

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

## Week #6: March 27 – April 1

**Monday, March 27**

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

**Theme: Reflection on Peter's Denial**

**Scripture: Mark 14:66-72 (The Message)**

The Rooster Crowed

<sup>66-67</sup> While all this was going on, Peter was down in the courtyard. One of the Chief Priest's servant girls came in and, seeing Peter warming himself there, looked hard at him and said, "You were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

<sup>68</sup> He denied it: "I don't know what you're talking about." He went out on the porch. A rooster crowed.

<sup>69-70</sup> The girl spotted him and began telling the people standing around, "He's one of them." He denied it again. After a little while, the bystanders brought it up again. "You've got to be one of them. You've got 'Galilean' written all over you."

<sup>71-72</sup> Now Peter got really nervous and swore, "I never laid eyes on this man you're talking about." Just then the rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered how Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows twice, you'll deny me three times." He collapsed in tears.

**Reflection:** Why did Peter deny his Lord to an unknown crowd of dark-lit strangers? We can imagine some of the fear and confusion he was facing, but still...it seems a little out of Peter's character. This got me thinking, how do we deny our best friends in our culture?

One example came rushing to my mind, a classic Seinfeld episode. In the episode, Jerry and his friends discover the best soup in town, made from secret recipes. It's so good that there's always a line out the door, down the street. Because of the demand, the shop owner is very specific on how one should order to keep things moving. And the stakes are high - if you make a mistake in the ordering process you get banned for life! In quintessential Seinfeld, Jerry's best friend George over complicates the process. He asks for a piece of bread with his soup and it quickly escalates. George gets the soup bag snatched from his hand with the words, "no soup for you!" Jerry is next in line, right behind George and it's obvious they are together. In that moment, you can see it in Jerry's eyes. He is faced with a decision. Deny knowing George, and keep the soup? Or come clean and defend his friend and be banned with him? He puts just enough distance between himself and George so as to imply "I don't know that guy." The rest of the episode plays out around the topic of denial, and the many vain reasons people put their own desires over friendship and loyalty.

While this is a lighthearted example, it reveals the significance of denial. The great impact that denial has on friendship and trust.

To be clear, Peter's denial is on a completely different scale than a comedy sitcom from the '90s. But there's a similar principle at work. In the moment of denial, something insignificant (soup or acceptance) is irrationally prioritized over something significant (a best friend or a savior). Upon reflection it doesn't make sense. But in the moment, denial appears as a very powerful option.

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Why would Jerry potentially deny knowing George over soup? Why would Peter deny knowing Jesus to avoid the glare of a random stranger by a fire at night? Why?

I think Jerry knew that their relationship would survive the decision. And it did. In the series, Jerry and George continue as best friends meeting daily for coffee to talk about nothing in particular.

I think Peter knew his relationship with Jesus would survive this moment. But it's still difficult to decipher his motive. I think this being one of the first times that Peter has to go on without Jesus being present has something to do with it. When Jesus was around Peter was bold. Peter is the one given credit for cutting the soldier's ear in the garden. But when Jesus isn't around - he struggles big time! He denies even knowing Jesus!

In my own life, how often do I live in the subtle nuance of denying association with Jesus? If I'm at one of my kids' schools, on the soccer sideline getting to know a new parent, I'm ashamed to say that it may take me a good amount of time to directly associate myself with Jesus. If I live my life in the land of good intentions, I'll may never bring up Jesus. And at some level that is definitely a form of denial.

I wonder how many times we inadvertently deny Jesus, by not being forthright that we know Him, and that He is Lord. We tend to leave so much unsaid.

But let's be honest (and we relate to Peter in this way) it's hard for us to associate ourselves with Jesus. He calls us to look and talk differently even if it's uncomfortable. Even when others respond negatively or don't understand. Why would we shy away from being associated with the savior of the universe?

**Practice:** Prayerfully select someone you know at work, school, or in your daily routine and attempt to clarify with them where you stand with Jesus. If you have lived in the subtle understanding that you are a Christian, make it less subtle. In that relationship, make sure that you're not denying the Name of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord, if I'm honest with you, I know there are times that I shy away from association with you. Give me your love for the lost, and allow that to embolden me to stand up for your name in a loving and life-giving way. Let this be true within my extended family, with my friends, with my co-workers, with my classmates, with my neighbors, and even with strangers.

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**Tuesday, March 28**

**Today's Devotional comes from Robin Woodworth**

**Theme: In what ways are you hiding your identity in Jesus?**

**Scripture: Galatians 3:27-4:7**

For those of you baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise. Now I say that as long as the heir is a child, he differs in no way from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. Instead, he is under guardians and trustees until the time set by the father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were in slavery under the elements of the world. When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we may receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then God has made you an heir.

**Reflection:** These 10 verses, written by Paul to the Galatian Church, succinctly tell the beautiful story of our true lineage in Christ. As I pondered what I might write for today's devotion, I kept rereading the verse in different versions while investigating certain words and phrases in order to relay how amazingly these verses made the treasure of my identity in our Savior life giving and affirming. I hope you have an opportunity to do the same.

Sitting in the verses I wondered if I was living as a slave or an heir. Was I hiding my true identity in Christ? Are you?

God in His grand and glorious design has given us so many practical lessons evidenced in the everyday of our human experience. As my friends and family know I love winter days when nature is at rest and the days grow colder. I am fascinated with nests birds fastidiously built in spring clearly visible in the starkness of winter and I can collect the ones I can reach to admire the crafting of our feathered friends. (I place one in our Christmas tree: they represent the love, commitment and effort it takes to build a happy home.)

Springtime arrives, slowly at first with early flowers like Winter Aconite and Snowdrops, then pushing forth through warming earth green leaves followed by colorful blooms of Crocus. While late winter still has its grip on the earth, I continue my walks on woodland trails but now to catch glimpses of the first sign of Bloodroots, Spring Beauties' and Rue Anemone's delicate foliage nudging their way through the leaf covered forest floor. The spring my mother, who knew every wildflower by name, died, I sought comfort on wooded trails for my grief, seeking those flowers who heralded springtime and whose names I had learned by her side. As if all of nature knew such a fitting memorial was needed, the fullest, most dense patches of Bloodroots covered the hillsides that particular year! This showy display was a celebration and confirmation of God's grace & provision for my sorrow as I experienced Him clothing the earth in flowers!!!

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So, my thoughts return to the first verse in our reading...am I hiding my faith under cover or am I displaying God's intended beauty of His gift of new life to me through Christ? Am I living transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, a relationship of personal intimacy, showing an especially close relationship to God?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, this Lenten season we've been challenged with the theme of "increase and decrease". We have had the opportunity to look at our faith anew. Please give us the desire to seek intimate time with you in your Word and in thought and prayer. Show us ways to show a hurting and weary world the beauty of a personal relationship with you! Amen.

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**Wednesday, March 29**

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

**Theme: Gospel Conversation**

**Scripture: Genesis 1:1-3a; Luke 23: 44-46; Matthew 28:16-20 (NLT)**

**Matthew 28:16-20** - Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

**Genesis 1:1-3a** - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said...

**Reflection:** In the beginning there was nothing. The earth was formless and empty. Darkness covered everything.

And then God spoke...His voice filled the empty chasm. His utterance caused everything to change. With a word, all that is, was made. Day and night. Water and land. Sun, moon, stars and planets. Trees, flowers, birds, fish, animals and humans. He declared it, and it was so.

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice...

Good Friday... Darkness again covers the land. Hopelessness fills the hearts of many who are present at Jesus' crucifixion. Questions saturate the sky. How can this be happening? Why won't He come down? Is He really the son of God?

And then Jesus spoke...“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” He breathed his last. It was finished. With those words Jesus let us know he had paid the ultimate price for us. A debt we couldn't pay. He died for our sins.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said...

Jesus is alive. The eleven, and most likely many, many more, have gone to a mountain where He told them to go. Jesus arrives. There He is.



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Wait, is it Him? Is it really Him? Can it be Him? Questions filled the air. Doubt raised its head. And then Jesus spoke. The doubts were silenced. The questions were answered. It is Him! He is alive.

There is power in the spoken word. God could have created the world with a nod. Jesus could have ended His life with a sigh. He could have squelched the doubt numerous ways. But that is not how He chose to do it. He chose to use speech. Vocal commands. The Word who became flesh used words to reveal who He is.

The doubters believed when He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

He could have said anything. "I'm back. It's me. I love you." Instead, the words He chose to speak were a command. Go. Make disciples. Baptize them in my name. And then He ended by speaking a promise. I am always with you.

This season, remember the power of the spoken word. Ask God to guard your speech. To prevent unkind, untrue words from leaving your mouth. Remember how words were used to overcome darkness. To create life. To bring salvation. And then remember that the Word is with us when we tell others about Him. We are never alone.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus thank you for overcoming darkness, sin and loneliness. Guard my mouth that I may speak only truth and life. Give me the words to use to tell others about you. Amen.

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**Thursday, March 30**

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

**Theme: Reaching Out to Someone New**

**Scripture: Romans 10:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

**Reflection:** Being the parent of a teenager, I can't even begin to tell you how many times I have shared worldly knowledge and advice with my child to then have him doubt, deny and even reject it outright. And then later, a friend or other respected adult in his life tells him the exact same thing I shared with him, and all of a sudden, this same information is "amazing." "I can't believe you didn't tell me." Frustrating? Yes. Surprising? No...this kind of thing has clearly been happening for centuries.

On the surface, Romans 10:14-15 seems to be a call to spread the Gospel, go out to all the nations and be Jesus' hands and feet. While studying to write this devotional, I discovered that Paul wasn't reiterating the "Great Commission" but rather refuting the very argument his Roman church readers gave for why the vast majority of Jews in Jesus' day refused to believe in Christ and why the Gentiles were so easily brought to belief.

The Jewish people, of all people groups on earth, had been given the "handbook" (aka the Law and prophecy) centuries earlier and yet they still denied Christ as the Messiah despite the fact that Jesus checked all the boxes up to and including dying on the cross and resurrecting three days later. Paul goes on in the rest of chapter 10 to quote Isaiah and Moses to prove this point. In other words, Paul is essentially saying that God used the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous to get his message across. Isaiah 65:1 says, "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I.'"

So, why is the focus of this devotional called "Reaching out to someone new?" I believe that God still calls us to spread His good news each and every day. I know what many of you might be thinking... "I'm no Bible scholar," or "I don't know the first thing to say to a stranger," or "I don't want people to think I'm some crazy person." And the list of reasons goes on and on, right?! Despite all that, we are still called to share God's message of Jesus' love to the people around us. That being said, let me ask you just a couple simple things to do when you go to God in prayer.

1. Ask God to tell you, nudge you, make it clear to you a person he wants you to talk to about himself.
2. Take a breath and calmly, sincerely ask that person, when you encounter them, if you can pray for them or if there's something they would like you to pray for.

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3. Be courageous and speak aloud your prayer over this person. A prayer doesn't have to be a mini-sermon, it can be as simple as, "Lord, please bless (person) today".
4. Thank Jesus for answering prayer and end "in Jesus' name".

If, in the process of talking with this person, they ask you a question you can't answer, be honest. Tell them you don't know, but then be brave and invite them to church where you can be sure Pastor Nate can knowledgeably answer their question.

Don't be discouraged if you get turned down a time or two. God puts these people in our path for His purposes and we don't always see His intentions in the moment. And, don't stop trying and don't stop praying. You never know when you will be that "friend" or "respected adult" in someone's life who gives "amazing advice" for the 'nth' time that opens their hearts to Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for coming to earth and dying on the cross for a sinner like me. I pray today for your guidance and the correct words to say to that someone you set in my path for your purpose. Please help me to be brave for your kingdom. I ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.



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**Friday, March 31**

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

**Theme: Acts of Service**

**Scripture: Philippians 2:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore

if there is any encouragement in Christ,

if there is any consolation of love,

if there is any fellowship of the Spirit,

if any affection and compassion,

<sup>2</sup> make my joy complete

by being of the same mind,

maintaining the same love,

united in spirit,

intent on one purpose.

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit,

but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;

<sup>4</sup> do not merely look out for your own personal interests,

but also for the interests of others.

**Reflection:** As a dad to three teenagers, I feel a tension between motivating them to be responsible and all of us enjoying being together. Being responsible often looks like getting stuff done: cleaning the house, maintaining the yard, finishing homework, practicing for music or sports. Enjoying each other is more of an attitude, a perspective of heart and mind. And as a dad, I want to keep responsibility (for tasks) and enjoyment (of relationships) together. If the house gets cleaned, while everyone's mad at each other, that's a fail. Or if we spend each minute of every day just talking, laughing, and having fun, while nothing gets done, that's a fail as well.

Paul, the apostle, knew this tension. And he wanted to guide the church family in Philippi toward a better balance of responsibility and relationships. He wanted to advance their joy (Phil. 1:25), and he wanted them to fill his joy to the very brim of his heart (Phil 2:2). And he also wanted them to serve each other, "for each member of the family to look out for the interests of other family members." Yet how do you maintain this balance? Paul knew what was needed. He knew that if everyone just started serving each other, without other elements in place, it would never succeed. He knew that you motivate hands to serve by first appealing to the heart and the head.

So, in Philippians 2:1 Paul says use your mind to remember. He seeks to motivate the believers' serving hands by reminding them of what God had done for them (Christ in grace has encouraged them, the Father has comforted them in his love, and the Spirit has welcomed them into fellowship; see 2 Cor. 13:14). He also says the Philippian Christians should recall to mind the affection and compassion they had had for each other in better days (Phil. 2:1d). In the next verse, Paul continues to challenge their minds to think in unified ways

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in the present (the same mind, same love, one spirit, one mind). Paul motivates the hands by appealing to the head.

Then in Philippians 2:3, Paul also speaks to the heart. First, he tells them to drop their proud delusions of grandeur; then he tells them to replace them with a heart of humility that loves and values others as more important than self. Paul speaks to the heart in order to motivate the hands.

Because now, finally, in Philippians 2:4, Paul gets to acts of service. He says, Stop: don't allow your attention to be caught up in your own to-do list, your own calendar, your own needs. But instead, start by adding another focus: each believer should look out for the needs and interests of other people.

In all this, Paul calls the church family to be responsible and serve each other (hands), and also to enjoy each other (through the heart and head). So, if you're more of a get-things-done kind of person, how do Paul's reminders for your heart and head challenge your instincts toward serving? And if you're more of a contemplative type, enjoying the grace and relationships God has given, how do Paul's words challenge you to take initiative, in concrete ways and words, for the benefit of other people?

**Prayer:** Father, Son, and Spirit, we ask that you would help us remember what you have done for us, how you have first served us out of the joy of Your own heart. And help us to take delight in the people around us, as we take steps to serve them, just like You.

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**Saturday, April 1**

**Today's Devotional comes from Eden Foester**

**Theme: Community**

**Scripture: John 13:34-35**

<sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

**Reflection:** When Jesus calls us to love one another, He calls us to love as He loved. If we want to walk in true love, we have to think about how Jesus loved.

The love that Jesus demonstrated for us can begin to feel normal or even meaningless when we get used to hearing it, but I want to challenge you to really let the weight of His love captivate your heart. So, what did Jesus' love look like?

Jesus left a perfect place with God and came down to our broken world in the form of a servant, because of His love for us. He lived a perfect and blameless life, healing the sick, chasing after the lost, and constantly directing His people back to the Father. The greatest act of love was when Jesus, undeserving of any punishment, took all the blame and died on the cross, giving His life for us and taking away every punishment for all mankind. His love is extravagant, servant hearted, and selfless.

I spent the last three months in Lebanon doing mission work, and I quickly came to the realization that community flourishes when each person is captivated and driven by the love of Jesus. I had a team of 13, and I can confidently say that our unity and friendship first came from a place of selflessness and servant hearted love. It was as simple as washing the dishes when no one else wanted to, or praying for someone when they were struggling. For me, loving others became a lot easier when I realized that Jesus never once withheld love. So why would I?

Let Jesus' love drive you to love others well, especially when it means going low and serving. Jesus lives inside of you, so when you love, you're actually showing His love, and this really changes communities and atmospheres!

**Practice:** What is one way you can love someone well today? Ask the Lord to show you where you have been withholding love from your community, and ask Him to give you the strength to love like He does in this area.

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank you for the way that you love me. Please captivate me with your love and never let me forget the weight and depth of your love for me. Help me to love others in my community as you have loved, and let my love for others demonstrate my devotion to you.