

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

## Week #5: March 20-25

Monday, March 20

Today's Devotional comes from Todd Johnson

**Theme: Reflecting on the Arrest of Jesus**

**Scripture: Mark 14:43-52 (NIV)**

<sup>43</sup> Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

<sup>44</sup> Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." <sup>45</sup> Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. <sup>46</sup> The men seized Jesus and arrested him. <sup>47</sup> Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

<sup>48</sup> "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? <sup>49</sup> Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." <sup>50</sup> Then everyone deserted him and fled.

<sup>51</sup> A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, <sup>52</sup> he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

**Reflection:** One summer when I was around 6 years old, I got separated from my family while at a shopping mall. My older cousin was supposed to keep tabs on me but in the rush of people we got separated. In that moment overwhelming fear enveloped me. I wandered into a random store full of tears and fortunately a kind older gentleman behind the counter said he'd help me find my family. It took about 2 minutes to find them, but it felt like an eternity. The reason why I still clearly remember this day some 35 years later is because the human emotions associated with being disconnected from those you love run deep.

In Mark chapter 14 starting in verse 43 we read the account of Jesus' arrest. In this account Jesus is betrayed by one of his disciples with a kiss. He was then arrested by those he taught amongst in the temple courts, and then ultimately deserted by EVERYONE else. This passage also tells us that people were even willing to run away naked just to be able to disconnect themselves from Jesus.

No doubt Jesus in his humanity must have felt deeply about this moment. The same people he came to love, serve, and sacrifice himself for are now running away in fear that they might lose something for being associated with him. When my cousin lost track of me at the shopping mall it was merely an accident. On the contrary, what is happening to Jesus in Mark 14:43-52 is purposeful. Fear has caused friends to flee, it has turned disciples into renouncers, it has caused those closest to Jesus to forget the most important thing. Fortunately for all mankind, Jesus never lost sight of the most important thing, **"The Scriptures must be fulfilled."**

May we consider where our discipleship to Jesus needs strengthening. May we be honest

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

with ourselves about what fears keep us from bold discipleship to Christ. And then as we identify those fears, may we invite God to do the work of building our faith and removing our fear.

**Prayer:** Lord God, thank you for the persistence of your Son Jesus Christ, who didn't allow personal pain to knock him off his mission. Teach me to follow in his footsteps, that the fear of this world will not hold me back from the mission you have sovereignly called me to.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Tuesday, March 21**

**Today's Devotional comes from Danielle Vota**

**Theme: Identify with Jesus through suffering**

**Scripture: Philippians 3:8-11 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

**Reflection:** In many ways, I've lived an accomplishment-centered life. I tried my best to cram in as many accomplishments as I could before I turned 30. I became a sergeant, but then I needed to become an officer. I completed my undergrad, but then I had to get a graduate degree. So on and so forth, always chasing after the next goal. I was driven by this "I'll be happy when..." mentality, but once I achieved my goals, I wasn't happy like I thought I'd be. I didn't get that "I've arrived" kind of feeling like I was expecting.

In verses 4-7, Paul writes "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more" and then proceeds to list his earthly accomplishments. Paul's point is that if any human being could be justified by status or works, it would be him—and yet, he considers all that garbage in comparison to Christ. And he is right! When we die, almost everything ends up forgotten, donated, or in the garbage. Paul understood that nothing is more important than faith in Christ because nothing else can forgive our sins and grant us eternal life. That's why he was willing to suffer the loss of all things and share in Christ's sufferings. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to "attain the resurrection from the dead" i.e. eternal life. If we think Paul sounds extreme here, it's because we don't clearly understand our condition and what's truly at stake yet.

Paul tries to set our minds right by reminding us "...look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18 ESV). When you live for Christ, your earthly accomplishments need not consume you. If you've accepted Christ, you've already figured out the most important thing there is to figure out in this life. You've received not only salvation, but also a purpose in life that can never be taken away from you. God can use you to spread the Gospel whether you are young or old, healthy or sick, rich or poor, book smart or street smart. Let us rest in the security of our eternal salvation and be servants of Christ no matter where life takes us.

**Sing in Worship:**

Like the woman at the well, I was seeking  
For things that could not satisfy.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

And then I heard my Savior speaking  
“Draw from My well that never shall run dry.”

Fill my cup, Lord;  
I lift it up Lord;  
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul.  
Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more.  
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.

There are millions in this world who are seeking  
For pleasures earthly goods afford.  
But none can match the wondrous treasure  
That I find in Jesus Christ my Lord.

So, my brother if the things that this world gives you  
Leave hungers that won't pass away,  
My blessed Lord will come and save you  
If you kneel to Him and humbly pray.

-“Fill my cup, Lord” by Richard Blanchard, 1959.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Wednesday, March 22**

**Today's Devotional comes from Pastor Matthew McNutt**

**Theme: Are you a Resilient Disciple?**

**Scripture: Philippians 1:29 (NLT)**

For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

**Reflection:** I am not a fan of suffering. I don't like pain. I avoid difficult situations. I would prefer a hard pass to hard times. And yet Paul suggests – no, he directly labels – suffering for Christ a privilege. Which seems an oxymoron at best, right? In what equation is suffering a privilege?

But we do kind of understand it, don't we? Heather and I have four sons, each wired in different ways with different passions. Our second son, Caleb, is an athlete through and through. As a freshman in high school, he signed up for the Concord High School football team with zero experience. He endured brutal workouts. Took hit after hit. Tackle after tackle. By the time he was a senior, he was one of the biggest guys on the team and played on both the offensive and defensive lines. Teams routinely double and triple teamed him to keep him away from their quarterback. One of my favorite photos is one in which the opposing team had four guys lined up against just him.

When this first started happening, I was somewhat concerned. How is it fair to send so many guys against him? His response caught me totally off guard; "dad, that's exactly what I want. The more guys they send against me, the more of my teammates are left unguarded and can make the play." He was proud to suffer through practices, proud to suffer through endurance building workouts, and proud to take hits so his teammates would be free to run. His focus was on the result, not the (quite literal) pain.

Which is what Paul is calling us each to; the privilege of being a part of Christ's work here on earth. That word suffering can take up too much of our focus. In our western culture it jumps out at us in a way that our ancient brothers and sisters would not have felt. You see, if we are resilient disciples, followers of Christ committed to His cause, with a God honoring perspective on what is important, then we can see the privilege we are given to be part of such an incredible purpose. Gordon Fee expresses it more eloquently than I ever could: "A crucified Lord produces disciples who themselves take up a cross as they follow Him. We are thus to live on behalf of Christ in the same way Christ Himself lived – and died – on behalf of the fallen, broken world." (Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 81)

In other words, when following God becomes difficult, challenging, or even painful, it is because we are beginning to live in the way that Christ lived, and in those moments are great joy and our great prayer must be for strength to continue on, to not waste this privilege we have been given.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Prayer:** Father God, I thank you for this incredible privilege. I ask for the wisdom and clarity to see it as such, for the boldness to not shy away from it, and the courage to continue to pursue you and honor this gift you have given each of us that call you Lord.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Thursday, March 23**

**Today's Devotional comes from Brandon Sellers**

**Theme: The Way**

**Scripture: Psalm 1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree

planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,

but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

<sup>6</sup> for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

**Reflection:** Psalm 1 is a short Psalm. It only has 124 words (ESV), but the most interesting word for me is the first word of verse 2. "But." This peculiar conjunction creates tension between verses 1,4-5 and verses 2-3, 6. By using the conjunction "but" the Psalmist is stating that verses 1 and 2 are mutually exclusive. They are saying that those who delight in the law of God do not get counsel from the wicked. Conversely those who sit in the seat of scoffers, don't meditate on God's word.

In verse 1 we see the verbs walk, stand, and sit; symbolizing that we get sinful counsel from all over. In our society that could mean social media, political pundits, worldly culture, and even from within ourselves. When we dine alone, we eat with a sinner. In Romans 7 Paul talks about his inner struggle with the law and he wrote half the news testament. What are we to do when it seems we are swimming in ungodliness?

The word "but" points us in a different direction. It means that the way we avoid ungodly counsel and beliefs is by being saturated with God's word. Medically speaking, the love of God's law is both curative and preventative. The Psalmist understands that we are going to be in the world. A fallen world with a fallen culture, but there is a stream that nourishes and sustains us. It allows us to thrive when we are rooted by that stream. A stream that causes fruit to grow and keeps our leaves from withering. And that stream is found by loving God, loving his law and his word, and loving the one who kept the law, yet died for those who couldn't.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He walked with the wicked, but not in step with the wicked. He dined with sinners; he didn't take the way of sinners. Although his pre-resurrected body hung near mockers and scoffers, he was never one himself. Not only was Jesus rooted by the stream of water; He is the stream of water (John 7:37, Jer 2:13). As Christians, that stream of water dwells in us, so let us sink our roots in Him. That way, when we are surrounded by sin (or maybe just dining alone), we will have living water flowing into us and perhaps helping the wicked, sinful, and scoffing to be planted by the stream as well.

**Prayer:** Abba, Father, mend my heart so that I love your law. Show me when I am wicked, a sinner, or a mocker. Teach me to repent. Hold me fast so that I praise your name. Nourish me so that I bear fruit, do not wither, and so people will see the fruit that comes from you then praise you, my father, in heaven. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.



# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Friday, March 24**

**Today's Devotional comes from Rev. Champ Thornton**

**Theme: The Truth**

**Scripture: John 8:31-32 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

**Reflection:** For almost the last 30 years, I've worn glasses to read. But in the last two years, my eyesight has gone from bad to worse. If I'm not wearing my glasses, the chances of correctly reading my latest text are pretty slim.

In John 8, Jesus is talking to men and women who have professed faith in him. They claim to see, and Jesus prescribes a lens that will guarantee corrected sight. With this lens, these people (1) will show themselves to genuine followers of Christ, and (2) they will be able to see the reality ("truth") which will in turn liberate them from enslavement to sin (see John 8:34-36).

What is this "lens?" Jesus says, "If you abide in my word" (John 8:31). In other words, if you hold tight to Jesus's teaching, then you'll demonstrate you're a real Christian and his truth will free you from sin. Jesus's teaching wasn't something to agree with only partially or temporarily, but to tenaciously cling to for life.

Sometimes you'll hear Jesus's words in verse 31 quoted in movies. And often they'll mean something like "If you'll acknowledge and accept the truth, although it might be uncomfortable, it can ultimately lead to greater personal growth and healing."

But Jesus isn't calling you to accept a hard truth about yourself or your situation. He's calling you to view all of life through His truth. Freedom doesn't come from seeing something from another person's perspective, but by seeing everything from Jesus's perspective. Through his lens.

If you say you want to know the truth about life, if you say you want to see freedom in your life, then you must admit you can't really see on your own. If you acknowledge that you need the glasses of Jesus's authoritative teaching, it may look like you're surrendering your freedom. Or it may appear that you're shutting down an open-minded search for truth. But the reality is that since He is the Creator of this world and knows how all things were designed, and since He is the Savior of the world and knows how all things need to be restored, He is the only and perfect way to have both truth and freedom. Let go of trying to figure it out on your own, and cling to the word of Christ. And His truth will truly set you free.

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

**Saturday, March 25**

**Today's Devotional comes from Pastor Nate Keeler**

**Theme: The Life**

**Scripture: Colossians 3:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

**Reflection:** This Christmas we bought Aidan an Oculus Quest 2 virtual reality (VR) gaming system. To be completely honest, this was also a present to myself. VR takes the immersive experience of gaming to a whole new level. You can ride roller coasters, climb the Alps, box against Ivan Drago and even tour the Grand Canyon all from the comfort and safety of your living room. However, VR plays tricks on your concept of reality. Even though I intellectually know that I'm not hanging from a cliff on the edge of the Grand Tetons, physically and emotionally I am experiencing another "reality." This is why there are so many hilarious YouTube videos of people screaming, falling over, running into walls and throwing their handsets through their TVs. The key to not injuring yourself or breaking something when you play VR is to not lose grasp on your position in true reality.

In Colossians 3:1-10, the apostle Paul calls us to discern the difference between spiritual (true) reality and earthly (virtual) reality and live accordingly. The main reason our faith and lives malfunction or get off course is because we lose our grasp on the deepest and truest reality about life, morality, God and eternity. How easily we get sucked into the "virtual" reality of this earthly world. We can be fooled into believing and living out the ever-changing mantras of this world: "Love is love," "I am who I feel myself to be," "Greed is good," "I have to look out for #1," "Lie to protect yourself," "Don't get mad, get even," "Do what makes you happy" just to name a few.

But the deepest and truest realities are defined by God, His Word and His Promises. In Christ, our mantras are "God is love and I am loved unconditionally by Him," "I am who God says I am," "Christ-like humility is good," "I have to look out for the needs of others above myself," "Tell the truth," "Forgive your enemies as in Christ we are forgiven," "Do what makes God happy" (which leads to your greatest joy).

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

Which reality are you firmly rooted in? Which reality are you setting your mind and heart upon? The good news is that we can reset our reality every day by reminding ourselves of what we know is true. Make today the day that you operate according to the spiritual realities in Christ.

**Prayer:** Father, I ask you to forgive me for slipping so easily into the virtual reality of this world, the flesh and the devil. I am prone to wander away from what is deeply true about you, me and this world. Today, give me the ability to see and believe that the spiritual realities are the truest and best for my life. Help me to firmly grasp my heavenly and eternal position: My life is hidden with Christ in God. In Jesus' name, amen.