

# LENT: 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

## Week #7: April 3-8

**Monday, April 3**

**Today's Devotional comes from Pastor Todd Johnson**

**Theme: Reflecting on how Jesus endured the Trial**

**Scripture: Mark 14:60-62**

<sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

<sup>62</sup> "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

**Reflection:** When I was a much younger man, I used to run endurance races in the mountains of Colorado. My favorite race was the Georgetown to Idaho Springs Half-Marathon. 13.1 miles through the mountains at 8,500 feet isn't for the faint of heart. One of the distinctives of this race was that it was very easy to get off course. There were a lot of turns and switchbacks, therefore, if you weren't paying close attention, you could easily get knocked off course, making your 13.1 mile journey even longer. Fortunately, the race organizers placed volunteers at critical intersections, these volunteers would make sure weary runners didn't set off in the wrong direction. What these race organizers knew from experience was that when we are lacking endurance, when we are weary, we can much more easily lose focus.

When we think about all the things that Jesus endured during passion week, we can often overlook His meeting with the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53-65). In this meeting Jesus endures false testimony about Himself. He is disrespected by being spat on and slapped. His accusers are overwhelmingly misinformed about who He is and what He is doing. This must have been a terribly wearying experience for Jesus to endure, but He does not allow this trial to knock him off course.

Jesus is laser focused on his mission of redemption. Instead of getting angry at the Sanhedrin and exercising His divine power against them. Jesus uses this opportunity to tell His foes exactly who He is... "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." By this Jesus is referencing the fact that during His first Advent the glory of His deity was veiled in a human body. But when He comes again the veil will be removed and everyone will know EXACTLY who He is.

A part of the reason why Jesus was able to endure and stay the course is because He never lost sight of who He TRULY IS. I think for us here in 2023, staying the course is similarly rooted in knowing WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST. Being invited into the family of God by the sacrifice of His son Jesus will enable us to endure the turns and switchbacks of life. And the best part is Christ hasn't left us, He's given us the Holy Spirit to guide our lives until He returns.

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You may find yourself weary and lacking the necessary endurance on the road of life. It helps to know that we have a Savior who endured the struggles of life just like we do. He endured so that we might be children of God through faith in Him (Gal. 3:26).

**Prayer:** Father God grant me the endurance of your Son Jesus who withstood mockery, beatings, betrayal and crucifixion to redeem my needy soul. May I stay the course through life's ups and downs knowing that through it all my truest security lies heavenward, because of the faith I have placed in Jesus.

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**Tuesday, April 4**

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

**Theme: What trial are you facing?**

**Scripture: Psalm 27 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?

<sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me  
to eat up my flesh,  
my adversaries and foes,  
it is they who stumble and fall.

<sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war arise against me,  
yet I will be confident.

<sup>4</sup> One thing have I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord  
and to inquire in his temple.

<sup>5</sup> For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will lift me high upon a rock.

<sup>6</sup> And now my head shall be lifted up  
above my enemies all around me,  
and I will offer in his tent  
sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;  
be gracious to me and answer me!

<sup>8</sup> You have said, "Seek my face."  
My heart says to you,  
"Your face, Lord, do I seek."

<sup>9</sup> Hide not your face from me.  
Turn not your servant away in anger,  
O you who have been my help.  
Cast me not off; forsake me not,  
O God of my salvation!

<sup>10</sup> For my father and my mother have forsaken me,  
but the Lord will take me in.

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- <sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.
- <sup>12</sup> Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they breathe out violence.
- <sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living!
- <sup>14</sup> Wait for the Lord;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the Lord!

**Reflection:** The last verse in Psalm 27 reminds me of my favorite scene in “The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian.” I think it’s fair game to include a little spoiler here since it was published seventy-two years ago. The Telmarines invaded Narnia resulting in generations of Narnians living in fear and hiding. Until one day, Prince Caspian led the Narnians in rebellion against King Miraz the Usurper. The war was not going well for the Narnians. In a last-ditch effort, Prince Caspian blew a magic horn that legend said would bring back King Peter, King Edmund, Queen Susan, Queen Lucy and maybe even Aslan the Great Lion to set all things right again in Narnia. Nothing immediately happened. Days went by and no help arrived. Despair and dissent spread throughout the camp.

*“... The help will come. It may be even now at the door” said Trufflehunter.*

*“Pah!” snarled Nikabrik... “We tried first the Horn and it has failed... But when your sword breaks, you draw your dagger. The stories tell of other powers beside the ancient Kings and Queens. How if we could call them up?”*

*“Who do you mean?” said Caspian at last.*

*“I mean a power so much greater than Aslan’s that it held Narnia spellbound for years and years...”*

*“The White Witch!” cried three voices all at once...*

*“But, heaven and earth!” said Caspian, “haven’t we always been told that she was the worst enemy of all? Wasn’t she a tyrant ten times worse than Miraz?”*

*“Perhaps,” said Nikabrik, whose voice now rose to a scream, “[but] if you can’t help my people, I’ll go to someone who can!”*

Trufflehunter was right, help had arrived! They were listening just outside the door the entire time. When King Peter and the rest realized Nikabrik was conspiring with a hag and a werewolf to summon the White Witch they all burst into the room and defeated them. When faced with trials, we have the choice to be like Trufflehunter or like Nikabrik. Will we be courageous, faithful, and patient while we wait on the Lord, or will we lose heart and demand results no matter the cost? I think C.S. Lewis chose the horn to represent salvation for the Narnians because Jesus is referred to as the “horn of salvation” in Luke 1:69 and Psalm 18:2.

**Prayer:** Jesus Christ, our horn of salvation, you came to earth and defeated our greatest adversaries; sin, death, and Satan. You promised us that one day you would return to set

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everything right here on Earth. Therefore, let us boldly proclaim, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1). Help us through your Holy Spirit to be strong and courageous as we wait faithfully to see your face. Amen.

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**Wednesday, April 5**

**Today's Devotional comes from Rev. Kyle Benson**

**Theme: Perseverance**

**Scripture: Romans 5:1-5 (NASB1995)**

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith in this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

**Reflection:** What are awards? The dictionary defines awards as "a prize or other mark of recognition given in honor of achievement." Olympians receive awards in the form of medals for athletic prowess. Employees receive awards for work well done. Students receive awards for academic achievement. Fraternities and sororities give awards to members for charitable works. Church laity receive awards for dedicating themselves to the wonderful work of ministry. Awards are great. They uplift and inspire the recipients and show them that their work has been noticed and is appreciated. On the other hand, awards can also come at a cost.

There are times when human life is stressful. There are times when human life is filled with tears. There are times when human life is overrun with trials. There are times when human life is rife with tribulation. There are times when human life is racked with pain. There are times when human life is contaminated with injustice. There are times when human life is marred with racism and prejudice. In times like these that have been just described, can an award possibly come? When we are at extremely low points of our lives is an award considered? When we are on the verge of giving up, is an award even in our thought process? If not, then take comfort in this mighty living scripture from Romans 5:1-5.

The Apostle Paul (a man who is no stranger to pain, suffering, trial and tribulation) in his letter to the people in Rome has clearly stated that awards can and will come in the lives of those that persevere. In the lives of those that place their trust in the ever loving and true God and not give up. In the lives of those that endure. Perseverance and endurance are synonymous terms. Paul tells us that perseverance has an award. The award is character. I chose the NASB1995 version because it inserts the word "proven" before "character." Paul goes on to say that there is even an award for proven character. And that award is hope.

My friend Johnnie has that hope. The hope that in spite of circumstance is ever present. You may remember his personal philosophy from the previous devotional, "the bitter end is getting sweeter all the time." His incredible trust that there is light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. However, I like the way Edward Mote penned the hymn that says, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and His righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ (say it out loud as you read this) On Christ, the solid rock I stand. All other ground, (yes ALL OTHER ground) is sinking sand."

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**Prayer:** Lord God Almighty, thank you for giving us your Son and the blood He shed by which we are strengthened and for His rising that we have hope for the future. Help us to look to You for that perseverance that builds character and that character that brings forth hope, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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**Thursday, April 6**

**Today's Devotional comes from Daniel Price**

**Theme: Packing for the Exodus | Holy Thursday**

**Scripture: Exodus 15:19-21**

For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea..."

**Reflection:** Imagine you're leaving home for good. You'll never be back and you need to pack only what you can carry as you race to freedom.

That first night of Passover must have been frantic and terrifying for the Hebrew people who were slaves in Egypt.

Through Moses, God had given them instructions about how they might survive the night: Kill a lamb, paint its blood on your door frames, eat the lamb with your family huddled close while the Lord passes overhead in the night, killing the firstborn of those not marked by the blood. And be ready to run.

Could you imagine packing to leave your home under those conditions? Considering that, I can't help but wonder a bit at one item they packed. Of all the things the women of Israel might choose to take with them as they made their Exodus, apparently, they chose to include... tambourines?

"Honey, remember to put my tambourine in your pack!"

Miriam's husband probably rolled his eyes. "Do we really need that?"

But the tambourines came in handy, didn't they? When God destroyed Pharaoh and his armies, Miriam led the celebration with her tambourine. Singing and dancing about the glorious victory that God had won for them. She was ready to praise God!

But her celebration in the light was planned for in the dark of that awful night of Passover

She got ready to praise while still amidst the cries and fear.

She knew that somewhere down the road God was leading them, out of the suffering of Egypt, would come moments of joy and singing because of God and his work. She anticipated the coming goodness of God.

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Perhaps you find yourself in one of those dark places of fear, suffering and bondage today. If you do, remind yourself that God is in this place with you. And his road will lead you to places of worship that you might not expect. You see, He's good. He'll be good to you, even if you have a hard time seeing it while packing in the dark. But get ready. Because moments of celebration over his goodness are coming.

It's a lot like Good Friday, as dark as it was. As Jesus was betrayed during his last Passover with his disciples in the dark of night in Jerusalem, He could see the celebration that was coming. As He prayed and sweat drops of blood in the dark of the garden, even then He knew the joy of the coming Sunday's resurrection.

It didn't change the pain of what He was experiencing – and would experience even more. But Jesus knew what was on the other side: the celebration of God's own children, those bought by the blood of the Lamb, marking them as His, passed over and set free.

Expect to celebrate God's goodness, friend. Even if you find yourself in the dark. Pack your tambourine, because good things are coming!

Please join us for special Holy Thursday: Seder service this evening!

## **Holy Thursday: Seder Service & Kids' Program on Thursday, April 6 at 7:00 p.m.**

On Holy Thursday we will have a special Seder service. This service will walk through what Jesus and His disciples experienced during their final Passover meal the night before He was crucified. This service will be livestreamed. Children, birth through 5th grade, are invited to the Kids' Program where they will learn about Seder and the Easter story while hearing a Bible lesson, making a craft and having game/play time. Registration for the Kids' Program closed on Sunday (March 26).

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**Friday, April 7**

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

**Theme: The Cross-Tenebrae**

**Scripture: Mark 15:16-37**

<sup>16</sup> The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. <sup>17</sup> They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. <sup>18</sup> And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" <sup>19</sup> Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. <sup>20</sup> And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

<sup>21</sup> A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. <sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). <sup>23</sup> Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

<sup>25</sup> It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews. <sup>27</sup> They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!" <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!" <sup>32</sup> Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

<sup>33</sup> At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). <sup>35</sup> When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." <sup>36</sup> Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

<sup>37</sup> With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

**Reflection:** These six weeks of Lent we have followed Jesus in his decrease to the lowest moment in the history of the universe: the crucifixion of the Son of God. With painstaking detail, Mark's gospel takes us down the Humble Servant's staircase to the dank dungeon where we encounter His horrific suffering and death. The light, love and innocence of Jesus further exposes the hideous darkness of sin and evil at the hands of these perpetrators.

When we read the crucifixion story, we think to ourselves, "How could such evil and darkness be committed against such goodness and light?" But I'm also reminded of the haunting lyrics of How Deep the Father's Love for Us by Stuart Townend,

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*"Behold the man upon a cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished"*

When we place ourselves into the story, we realize to our dismay that we are not the heroes or even the innocent onlookers...we are the perpetrators. We may not have spit in His face and mocked Him, but our callous sin has mocked His righteousness. We may not have beaten and scourged His body, but we have every time we mistreat human beings made in His image. We may not have driven the nails in His feet and hands, but our rebellion is what put Him on the cross. He not only died FOR us, but He died BECAUSE of us.

As children of God saved by grace, often we are quick to rejoice in the triumph of His resurrection and our salvation. And rightly so! But today...pause the story here and sit in the shadow of the cross. As you come to the Good Friday service this evening, linger in the realization that it was our sin that held Him there until it was accomplished. Why? Because to the degree we can grasp the horror of the cross because of our sin we can begin to grasp the wonder of the cross that pays for our sin.

**Prayer:** Lord, I know it was my sin that held you there. I placed the crown of thorns upon your head. I held the nails as they pierced your hands and feet. [Confess any lingering sin that contributed to the suffering of Christ.] Father, humble me in the shadow of the cross. May I decrease so that the wonder of the cross may increase. Amen.

Please join us for a special Good Friday service this evening!

## **Good Friday: Tenebrae Service on April 7 at 7:00 p.m.**

This year our Tenebrae Service takes place on Good Friday. This is a vesper service of quiet reflection about Jesus' journey to the cross. It is a candlelight service of spoken word, scripture and music. Once you've experienced this time of remembrance, Easter Sunday is even more glorious! Due to the somber and quiet nature of the service, childcare is available up to 5th grade, no registration required. This service will be livestreamed.

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**Saturday, April 8**

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

**Theme: Community**

**Scripture: Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42**

**John 19:38-42**

The Burial of Jesus

<sup>38</sup> Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. <sup>39</sup> He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. <sup>40</sup> Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. <sup>41</sup> At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. <sup>42</sup> Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

**Matthew 27:57-61**

The Burial of Jesus

<sup>57</sup> As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. <sup>59</sup> Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, <sup>60</sup> and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

**Reflection:** The time in between...The Gospel accounts give us only a few details about the time in between Jesus's crucifixion and his resurrection. Interestingly, each of the gospels gives us specific details about his burial (Matthew 28:57-61; Mark 15: 42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42). It's beautiful and heart-breaking.

We learn that Joseph of Arimathea laid the body of Jesus in his own new tomb, which he had 'cut in the rock'. How some of the women followed and watched from a distance, and also 'helped prepare spices and ointments'. We hear how Nicodemus, 'the one who had earlier come to Jesus by night', also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes. We learn that 'Jesus was buried in a garden'. The Gospels are intentional to bring us into the gritty detail of the burial process.

Those involved in his burial were not necessarily his closest disciples. This gives us a glimpse into the broader impact of grief that would have been felt at Jesus's death. They may have been saying, "I can't believe He died. He really died. I loved him so much. I can't believe He's gone. I'm in shock." His lifeless body was a confronting reminder that he was gone.

As modern-day believers, we don't have first-hand experience with the time in between his crucifixion and his resurrection. Only a small group of believers lived through that historical

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moment. Even a smaller circle understood that he was the Messiah. It's helpful to pause...to imagine ourselves there. They went through the darkness, the unknown...the grief of that moment. And it's their grief that stands out to me now.

You can see love and care in their action...Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilot to gain access to Jesus's body, Nicodemus participated in His burial, Mary Magdalene and the other women stayed within close proximity of His body...and made sure they knew where His body lay so they could go and prepare spices and ointments. They all were living in the grief of the moment, but they weren't passive characters.

What does this mean for us on this in-between day?

In the midst of Passover, the loss of Jesus would have been overwhelming. The weight of their grief helps us imagine the profound delight at His resurrection! By pausing on the grief of the early followers...this may help us connect to the joy they experienced when they saw Him in the resurrection. Maybe this reminder can help us lean into the joyful surprise of the resurrection.

We don't have to fabricate excitement. We don't have to pretend we are excited that Jesus rose from the dead. As we rise tomorrow to the joy of resurrection...there is a richness of this moment discovered on the other side of grief.

As we come to the end of 40 days of Increase and Decrease, we all face a question - What now?

Hopefully there are some lasting takeaways that you've developed during this time, such as spirit-led attitudes, new spiritual rhythms, new margin for time with God, or a greater perspective on what's important. Will those aspects continue for you?

Forty days is just long enough to begin seeing small changes over time, and lasting change takes time. As you step out of this season of Increase and Decrease, take time to journal around the following questions:

- What did you find most difficult about the last 40 days?
- What is a lesson you learned? Why did God want you to learn that lesson? What good might come from it?
- What is something you need to continue? (Possibly a new attitude, a new truth to live by, a new way to rely on the Holy Spirit or a new spiritual rhythm)
- What did you learn about yourself, others, or God?
- How might this new insight influence our church or those in your sphere of influence?

We end this season much like we began, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30).

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**Prayer:** Lord, did I learn what you wanted me to learn? (pause and listen) Moving forward, what new rhythm of life will help me stay connected to you? (pause and listen) Is there something specific you need to call to my mind as a takeaway from these 40 days? (pause and listen) Jesus, thank you for your resurrection, and for victory over sin and death. Help me move forward, not in my own strength, but in the strength of your Holy Spirit working in and through me. Lord Jesus, you must increase. Help me to decrease.  
In Jesus Name, Amen.

## **Join us on Resurrection Sunday!**

We will celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday with three services!

8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Livestream at 9:30 a.m.