must intentionally listen to His Spirit and seek understanding in His Word, yet we must also cling to what we know to be true.

The essence of our faith is the gospel, our need for a Savior (Jesus Christ our Messiah; our amazing, triune God), and the necessity of receiving His gift of salvation and surrendering our lives to Him forever. When we can uplift the essential doctrine and values of our faith, the secondary beliefs that vary between Christians can be entrusted to the Lord to work out.

Suppose we allow the enemy to succeed in distracting, hindering, or tripping us up over the smaller issues we disagree over. In that case, we are allowing him to sow disunity from within the body of Christ. We must stand firm on our foundation and cornerstone, which is Jesus Himself and the truth of His Word and continually go back to that as a reminder of who we are and what we are to do on this earth.

## **Reflection**

*Have you allowed or seen the enemy sow disunity within the body of Christ because of certain disagreements or frustrations he focused you on?*

*When others do not agree with your convictions, do you tend to get anxious and try to convince them? Or are you learning to live in the tension and trust God to reveal truth to them in His time?*

*What is essential to the Christian faith and what is of secondary importance? (if you aren’t sure, take a few minutes to do some research or speak with a trusted spiritual mentor). What does it look like to have unity around the things of Jesus and what is essential to the Christian faith?*

## **Prayer**

*Precious Father, thank You for Your grace on me in the midst of my imperfection. As I seek to honor You in the way I work with others as a unified body of Christ, may You grant me wisdom and persistence so I can discuss topics by going to Your truth and in patience and love for other believers. May I*

*be firm on Your foundation and the core of my faith to stand united with You. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 24 – March 17**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, help me embrace the cross and trust You.*

*Holy Spirit, please work in me so I desire the way of the cross, so that I seek Jesus and His resurrection life, and not any insufficient substitutes. Please show me what Jesus is like, so I can recognise Him in others and know when it is good and wise to follow their example. Please love me and teach me to love like Christ. May all of me glorify the Father. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 3:17-18***

### **Keeping Track By Jimmy Purchase**

We're through most of 2022, and I think it's time for some introspection. So far this year, are you looking more like Jesus or less? If the answer is less, maybe it's time for a change.

In this passage, Paul challenges the Philippians to model their lives after faithful Christians. There is no shortage of people to imitate, but not everyone follows Jesus. These “enemies of the cross” have chosen to have their lives shaped by something or someone else. Paul’s challenge to the Philippians is a challenge for us, too. Who are we imitating? What are we imitating?

The culture around us is constantly begging for our attention—and culture is never passive. Jon Tyson points out that culture seeks to lead us from faith to doubt, from community to isolation, from rest to exhaustion, and from generosity to selfishness.

Every Sunday morning, I get a notification on my phone called “Screen Time.” My iPhone keeps track of how much time I’ve spent on my phone that week, which apps I spent the most time on (spoiler alert: it’s Instagram & Kindle), and how this week’s screen time compares to the previous week. Last week, I spent six hours on my phone. Six whole hours! I don’t think I’m alone in this terrible screen time vortex. In today’s world, our devices tend to shape us. All the latest news, stock info, crypto updates, likes and comments on our photos, important text messages, and (of course) memes are all just one swipe away.

Ironically, my Screen Time notification pops up when I’m at a church service. It’s a sobering weekly reminder of how things rob our attention from the One who should ultimately get ALL of our attention and affection. If Jesus has captivated our hearts, then we shouldn’t be shaping our lives after our news updates, likes and comments, or negative people around us. We ought to be shaping our lives after the life and mission of Jesus.

The hard truth: We’re all formed by *something*. I’ve heard it said, “We resemble what we worship, either for ruin or restoration.” For some of us, we’re imitating too much of what we see on our devices. Could it be that devouring fear-filled news has caused you to have a spirit of fear? Maybe too much social media makes you feel like you’re missing out—and the FOMO is unbearable. You may even have a close friend or co-worker negatively influencing your life.

In today’s passage, Paul says, “Show me where you invest your time, and I’ll show you your future.” We all tend to be a product of our habits and environment. Who or what are you spending time with? Is it bringing you closer to Jesus?

Don’t believe in the myth of neutrality, as there are no neutral parts of your life. Every second of every day is contested space. If we’re not careful, someone or

something will shape us into something else rather than the image of Jesus. Paul's challenge to the Philippians shows us that it's important to actively monitor the influences in our lives and keep track of who we're becoming.

## **Reflection**

*What gets the bulk of your attention currently? Who do you spend your time with?*

*Sit with the Holy Spirit and ask Him to show you, what are each of these things and people doing to your soul? Are they shaping you in ways that bring you toward Christlikeness? Or distract you from Him?*

*Does giving these things up in any way cause you to feel anxiety or resistance internally, perhaps pointing to it having too much of a hold on your heart? Has a 'good thing' become an 'ultimate thing'?*

*Prayerfully, what changes or limits is the Holy Spirit calling you to make with these things? If there is anything mal-forming your soul, can you consider replacing it with what will feed and form your soul, help your mind and body rest, etc.*

## **Prayer**

*Lord, today I want to surrender all of my attention and my desires. I want You to have my whole heart. Holy Spirit, reveal to me the person or thing that gets in the way of my relationship with You, Lord. Forgive me for the good things I have made into ultimate things. Forgive me for the times I've placed my faith and hope in people rather than in You. Thank you, Jesus, for loving me even though I'm too easily distracted by those around me. I surrender all to You. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul. When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 25 – March 18

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, conform me to Your glory.*

*Holy Spirit, I want my end to be eternal life with the Lord, I want You alone to be my God, I want Your glory above mine, and I want to be transformed so that I conform to the glory of Christ. Please grow these desires in me. Please guide me to pursue a daily life, that keeps these priorities. And please, by Your love and Your power and Your strength, give me what I need to walk with You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 3:19-21***

## Quite the Contrast By Pastor Dan Hickling

When reading God's Word, we see an undeniable theme from one end to the other. There's a pattern presented to us where two points are compared against each other to present a powerful contrast. For example, we see hate contrasted with love, sin contrasted with holiness, evil contrasted with good, and on and on and on. Such contrasts are intended to instruct, teach, and show us the nature of our natural selves and the supernatural nature of God. Contrast clarifies the difference between who we are in our fallen state and who God is in all of His perfections.

We're presented with one of these contrasts in this passage, as Paul compares two types of people with two different life perspectives. First, he references those "whose end is destruction," which we can all agree isn't good! These are the "enemies of the cross" that Paul introduces in Philippians 3:18. As he continues to describe the qualities of these people, he ends on an interesting note by stating they "set their mind on earthly things." The word "earthly" serves as a summary of the first category of people. They're all about this world, this planet, and what's in it. As far as they're concerned, this is where all substance and satisfaction are found, and life is dedicated to all things earthly, but even in the best-case scenario, it all ends here and goes no further.

In contrast, Paul introduces another category of people, those who aren't earthly but whose "citizenship is in heaven." This is a complete reversal of the previous perspective! Instead of being the "be all, end all," the earth and everything in it are just a means to another and a greater end. This world isn't the destination but rather the corridor or walkway that leads to the place where true substance and satisfaction is found . . . heaven! For Jesus is in heaven at this point, not on earth. Consequently, those who've surrendered their lives to Him also look beyond the earthly towards the heavenly and its realities. And one of those realities is the earthly body that everyone is well acquainted with will be transformed into an eternally glorious body.

That's quite the contrast! The earthly and the heavenly mindsets couldn't be farther apart. One reflects humanity's fallen and finite state, and the other reflects God's eternal glory. This begs the questions: Which perspective do we subscribe to? Do we derive our purpose from what this world can offer us, or are we motivated by the eternal things that lay beyond? Are we earthly, or are we heavenly?

God gives us the option of making our decision based on whether we reject or receive what He has done for us through His Son, Jesus. If we're totally honest, it's not a difficult decision to make.

## **Reflection**

*Does your life, where you spend your time, attention, resources, reflect an earthly or a heavenly mindset?*

*Are you deriving your purpose from what this world can offer you? Or are you motivated by eternal things that lay beyond, what Paul mentions in this passage?*

*Jesus makes it clear there is a cost to following Him, that we will have to lay down the things of the world, die to ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. We must also remember it costs us far more to not follow Jesus. Take some time with the Holy Spirit to prayerfully consider, with any of the things of the world that you are struggling to lay down (and we all struggle from time to time), what is it costing you to keep those things? What goodness, freedom, love of God, genuine satisfaction in Jesus, resurrection power, etc. is being sacrificed for lesser things?*

## Prayer

Lord, I can easily get off focus as I walk through this world. Help me focus my life on the eternal more than the earthly. Give me the perspective I need to faithfully follow You as You use my life in the here and now for Your glory. Show me where I am distracted and teach me to keep my eyes fixed on You, to abide in Your love and know from experience it genuinely is better than anything else. Amen.

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 26 – March 19

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Dear Jesus, help me stand fast in You.*

*Holy Spirit, I need Your strength and guidance today. Please help me and lead me. I surrender myself to Your love and care. Speak to me through Your Word and show me what is truly in my heart that does not match the will of the Father, so I may lay it down, follow Jesus, and glorify God. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 4:1-2***

## The Word Works By Pastor Dan Hickling

It's been said, "The Bible isn't just cake for special occasions, but bread for daily living." The point is that God's Word isn't something just to be brought out every so often when something momentous happens. Instead, it's to be used daily in and out in the deepest trenches of our struggles, pressures, and conflicts. Unless we see this, we won't apply Scripture as we're meant to, nor will we experience its power when we need it most. We need to understand that the Word works in real life, even in those things we might be tempted to sweep under the rug. But if we trust in its power and put it into practice as occasions arise, we'll see spiritual victories where there's only been defeat.

We get a great example here as Paul continues his epistle to the Philippian church. Based on our reading above, two women were well known within the church and to the apostle. Their names were Euodia and Syntyche, and it's clear from Paul's plea that they were "of the same mind in the Lord" because they were notoriously at odds with one another. We don't know the cause of their disagreement, but we do know it was "out there" in a way that was damaging their reputations as Christians who should be known for their harmony and peace with one another.

Whatever the issue was, Paul considered it important enough to reference it publicly, and here's where we see the power of applying God's Word in our daily lives. Paul has been penning some universal truths—deep doctrinal waters—in this letter. Yet, he sees fit to stop and call Euodia and Syntyche out on their bad attitudes and implore them to start thinking as the Lord does instead. Just like that, they were woven into God's Word in a manner that's as practical and true to life as you can get!

But again, that's the beauty of the Bible. It isn't just about lofty theological concepts. It's also about telling two sisters to stop fighting and to come together the way Jesus would want them to. That's how the Word works. It tells us what we need to hear and what we need to do in our daily grind so we can grow more like Jesus. Because in all actuality, if that's not happening, what else matters? God's goal in giving us His Word isn't an enlightened intellect but a transformed character—and we can rest assured that Euodia and Syntyche were transformed due to this.

Allow God's Word to affect you the same way. Ask the Holy Spirit to use it to convict and challenge you personally. Recognize that your heart needs a lot of work, and the Word works to make us more and more like the Master.

## Reflection

*Take some time to re-read what we've meditated on so far, and even your journaled reflections. Are there any ways in which you feel convicted by the Holy Spirit?*

*Recognise these as invitations to repentance, to turn away from what is harming you and keeping you from abundant life in Christ, and to turn to the One who calls you Beloved. Respond in repentance, receive forgiveness from Christ, and let God love you.*

*What are some concrete steps you can take this week to apply what God has been speaking to you? Make a plan. Invite accountability by telling a trusted believer and asking them to pray for you. Practice walking in obedience.*

## Prayer

*Father, thank You for not abandoning me but always pursuing me and drawing me from what harms me and into Your love. Jesus, thank You for being such a practical Savior. You don't give me theories, but You give me precisely what I need to change and grow into Your image and likeness. Keep me ever mindful of my need for You and complete the good work that You've begun in me by the power of Your Word. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 27 – March 20

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, I rejoice in You.*

*Holy Spirit, teach me to rejoice in the Lord, to enjoy Your presence in all circumstances, and to know that You are truly always with me. Reveal to me the joy of knowing Christ more deeply and the joy of being loved by the Father and the joy of being led, taught, and comforted by You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 4:4-5*

### Always? By Pastor Dan Hickling

When you pull back and view *Philippians* in its entirety, you find it can be boiled down to one single word: rejoice. If there's an over-arching theme for this epistle, it's finding joy and rejoicing despite one's circumstances. So, the call to rejoice in the Lord is a sort of *CliffNotes* version of the Book of *Philippians*.

If you're a normal, reasoning human being, you're probably calling a "time out" as you read this passage. If you're like me, you may think, "Okay, I get the importance of rejoicing, but not everything in life is joyful or fun. So, isn't it just setting someone up for failure to expect them to rejoice at all times?"

I've thought these same words, and chances are you have, too. Deep down, we know neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit who's inspiring him is setting us up for failure, but what can we make of what's communicated here? How are we supposed to rejoice always?

The answer lies in the three words connecting "rejoice" and "always," as the reconciliation of this apparent dilemma resides "in the Lord." Apart from the Lord, it's impossible to find joy in every circumstance. But in Him, all of that changes in two distinct ways.

First, we can always rejoice in the Lord when He is our object. The Lord is who He is, and He's beyond any earthly description on our part to fully define Him.

We use words like loving, patient, merciful, awesome, glorious, and so on to convey a sense of His character. Still, in reality, He's more wonderful than we can articulate or comprehend. He will *always* be this way! He doesn't have ups or downs, nor does He waver in any way, which means no matter what we experience in this life, there's always a basis for rejoicing in who the Lord is.

Secondly, we can always rejoice in the Lord when He is our resource. Once we are in a relationship with the Lord by faith, we instantly possess an inheritance of spiritual riches greater than all worldly wealth (Ephesians 1:3). In the Lord, we have a spiritual account that he eternally resources and is independent of earthly factors! We need peace, and we have sufficient funds! We need wisdom, and we have sufficient funds! We need compassion, and we have sufficient funds! We need joy, and guess what, we have sufficient funds! The Lord, Himself, supplies all our spiritual needs (including joy), and we draw from these resources by simply asking God to fill us with them, which He does through His Holy Spirit.

Rejoicing isn't contingent on what's happening to us in this world. It's far greater than that! As you go through life, remember that rejoicing is based on who the Lord is and what He provides for us in Him.

## **Reflection**

*What would it look like to rejoice in the Lord at all times? Can you imagine it? Sometimes we struggle because, let us be completely honest, we do not enjoy the Lord. We do not know how to enjoy Him. If this is you (because it is certainly me), take time to honestly talk to God about this and ask Him to help you and teach you to enjoy being with Him, to taste and see that He is good, to discover how He truly can satisfy the deep needs of your soul.*

*When has it been easy to rejoice in the Lord? Thank God for these times.*

*Where is it hard to rejoice in the Lord? Ask for His help in these times of testing from the inheritance of spiritual riches you have in Christ.*

## **Prayer**

Lord, I choose to fix my focus, not on the things of this world that are happening all around me, but on who You are and on all You have provided for me in You. Help me maintain this perspective and not get distracted by the things that would move me from rejoicing always. In all things, in every

circumstance, help me to know You are with me and to enjoy Your presence. Show me Your beauty and faithfulness, Lord. Amen.

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 28 – March 21**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *God, guard my heart and mind with Your peace.*

*Holy Spirit, help me to recognise where I am anxious and to practice bringing everything to You by prayer and supplication. Thank You for Your goodness, Your mercy, Your faithfulness, Your care, Your provision, and Your love. Please give me Your peace that surpasses all understanding and guard my heart and mind. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 4:6-7***

### **The Power Combo Against Anxiety By Mirely Maldonado**

Sometimes in life, we feel like the rug has been pulled out from under us, and we wonder how we will make it. While Paul was imprisoned, these words he wrote to the Philippian congregation have helped many throughout the years

remember where their help comes from at all times—especially in times of uncertainty.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines anxiety medically as

*an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.*

Did you see some keywords there? Fear, doubt, threat, self-doubt, cope, etc. Anxiety seems to surface mainly by fear of the unknown(s), and unless you are the Lord Most High, there have been, are, and will be “unknowns” in your life.

In today’s passage, Paul tells us we’re to be anxious about nothing, but Paul, a mere human like us, knows this is not always possible in our flesh. If we look around today, we can see this is especially true in societies like ours, where we’ve become more isolated, less community-oriented, we don’t like to inconvenience others, we want things to be solved instantly, and we like to have all sorts of safety nets and backups or “just in case” items, etc. Yet, we’re given a unique, set apart, and faith-filled way of handling our anxiety: give our requests to God and bring them to Him through prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving!

Thanksgiving or gratitude changes us from the inside out. It is spiritually powerful, as it reminds us of God’s care and faithfulness, and it’s also physically powerful. Neuroscience proves it rewires our brain, which in turn helps our thoughts, attitudes, and responses. Paul knew thankfulness was key to living surrendered to the Lord, as he would mention it in combination with prayer in several of his letters (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:3; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; 1 Timothy 2:1).

In these turbulent times of division, pestilences, wars, rumors of wars, and all the many other “unknowns” and “what ifs” of this world, we’re reminded we’re not in control. But we can know the One who is—and He wants us to cast *all* our anxieties on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)!

## Reflection

*What ‘unknown’ brings you anxious thoughts when it comes to mind? Where are you tempted to take control and try to protect yourself? Name each of these and give them to God, trusting in His care for you.*

*What has God provided you today that you can thank Him for? Try to name ten things – remember, everything is gift. Then name ten things from this past week. And another ten from this past season. Trace the faithfulness and care of the God who loves you, and next time anxious thoughts come up you can remind yourself with tangible evidence that your God loves you.*

### **Prayer**

Father, in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, I come to you and surrender control. Please help me when I want to take control of things, and may Your Spirit remind me that You care for me and that Your way is best. Help me stay in that narrow way that leads to life. Thank You for Your faithfulness. Amen.

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 29 – March 23**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *God of peace, please me with me.*

*Holy Spirit, I specifically surrender my mind to You today. Help me and teach me to fix my mind on the things of You, that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy, by Your definitions. Help me to put into practice what You show me and follow You with whole-hearted obedience. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 4:8-9*

### Peace In Practice By Danny Saavedra

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension.” Sadly, we often settle for the absence of outward tension even as an all-out war takes place within. This is not what God desires for us and not what we’re created for.

As Paul wraps up his letter, he reminds the Philippians of an essential aspect of God’s character: He’s “the God of peace.” In Greek, the word for peace is *eirēnēs*. It describes wholeness, health, and harmony “when all essential parts are joined together” (HELPS Word Study). Think of it like a beautiful puzzle or Lego set where all the pieces are in their proper place.

This is who God is and what God gifts to those who are in Christ. This is why Christian peace is unique from anything the world has to offer; it’s “the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

So, how do we “stand firm in the Lord” (*Philippians 4:1 NIV*) and walk in this peace that “will guard [our] hearts and [our] minds in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 4:7 NIV*)? Paul provides a three-fold strategy for experiencing the peace of God:

- 1) Prayer and thanksgiving
- 2) Biblical meditation
- 3) Discipleship

Yesterday, we covered prayer. Today’s passage covers meditation when Paul says to “think about such things.” The word there is *logizesthe*, which means “to reckon inwardly, weigh, deliberate.” Paul encourages us to meditate on, reflect deeply, and deliberate on all that’s true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtue, and praiseworthy.

Guess what? These things can only be found in Jesus and His Word. In Jesus, we’re set free by the truth (John 8:32, 14:6), we see incomparable nobility and honor (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 25:31–40; James 2:7), righteousness, and justness (Isaiah 46:13; John 5:30; Romans 3:22, 10:4), purity and perfection (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:19, 2:22), we discover the true source of all the loveliness and affection (Matthew 9:36, 11:28–30, 14:14, 15:32; Luke 7:13;

John 10:1–18; Romans 5:5–8; Hebrews 2:17), and experience all the excellence and grace of God Almighty (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26). These qualities of Christ can only be seen and experienced through a relationship with Him and understood through the devotion to His Word.

Now watch this: The best way to learn how to put everything that Paul spent four chapters teaching them and us is through discipleship and imitation within the context of the Christian community. It's vital for us to find someone like Paul in our lives, someone whom we can apply this passage: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV). Find someone who exemplifies what it means, looks like and sounds like to follow Christ; someone who reflects Jesus.

Friends, peace is available to all of us who are in Christ. It's found in an intimate relationship with Him and His people, walking with Jesus, knowing Him deeply, and living amongst His people.

## **Reflection**

*Are you connected to a mature believer who can help you follow Jesus? Are you connected with a small group, a community of believers, where you can seek and follow Jesus together?*

*If you are not connected, please prayerfully consider opportunities to get connected – God puts us deliberately in church families, it is the enemy who wants us isolated. Visit [brookswoodbaptist.com/discipleship](http://brookswoodbaptist.com/discipleship) to begin exploring the opportunities to connect with other believers, or contact [discipleship@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:discipleship@brookswoodbaptist.com) or [sean@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:sean@brookswoodbaptist.com) or [reuben@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:reuben@brookswoodbaptist.com) to be connected with our ministry staff who will help you find opportunities to join meaningful fellowship as you follow Christ together. We are here to serve you and eager to know and support you, truly.*

*Where do your thoughts tend to turn to 'unlovely' things? Is this caused/triggered by anything in particular? Take time to pray and surrender these thoughts to God, and ask for His help in turning your mind toward meditating on what is good.*

*What are some of the things you enjoy thinking about that fit into Paul's description of what we should set our minds on? What are some favourite Scriptures that you could commit to memory, or favourite songs or memories,*

*that you could ‘keep in your back pocket’ for when you need to turn your mind to what is lovely?*

### **Prayer**

*Father, I ask for Your peace to guard and surround me in Christ Jesus. Keep me centered upon Your truth, Your Word, and Your character. Help me find and stay deeply connected with a church family that can help me follow You, know You, and love You. May I continually meditate on You and seek intimacy and closeness to You in all things. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 30 – March 24**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord, lead me to contentment in You.*

*Holy Spirit, thank You for all the ways You have cared for me. Thank You for Your perfect and unconditional love. Please grow contentment in me, helping me to trust and rest in You. Jesus, help me know You as my Shepherd who gives me everything I need. In Jesus’ Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 4:10-11***

## **Not About the Money By Pastor Dan Hickling**

As Paul brings his letter to a close, he acknowledges the Philippians had cared for him while he was held as a prisoner of Rome. Earlier in the epistle, we learned this church had taken up an offering on his behalf and sent it off to him with one of their members named Epaphroditus, who stayed to help take care of Paul's needs (Philippians 2:25–30). Before closing, Paul wanted them to know their generosity towards him brought him great joy.

Paul immediately clarifies that his joy wasn't over the actual gift they gave. He will tell them why their offering blessed him in just a few verses. With all of the abuses of spiritual authority Paul had seen over the years, he wanted to make it very clear that it wasn't about the money because he had come to a place in life where he had learned to be perfectly content.

To be “content” is to be completely at peace with one’s substance. Perhaps the best way of understanding it is by considering its opposite, covetousness. We all know the deep desire to possess something we don’t already have. It occupies our thoughts and has the power to influence our actions. How many bad decisions have we made with covetousness in the driver’s seat of our soul? Contentment is total freedom from that, enabling Paul to faithfully serve the Lord without abusing his authority or manipulating others into giving what they shouldn’t.

We should all want to know how Paul learned this state of contentment because we should all want to live in the same state of freedom. How did he do it?

Most of Paul’s life (and ours) is learning to let go and live open-handedly before God. Over time, Paul realized he wasn’t in control of things as he thought. God was in control, and he learned to release his life and entrust himself into the Lord’s hands. Each day became an exercise in living with an open-handed attitude, knowing that whatever God chose to put in his hands was to be received and used to serve and glorify Him. If that meant an abundance, it was to be used to the Lord’s glory. If that meant nothing, it was to be used to the Lord’s glory. With this open-handed attitude, it wasn’t about the actual substance but the stewardship of the substance that mattered. It wasn’t about the money; it was about the Master!

Can the same be said of us? Do we wake up each morning with open hands, willing to receive and steward whatever the Lord chooses to place in them for His glory? Or are we under the curse of covetousness, constantly driven by desires that are never satisfied? Lord helps us to learn and live as Paul did.

## Reflection

*Do you practice starting your morning with open hands before God, willing to receive and steward whatever the Lord chooses to place in them for His glory? Consider adding this as a daily prayer practice.*

*Pete Scazzero said that “The Christian life is not about grasping, but receiving.” Where do you find yourself tending or being tempted to grasp, cling, chase, pursue, covet? Are these your true needs, or are there deeper unmet needs underlying these tendencies and temptations?*

*Where do you need to ask Jesus for His help in loosening your grip? What unmet needs can you bring to the Father today, knowing He yearns to be gracious to you and loves to supply all your needs?*

## Prayer

*Father, I confess I’m often driven through this life by covetousness. Please help and free me from this way of life by seeing my life as a channel to glorify You. May I know contentment as I live with open hands and as a steward of the blessings, You give to me, regardless of how much or how little. Let me find peace in using it for Your sake. Help me release all anxiety and grasping, and rest in You, learning to receive the goodness and love You have for me. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 31 – March 25

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Loosen my grip, Jesus.*

*Holy Spirit, thank You for Your love – help me to know Your love better. Thank You for Your strength and provision – help me to rely on You more. Thank You for all the blessings You pour out on me – help me to recognise everything as gift and truly receive, open, and use those gifts. Surely the Lord is good to me. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 4:12*

### **The Secret Formula By Danny Saavedra**

“You’re in such good shape.”

“You’ve been happily married for 50 years.”

“Tom Brady, you’ve been playing at a high level for 20 years.”

*What’s your secret?*

We ask these questions because staying in shape is hard, marriage is hard, and being at the top of our field for two decades is hard. We’re hoping there’s an easy solution, formula, or habit that will enable us to find the same level of success as those we believe have it all figured out.

In today’s passage, Paul tells us he’s found such a secret: to live with contentment “in any and every situation.” He’s discovered how to be always content, whether full or hungry, healthy or sick, rich or poor, a free man or a prisoner chained to a Roman soldier. Isn’t that amazing?

What Paul is saying here seems downright impossible. It’s an age-old struggle for humanity that goes back to the Garden of Eden.

You see, Adam and Eve were to stay away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warned them if they ate of this tree, they would die, but the serpent tempted them, telling them if they ate from this tree, they’d be like God! Man’s covetousness then took over, as they wanted something they

believed they didn't have. At this moment, their pride and selfishness led to discontentment with all the Lord had given them. In turn, they lost sight of the infinite number of fruit-filled trees because the one tree they were prohibited from eating suddenly looked "good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom" (Genesis 3:6 NIV). They became discontent with God's amazing and abundant blessings and decided to disobey Him, and for what? Because they believed by disobeying God and eating from this tree, they would become *like* God. Want to know the worst part? They already **WERE** like God. They were made in His image and likeness.

This is and has been a major struggle for humanity, but Paul learned to be content in the Lord and live with joy regardless of his circumstances. When Paul struggled with a thorn in his flesh, he asked the Lord to remove it, but the Lord said no, saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." In response, Paul said,

*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9–10 NIV).*

The lesson Paul conveys here is that whether we have nothing to our name or we have an embarrassment of riches, God's grace alone is what satisfies and suffices. It should be more than enough for us to experience joy, peace, and contentment. Even if we have nothing, we have everything because His grace is sufficient!

Tomorrow we'll go deeper into Paul's secret.

## **Reflection**

*Where have you been (or are) tempted to try to 'bless yourself' instead of seeking and waiting for God's blessing?*

*What are all the things you think you need today? Speak to God about these things, surrendering all of them to Him. Notice if there are needs you hesitate to bring to Him – trust that He loves you and wants you to bring your requests.*

*Of the things you lack, do you find yourself putting off feeling content and taking joy in the Lord, enjoying the season you are in, allowing yourself to rest, etc. until you have any of those things?*

*Are those things worthy of you putting off contentment, joy, and rest? Can you practice trusting that God can truly bless you apart from those things?*

### **Prayer**

*Father, I praise You in my weaknesses for the insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties. I praise You in richness or poverty, fullness or hunger, abundance or scarcity for the power of Christ that is made perfect in these things, for how Your glory, power, and goodness are displayed and magnified in them. I thank You for Your grace that is sufficient. I thank You that even when I have nothing, I have everything because I have and am found in You! Help me never lose sight of this, dear Lord. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 32 – March 26**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Christ, give me strength.*

*Holy Spirit, please transform me so I rely completely on You. Show me where I am relying on my own strength, and teach me how to rely on You instead. Help me to remember that You do not desire independence from me, but childlike faith that always trusts. Lord, I do believe. Help my unbelief. In Jesus' Name, I*

pray. Amen. ***Understanding, strength to grasp, allow transform to convic, repent, heal, restore, rebuild, walk in it, wisdom, abound in love, etc.***

**Read: Philippians 4:13**

### **Strength and Endurance By Danny Saavedra**

*What's your secret?*

In today's verse, Paul outright tells us the secret of contentment and joy-filled living for free. Before we learn the secret, what does it mean to be content (*autarkēs*)? It's complete satisfaction, a feeling of sufficiency and wholeness. It's content with life because of our relationship with God. It's a feeling of self-sufficiency that is entirely supplied and produced by God through the indwelling power of Christ.

So, what's the secret? "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Few verses in all of Scripture are more commonly misunderstood than this one. As hard as this is to believe, Philippians 4:13 isn't about God helping you win a sports game, get a promotion, build a successful business, or buy a Ferrari. It's about something much more important and essential to life, particularly the Christian life! This commonly quoted verse can be more accurately described this way: Through Christ, I have the strength to endure in all things.

Essentially, we can endure or bear anything that has come and will come our way through the strength Christ provides. The Lord's supernatural power makes us immovable objects in the face of any irresistible forces to achieve what the Lord wills and purposes for us. It's a *combative, confrontive* force to endure and accomplish all He gives us faith for. So, in every way, faith and strength go hand-in-hand.

All faith and strength to endure and walk in His purposes and plan, even in suffering and trials, and to do so with satisfaction, peace, and joy—is built entirely upon God's love for us! Where do we see this? Romans 8:35–39 (NIV) says,

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the*

*present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Friends, the truth is we see the opposite of what Paul is talking about everywhere, every day, all around us. We see people who aren't satisfied, who have so much and yet feel empty and lost, who fall apart when life doesn't live up to expectations. It doesn't have to be this way for them or you! As believers, we have the Spirit of God living in us, and in Him, we are made whole, full, satisfied, have peace, and joy, are filled with faith, and built up with supernatural strength to not only endure but overcome everything this world can throw our way. We can show those who don't yet know Jesus the way to a life of contentment here and now and eternal glory to come!

## **Reflection**

*Where do you tend to rely on yourself, your own willpower and giftings, instead of on God? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see where this is happening and why. Do you feel guilty, ashamed, anxious, or uncomfortable relying on God's strength? Are you unsure how to rely on His strength, receive from Him? Or something else?*

*What would it look like to instead rely on His strength, and relax in Jesus? Can you surrender those areas to Him and ask for His strength instead?*

*The strength of Philippians 4:13 comes from a relationship with Jesus, from walking with Him and knowing Him deeply. What steps can you take to intentionally spend more time with Him this season and deepen your relationship? What spiritual practices now, or in the past, have helped you draw strength from Christ?*

## **Prayer**

*Father, You are my strength, my joy, my hope, my peace, and my salvation. In Your love, I am whole, satisfied, and complete. All sufficiency and satisfaction come from the grace You pour out over me daily. Without You, I can endure nothing, and I can do nothing. I am nothing. Thank You, Jesus, for being my all in all, for revealing Yourself to me, and for the faith, You give me to walk with You in all things. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 33 – March 27

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Father, make me generous like You.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Speak to me through Your Word. Help me to know You, receive Your love, and be transformed according to the Father's good and perfect will. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

### Read: *Philippians 4:14-16*

### The Gift of Generosity By Danny Saavedra

There's such an interesting dynamic taking place throughout this 2,000-year-old letter. In Philippians 4:10 (NIV), Paul says, "I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me." He was thrilled to learn of their concern and worry for him and the generous financial gift to support him during his arrest as he awaited an audience with Caesar.

Honestly, who wouldn't be, right? If I was struggling and hungry, I'd be jumping for joy if a group of people I discipled sent me a big fat check. However, Paul's reason for rejoicing greatly wasn't the same as mine. In Philippians 4:17 (NIV),

he tells us, “Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account.”

Paul wasn’t rejoicing because they met his needs; he didn’t need anything other than Jesus to be content and joyful. Instead, he rejoiced because of what it said about the Philippians and their walk with Christ!

He told them they did well in being generous, not because he needed it, but because they were embracing and embodying the gospel. They made his affliction and trial their own. They sought to help Paul bear his burden (Galatians 6:2). They exemplified the apostle’s words from Acts 20:35 (NKJV), which says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” By giving Paul a generous, physical gift, the Philippians received the spiritual blessing that comes from fulfilling the heart of Christ. This shows us that godly giving does eternal, lasting good for the giver more than for the one who receives.

So, what can we learn from this? Around the biblical notion of generosity, we should embrace two things:

First, we’re never poorer for having been generous. When we give to others from a place of love and care, out of the overflow of our *relationship with Christ*, we embody Christ’s heart and the law of Christ. This sacrifice of generosity unto the Lord for the sake of others will yield beautiful spiritual and eternal blessings.

Second, we must be burden bearers and burdens sharers! Many are quick to resist or reject the generosity and help of others. Why? Sometimes out of pride—people think they don’t need anyone’s help or don’t want anyone to know they need help. Other times, because we don’t want to feel like a burden. We mustn’t think this way!

Life is hard. It’s full of difficult circumstances, trials, and tribulations, but the Lord promises to provide for all our needs, right? Well, sometimes He desires to make provision through the obedient generosity or tender care of others and vice versa! Thus, we must check our pride at the door and allow others to operate in obedience and overflow. We’re also blessing them by gladly receiving their help as Paul did!

As believers, we’re expected to be generous as Christ is, but also to welcome the generosity and care of others. When we do this, we allow them to follow Jesus’ example and fulfill His law of loving one another!

## Reflection

*When you give, does it tend to be from a place of love and care? A place of anxiety and, if we are really honest, control? A place of reluctance and obligation? Talk to God about where you feel you can give freely out of love and where other emotions and motives may be at work.*

*What has God given to you? Consider what you have in abundance, your time, your abilities, your experience, as well as resources.*

*Next, what needs and burdens are you seeing in the lives of those around you? Do any of those needs match what you have to give? Is God inviting you to share those burdens? Can you pray about those you cannot do anything about, trusting them to your loving Father?*

*What struggles are you currently burdened with? Find someone to share it with. Please don't keep it hidden. Allow others to bless you through their prayers and through whatever generosity the Lord puts on their hearts.*

## Prayer

*Father, You are the source of all love, care, and generosity. We love because You first loved us. We show generosity and compassion because You are so generous and compassionate toward us. Thank You for being so kind, merciful, generous, and loving, Lord. I pray You would help me walk in generosity. I pray Your Spirit would show me ways I can bless the people around me. I pray You would break any pride or feelings of unworthiness I have so I can receive the generosity of others, as You lead them to show it. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

# Day 34 – March 28

## Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Glory to my God and Father.*

*Holy Spirit, I offer myself to You, submitting to Your will, trusting You to lead and guide me. Transform me so I glorify the Father, as Jesus did and still does. Give me wisdom and discernment, and help me receive Your Word and Your love. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Read: *Philippians 4:17-20*

### My Gifts, Your Gifts By Mirely Maldonado

In his letter to the Philippian congregation, Paul gives thanks for the generosity of the Philippian believers who supported him financially at various times of need. He also mentions how he's learned to be content regardless of circumstances, whether to be in want or having more than enough, because he knows he can do all things through Him who gives him strength (Philippians 4:12–13). However, because the Philippians were thoughtful and mindful of tangible needs, they sent him gifts, which is a beautiful display of how the body of Christ is to work.

He calls these gifts “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” Hebrews 13:16 (NKJV) says, “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.” Proverbs 19:17 (ESV) says, “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.” And Jesus Himself said, “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:33–34). So, we can see our Lord is well pleased when we love one another (John 13:34), we bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), and we look to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).

Today’s passage reads, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” We can be generous and freely give

because we have the Lord Himself as our source for all things, and His resources are endless!

The Lord wants us to live in community with others. He has created us all with different strengths, talents, and gifts. Inevitably, we'll have times of need, and others will help us. Other times, we'll help others with their needs. Paul often referred to believers and followers of Christ as a body: "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:4–5 NKJV)

If you feel alone, ask the Lord to guide you where you can find and build a healthy community with others. If it doesn't happen quickly, stay strong and keep holding on, as some of the most beautiful things the Lord puts together take time. And if you're in need but don't like to ask for help, ask the Lord to help you take that step of faith! He meets us right where we are and brings the right people on our paths, all in His perfect timing, just as He did for Paul.

## **Reflection**

*What gifts or talents has God given you?*

*Seek out opportunities this week to use your gifts to serve others, whether a friend, a stranger, with a charity or community organization, or a ministry in the church. God has put you where you are for a reason! If you would like help discerning your gifts and finding opportunities to use them, please connect with us. [discipleship@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:discipleship@brookswoodbaptist.com), [sean@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:sean@brookswoodbaptist.com), [reuben@brookswoodbaptist.com](mailto:reuben@brookswoodbaptist.com)*

*Where are you building healthy community? How is God inviting you to press into this community more?*

*If you don't have a place to build healthy community currently, again we invite you to explore the opportunities at our church, via [BrookswoodBaptist.com/Discipleship](http://BrookswoodBaptist.com/Discipleship), or to contact us using any of the above emails. We would love to help you connect with others and build a community that loves well.*

## **Prayer**

*Father, in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, I come to you and ask that You lead me on when and where to serve others and have the humility to receive in*

*times of need. Help me be a cheerful giver, expecting nothing in return but the joy and satisfaction of obeying Your Word. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 35 – March 30**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Lord Jesus, let Your grace be with me.*

*Holy Spirit, please give me Your grace today as I seek You in Your Word, in prayer, and in practice. Thank You for Your transforming love, please fill me to overflowing. Heal the broken parts of me. Show me Your goodness and glory. Make me like Christ. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: *Philippians 4:21-23***

### **Always Emphasize Grace By Kristen Hollis**

Closing arguments always matter the most in a court setting. It allows the lawyers to remind the jury of the facts and the most important case information to make the right decision. Paul does something similar here at the close of his letter to the church of Philippi. He makes a point to emphasize brotherhood and the grace of God. This makes a lot of sense because who

better to speak on receiving the grace of God than a Christian hunter turned foundational spiritual leader?

What can we learn from Paul here? Always emphasize grace. We're listening to a man who had his life radically transformed by grace and wants the same for others. Paul's life mission just a few years before this was to hunt and kill Christians who were following and preaching the gospel. Then, because God decided to give Paul the gift of His grace, his life was radically transformed, and he became new. God's grace is a gift to all of us—and it is freely given, so we also are called to give it freely! Paul is reminding us that we have the opportunity to grow in spiritual strength and have our lives changed not because of our human accomplishments but because of the true source of grace in our lives through Jesus.

How can this transform how we live our lives? To emphasize grace is to put others before ourselves. This doesn't mean handing out a free pass to someone unwilling to accept accountability or repent. Still, it means we can grow better together by not holding wrongdoings and mess-ups over the heads of our brothers and sisters. Living a grace-filled life is to live a life rooted in humility. You wouldn't want your mistakes to define the trajectory of your life if you were repentant and seeking to change, would you?

Emphasizing grace can always change not only your life but the lives of those around you. By emphasizing grace in your workplace, you create a trust-filled environment. By raising your children with grace, you're teaching them compassion and setting a Christ-like example as they hopefully follow in your footsteps. So, friends, follow God and Paul's example and offer grace as freely as it has been given to you.

## **Reflection**

*When was the last time you were in a situation where you didn't show grace but should have? If you could go back and change how you approached it, how would you do it differently?*

*What makes it difficult for you to show grace to others? Are there particular people, circumstances, etc. that come to mind? Talk to God about these difficulties, and ask for His heart and His wisdom to show grace well.*

*Where do you need grace today? Where do you feel you have fallen short, made mistakes, had a history of failings, gone the wrong way, hurt others, hurt*

*yourself? Beloved, remember God's grace is always greater and whatever you confess to Him He will cover.*

### **Prayer**

*Lord, thank You for Your never-ending grace. It's not through my works but Your grace that I can be on this journey of sanctification. Please fill me with a grace-filled spirit so I may walk through life-giving grace as freely as You give. Amen.*

### **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 36 – March 31**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, teach me to trust in You.*

*Holy Spirit, I surrender to Your love and the work You want to do in my soul today. Teach me to abide in the Vine. Help me know You as my Guide, Teacher, and Comforter. Lead me to the Father. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: Matthew 20:17-19; Acts 2:22-24**

## **The Road to Jerusalem by Max Lucado**

The road from Jericho to Jerusalem was just fourteen miles. A half day's journey. Jesus is at the front of his band of disciples. A young soldier marching into battle.

As Jesus states his mission, forget any suggestion that he was trapped and made a miscalculation. Ignore any speculation that the cross was a last-ditch attempt to salvage a dying mission.

These words tell us that Jesus died . . . on purpose. No surprise. No hesitation. No faltering.

The way Jesus marched to his death leaves no doubt: he had come to earth for this moment. The journey to the cross had begun long before leaving Jericho. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden of Eden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.

Jesus stepped toward Jerusalem with the promise of God in his heart. The divinity of Christ assured the humanity of Christ, and Jesus spoke loud enough for the pits of hell to vibrate: "And the third day He will rise again."

Is there a Jerusalem in your horizon? Are you on a brief journey from painful encounters? Are you only steps away from the walls of your own heartache?

Learn a lesson from your master. The next time you find yourself on a Jericho road marching toward Jerusalem, put the promises of God on your lips. When the blackness of oppression settles around you, draw courage from the Word of God. 'Tis wise to march into Jerusalem with the promise of God in your heart.

## **Reflection**

*What does it mean to you that Jesus gave His life voluntarily, that no one took His life from Him?*

*Where are you going through, or anticipating going through, hard and trying experiences? What promises of God can you cling to?*

## **Prayer**

*Dear Jesus, thank You for sending us the Holy Spirit and never leaving me as an orphan. Thank You for saving me and setting me free. Holy Spirit, thank You for dwelling inside me and never leaving me. Thank You for what You have*

*done in me during this season and beyond. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your goodness and mercy. Thank You for Your good and perfect will. Grow my love and awe of You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## **Rest**

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## **Day 37 – April 1**

### **Centering Prayer**

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *By Your wounds, Jesus, I am healed.*

*Holy Spirit, help me trust You with my whole self today, especially my suffering and burdens. Strengthen me and encourage me today. Please love me in the ways I need. Help me glorify God in this season. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: Mark 14:32-36; Isaiah 53:1-6**

### **In the Garden by Max Lucado**

Go with me for a moment to witness what was perhaps the foggiest night in history. The scene is very simple; you'll recognize it quickly. A grove of twisted olive trees. Ground cluttered with large rocks. A low stone fence. A dark, dark night.

Now, look into the picture. Look closely through the shadowy foliage. See that solitary figure? Flat on the ground. Face stained with dirt and tears. Fists pounding the hard earth. Eyes wide with a stupor of fear. Hair matted with salty sweat. Is that blood on his forehead?

That's Jesus. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Maybe you've seen the classic portrait of Christ in the Garden. Kneeling beside a big rock. Snow-white robe. Hands peacefully folded in prayer. A look of serenity on his face. A halo over his head.

The painter didn't use the gospel of Mark as a pattern. When Mark wrote about that painful night, he used phrases such as these: "Horror and dismay came over him," "My heart is ready to break with grief," and "He went forward a little, [and] threw himself on the ground" (14:32–42 NEB).

Mark used black paint to describe this scene. We see an agonizing, straining, and struggling Jesus. We see a "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3 NASB). We see a man struggling with fear, wrestling with commitments, and yearning for relief.

We see Jesus in the fog of a broken heart.

The next time the fog finds you, remember Jesus in the Garden. The next time you think that no one understands or cares, reread the fourteenth chapter of Mark and pay a visit to Gethsemane. And the next time you wonder if God really perceives the pain that prevails on this dusty planet, listen to him pleading among the twisted trees.

The next time you are called to suffer, pay attention.

It may be the closest you'll ever get to God. Watch closely. It could very well be that the hand that extends itself to lead you out of the fog is a pierced one.

## **Reflection**

*Have you ever felt the need for help but found that in your greatest moment of need, your friends couldn't be counted on? Were you in a situation that caused you to feel intense agony or pushed you to the limit?*

*Where in your life now are you feeling alone in your suffering and struggles?*

*What does it mean to you that Jesus not only understands your experience and needs because of His own firsthand experience, but He prays for you, provides for you, and has given you the Holy Spirit so you are never alone?*

## Prayer

*Dear Jesus, Your Word shows me that You were truly human, experienced human emotion and struggle and suffering, that You genuinely can be trusted to understand and help me because You have truly gone before me and You know the way forward. I invite You into the areas of my life where I am experiencing stress, anxiety, agony, and abandonment. Please help me. Please love me. Please be with me and help me be assured of Your presence and faithfulness. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 38 – April 2

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Dear Jesus, help me know Your love.*

*Holy Spirit, help me to meditate on the cross and Christ's sacrifice for me today. Give me the strength and courage to look and understand the depth of His suffering on my behalf and the unity to which He has called me, along with all other believers. Help me to accept the gift of salvation He has given me fully, to continue to submit to and press into sanctification, to receive His grace and love, and to never take it for granted or try to live without Him. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: John 19:23-24; John 17:20-26; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7**

### **Close to the Cross but Far from Christ by Max Lucado**

There was some dice-throwing that went on at the foot of the cross.

Imagine the scene. The soldiers are huddled in a circle, their eyes turned downward. The criminal above them is forgotten. Casting lots for the possessions of Christ.

Here are common soldiers witnessing the world's most uncommon event, and they don't even know it. As far as they're concerned, he is just another criminal. The cross is forgotten.

It makes me think of us. The religious. Those who claim heritage at the cross. I'm thinking of all of us. Every believer in the land. The stuffy. The loose. The strict. The simple. Upper church. Lower church. "Spirit-filled." Evangelical. Mystical. Literal. Cynical. Robes. Collars. Three-piece suits. Bornagainers. Ameners.

I'm thinking we aren't so unlike these soldiers. (I'm sorry to say.)

We, too, play games at the foot of the cross. We compete for members. We scramble for status. We deal out our judgments and condemnations. Competition. Selfishness. Personal gain. It's all there.

So close to the cross, yet so far from the blood.

We are so close to the world's most uncommon event, but we act like common crapshooters huddled in bickering groups and fighting over silly opinions.

We major in the trivial, constantly finding fault with others. We split into little huddles and then, God forbid, we split again. Another name. Another doctrine. Another "error." Another denomination. Another poker game.

So close to the cross but so far from the Christ.

"May they all be one," Jesus prayed.

One. Not one in groups of two thousand. But one in One. One church. One faith. One Lord. Not Baptist, not Methodist, not Adventist. Just Christians. No denominations. No hierarchies. No traditions. Just Christ.

## Reflection

*Where are you tempted to compromise the unity Christ has called us to? What is trying to distract you from recognizing how close you are to the cross of Christ?*

*Are there any relationships where you are experiencing broken fellowship and disunity? How can you move toward your brother or sister in Christ today, seeking the unity that is your heritage because you are in Christ?*

## Prayer

*Dear Jesus, forgive me for being distracted by, anxious about, and stuck on divisions, disagreements, and any form of selfishness rather than pursuing and loving the unity to which You have called us. Please help me to see as You see, to discern between what is important to You and what is not. Please forgive me too for allowing broken relationships to continue where it has been convenient or comfortable to be distant and avoid someone, rather than moving toward them in love. Help me pursue unity with wisdom. Give me Your love for others and teach me to walk in Your ways. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 39 – April 3

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, You are the perfect sacrifice.*

*Holy Spirit, help me today as I reflect on what Jesus' death on the cross has accomplished. That the curtain is torn in two, and now I can not only come boldly before the Father, but I have You abiding inside of me all the time. Help me grasp this miracle, as much as my human mind and heart possibly can; that because of the cross I now live in Christ and He lives in me. Transform me by this truth and the profound love of God. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:32-34; Hebrews 12:1-3**

### **Father, Forgive Them by Max Lucado**

Of all the scenes around the cross, this one angers me the most. What kind of people would mock a dying man? Who would be so base as to pour the salt of scorn upon open wounds?

The words thrown that day were meant to wound. And there is nothing more painful than words meant to hurt.

If you have suffered or are suffering because of someone else's words, you'll be glad to know that there is a balm for this laceration. Meditate on these words: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23 NIV).

Jesus did not retaliate or bite back. He did not say, "I'll get you!" "Come on up here and say that to my face!" "Just wait until after the resurrection, buddy!" No, these statements were not found on Christ's lips.

He simply left the judging to God. He did not take on the task of seeking revenge. He demanded no apology. He hired no bounty hunters and sent out no posse. He, to the astounding contrary, spoke on their defense. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NIV).

And when you think about it, they hadn't the faintest idea what they were doing. They were a stir-crazy mob, mad at something they couldn't see, so they took it out on, of all people, God. But they didn't know what they were doing.

Yes, the dialogue that Friday morning was bitter. The verbal stones were meant to sting. How Jesus, with a body racked with pain, eyes blinded by his own blood, and lungs yearning for air, could speak on behalf of some heartless thugs is beyond my comprehension. Never, never have I seen such love. If ever a person deserved a shot at revenge, Jesus did. But he didn't take it. Instead he died for them. How could he do it? I don't know. But I do know that all of a sudden my wounds seem very painless. My grudges and hard feelings are suddenly childish.

Sometimes I wonder if we don't see Christ's love as much in the people he tolerated as in the pain he endured.

Amazing grace.

### **Reflection**

*Where are you still suffering because of someone's words or actions? Talk to God about your pain and what this has cost you, inviting His healing love into your wounded places.*

*Where are you tempted to retaliate, to judge, to chase an apology or payment, or simply struggling to forgive? Share these honestly with Christ too and ask for His help with each, trusting that He loves you, that He can and will guide you through this process of healing and forgiveness, and that He can and will bless You and care for You no matter what anyone else does.*

*What does it mean to you that Jesus died for those who hurt Him? Meditate on the depth of His love for them and for you.*

### **Prayer**

*Dear Jesus, your love and grace are astounding. Unfathomable. Far beyond our capabilities. I cannot love the way You call me to love unless Your love is given to me. Please fill me to overflowing. Give me the capacity and wisdom to love well. I want to honor You. I want to glorify the Father. Transform me by Your Spirit until Your love is embedded in all of me. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

## Rest

Now that we have been fed by God through His Word and His Presence, let us lay down in the green pasture to digest and rest, resisting the urge to get back to doing. Take at least a few minutes, longer if you want to linger in His presence today, and simply be His beloved sheep. Rest in the safety He has provided. Take in the moment. Return to prayers or passages that ministered to your heart today. Let God love you and restore your soul.

When you are ready, step back into your day with Him.

## Day 40 – April 4

### Centering Prayer

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can spend time with God. Take a few minutes to sit in silence, letting your body become still and present to God. Slow down your breathing and take deep breaths.

Today, as you breathe, pray: *Jesus, You are the perfect sacrifice.*

*Holy Spirit, help me today as I reflect on what Jesus' death on the cross has accomplished. That the curtain is torn in two, and now I can not only come boldly before the Father, but I have You abiding inside of me all the time. Help me grasp this miracle, as much as my human mind and heart possibly can; that because of the cross I now live in Christ and He lives in me. Transform me by this truth and the profound love of God. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.*

**Read: Mark 15:33-39; Hebrews 9:1-14**

### The Temple Curtain Is Torn by Max Lucado

The curtain of the Temple was hung before the Holy of Holies, which was part of the Temple no one could enter. Jewish worshipers could enter the outer court, but only the priests could enter the Holy Place. And no one, except the high priest on one day a year, entered the Holy of Holies. No one. Why? Because the shekinah glory—the glory of God—was present there.

No one but the high priest entered the Holy of Holies. No one. To do so meant death. In no uncertain terms, the curtain declared: “This far and no farther!”

What did fifteen hundred years of a curtain-draped Holy of Holies communicate? Simple. God is holy . . . separate from us and unapproachable. Even Moses was told, “You cannot see my face, because no one can see me and live” (Exodus 33:20 NCV). God is holy, and we are sinners, and there is a distance between us.

But Jesus hasn’t left us with an unapproachable God. “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV). When Jesus’ flesh was torn on the cross, the curtain was torn in two.

It was as if the hands of heaven had been gripping the veil, waiting for this moment. One instant it was whole; the next it was ripped in two from top to bottom. No delay. No hesitation.

We are welcome to enter into God’s presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from him. The barrier of sin? Down. No more curtain.

But we have a tendency to put the barrier back up with the curtain of our heart. Sometimes, no, oftentimes, we allow our mistakes and guilty conscience to keep us from God.

Don’t allow a veil of guilt to keep you from your Father. Trust the cross. The curtain is down, the door is open, and you are welcome in God’s presence.

## **Reflection**

*When do you tend to ‘put the curtain back up’? We can know that Christ has paid for our sins in full, know in our minds that there is no sin He cannot cover, but struggle in our hearts to accept this truth and live according to it. What are you tempted to believe can stand between you and Christ?*

*Surrender each of these things to Christ. Confess them, trusting in the cross, trusting in His love for you, trusting He is eagerly waiting for you to draw near to Him so He can care for you and love you as you need and out of the abundance of His own love.*

*Take time to flip back through the Scriptures and your journaling to review what God has spoken to you and done in you during this Lenten season as you have drawn near to Christ and meditated on His crucifixion and resurrection.*

## Prayer

*As our final prayer, we encourage you to pray **Psalm 103 & Psalm 105**.  
What can we do now but worship the God who is so incredibly good?  
With all His people, in unity as His Church, we worship Him.*

*For tomorrow is Sunday  
and Jesus Christ is alive.*

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