

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

## Week #1: February 22-25

Wednesday, February 22

Today's Devotional comes from Pastor Nate Keeler

**Theme: Ash Wednesday**

**Scripture: John 3:30**

He must increase; but I must decrease.

Have you ever been in the presence of greatness? Maybe it was front row to see your favorite band, watching an ace pitcher throw a no-hitter, or meeting a hero of the faith. Being in the presence of greatness stirs in us a sense of awe and humility. We realize that whatever talent, accomplishments or influence we possess is comparatively miniscule. If this is true for mere mortals, how much more so in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ!

This was the experience of John the Baptist in the wilderness when he encountered Jesus. John had an enormous influence on the Jewish community in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Thousands of people came out to hear him preach and to be baptized. And yet, when he encountered Jesus, John knew that he was unfit to even be his servant. He knew that he must decrease and that Jesus must increase.

As we begin these 40 days of Lent, I want you to come into the presence of Jesus in your mind's eye. See His majesty, power and beauty. But also see His love, compassion and sacrifice. See the King of the universe decrease Himself to the point of death on a cross for you. This is true greatness. May His willing decrease call you to a season of decrease in your own self-importance and self-indulgence. May his greatness call you to a season of increased love, compassion and sacrifice.

### **Entering into Lent:**

Start with confession of any besetting sins, unbelief and self-centeredness. As you pray, dedicate yourself to Jesus as an act of awe and worship to His greatness. Ask Him to show you what to decrease during Lent as an act of worship. Some considerations: What is something you do every day that you can give up? What is a distraction or time waster? What is an undisciplined habit? What is an unnecessary luxury? Write down whatever comes to mind.

**Prayer:** Lord, I bow my knee as I think upon your greatness. What makes you so great is not only your power and majesty, but your love and humility. I confess that I am often distracted and preoccupied with my own agenda and desires. I dedicate this Lent season to decreased self-importance and increased worship and service to you. Show me how you want me to enter this season of Lent. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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**Thursday, February 23**

**Today's Devotional comes from Pastor Terry Foester**

**Theme: Setting the Course**

**Scripture: Psalm 103:8-14**

Psalm 103:8-14

- <sup>8</sup> The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.
- <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.
- <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;
- <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
- <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.

## **Devotional:**

Think back to a time when you could look out onto a vast horizon, and see clearly for miles. Maybe the view of the ocean from your favorite beach comes to mind, or the view from the top of a peak you've climbed, or the surprising moment on a plane when, after taking off on a cloudy day, you emerge into the sun a few seconds later, looking down upon a blanket of clouds. Before you read any further, recall a personal memory to your mind; a time when you could see clearly for miles.

As you enter a season of increase and decrease, it's important to begin in the gracious, loving and expansive arms of Jesus. There is nothing you can do, nothing you can give up or take up, to make him love you more than you are already loved. His abundant love is not conditional on your performance in life. In fact, Jesus loves the entire world, every single person! Tragically, not everyone experiences the fullness of the love and forgiveness found only in Jesus. But I hope you have! If you have turned away from your old way of life, and believed in Jesus as Lord, you can be confident in the fullness of the forgiveness in which you now walk. The Lord is compassionate and gracious toward you. He is slow to anger, and abounding in love. He does not treat you as your

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sins deserve, or repay you according to what you have done. In fact, as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on you.

As you bring to mind a scene from your life, that day when you could see clearly for miles...remember this...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed you from your sin, your transgressions, the trespassing you've done in the past. He does not identify you by your sin. He identifies you as his child.

If you're not careful, the next 40 days of increase and decrease may simply be another meager attempt at religious goodness in your life; something you attempt in your own strength. Instead, I want to challenge you to enter this season not focused on the activity of doing, but in the activity of being. Who will you be as you live out this season of increase and decrease? Walk as a child walks, following the lead of a compassionate father, curious about what you might discover along the way.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you for the forgiveness in which I now walk. Empower me in your Holy Spirit, and equip me with your grace to walk as your child. Along the way, reveal to me exactly what you want me to learn over these 40 days of increase and decrease. Lord Jesus, use this time to make me more like you, and give me greater conviction to share your love and truth with those around me. Amen.

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**Friday, February 24, 2023**

**Today's Devotional comes from Laura Van Hees**

**Theme: Walking in Step with Spirit**

**Scripture: Galatians 5:16**

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

From a very young age I was always taught to follow the rules. There were rules given by my parents and teachers for eating, sleeping, etiquette, business...you name it, there was a rule for it. When I was young, I knew that if I followed these rules, I would stay out of trouble and keep my parents and teachers happy with me....and maybe even win some approval for going above and beyond. Still to this day, it is ingrained in me to "follow the rules"... "work within the rules"... "if you don't follow the rules....A, B or C might happen."

At first blush, following the rules isn't a bad thing, right? Not necessarily. Back in the day when the Christian church was just forming, there were factions of Judaizers who traveled to the Gentile nations (like Galatia) preaching the various rules that needed to be followed to become a righteous Christian. Things like circumcision, the Sabbath and so on....essentially 613 laws in all...all in an effort to convert Gentiles to Jews on their path to becoming followers of Christ. These rules seemed appealing to the early Christians as they sought ways to please God.

In studying Galatians 5, Paul wrote to remind the Galatian Christians of God's new covenant through Christ who sets us all free. He was trying to explain to them that it is impossible to follow all 613 laws perfectly to become righteous so stop trying to "do it your way" thinking you are pleasing the Lord. Not through works but through faith in Christ are you set free from the law.

But does this mean we can just do anything we want? Of course not. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt 22:37-39). So how do we do that without following the law? You see, when Jesus left this earth, he gave us another gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that Paul refers to in verse 16.

For these early believers and still today, trying to understand how to "walk by the Spirit" was/is challenging or even confusing. Our flesh is constantly pulling us in the wrong direction trying to drag us into earthly bondage. And bondage seems so easy with the hurried lifestyle we all lead today. John Mark Comer writes, "Are we in too much of a

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hurry to listen to the Holy Spirit calling to our heart?" It's really not as hard as you might imagine if you just stop and listen to that still small voice inside you. For example, have you ever felt that pull inside you when you have to make a decision? Should I throw my litter on the ground or in a trash bin? Should I eat the entire cake or just one piece? Should I exercise today or sit in front of the TV watching Netflix all day? These are oversimplified examples, there is a voice inside that tells you what's right or wrong if you truly listen. So next time you need to make a decision...pause...listen...and thank God for his amazing gift of his Holy Spirit who guides us to be more Christ-like.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I give thanks to you for giving me such an amazing gift as your Holy Spirit. I pray...please help me to pause and listen. Help me to slow down and truly pay attention to you. And Lord, please help me to overcome my own desires...not to do things my way so that I may walk by the Spirit. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Saturday, February 25**

**Today's Devotional comes from Kim Biasatto**

**Theme: Praying for Wisdom**

**Scripture: Luke 2:10; James 1:2-6a**

Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

On December 9, 1965, A Charlie Brown Christmas premiered on CBS. Producers were concerned that it would not be successful. However, Charles Schulz, the creator of Peanuts, was most insistent that the biblical story of the birth of Jesus be included. Schulz's faith was deep and personal, and he asked the producers: "If we don't do it, who will?" And now, 58 years later we still enjoy hearing Linus recite from Luke 2. *(Side Note: If you observe carefully during that scene, Linus drops his security blanket when he recites the lines that begin, "Fear not!")*

I tell you these seemingly non-relevant facts for a reason. Jesus' birth was announced as good news that will bring great joy for all people. Joy - χαρὰν ([charan](#)) in greek. It means gladness, a source of joy. From Chairo: cheerfulness, i.e. calm delight. This is the same word used in James 1:2: "Consider it pure **joy**, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds."

This seems bizarre to me. The same joy that was for all people when Jesus was born, is the joy we should consider when we face trials of many kinds. How can that be? There are a lot of things that bring me joy. If I were to list them, I am completely confident that "trials" would not make the cut.

So why should I consider it pure joy when I face trials of many kinds? James 1:3-4 tells us: "because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." It's for our good. To help grow us up and complete us.

But HOW do I do this?

Ask for help! James 1:5-6a reads: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt..."



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We are not doing this alone! God is with us in the midst of our trials and offers wisdom to help bring us to completion.

So, this Easter, remember Christmas. Remember the good news of great joy. Remember the Word who became flesh, who grew up sinless, who died and rose again to reunite us with His Father. Remember that Jesus faced trials unto death. So fear not when you face trials, but consider it pure joy, for unto you a Savior was born who is Christ the Lord.

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you that in my trials, you are here. I ask for wisdom and mercy. For grace and joy. Redeem my pain and use it to mold and make me into the person you have designed me to be. Amen.