

From ashes to

*resurrection*

Cru Lent Devotional

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he beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send My messenger ahead of You,  
Who will prepare Your way” —  
“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
Make straight paths for Him.’”  
(Mark 1:1-3, New International Version)

These ancient words call to you today. Prepare, listen, pay attention. Repent and get ready for God to show up.

Lent is a time set apart for just these practices, and we’re glad you’ve chosen to spend it with us. We invite you to prepare, listen, pay attention, reflect and repent as you get ready to celebrate Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Starting now, join us on a journey “From Ashes to Resurrection.” We’re exploring the ways Jesus delivered you through His life, death and resurrection.

When Jesus Christ saved you, He made you new. He flooded the dark corners of your life with purifying light and breathed the fresh life of His Spirit into you. And He is continuing His miraculous work in you every single day.

Spend these next weeks recounting the many ways Christ has changed you — and continues to change you — through life with Him, now and into eternity.

*Lent - Day 1*

# Your Journey to Joy

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Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight ... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.  
(Psalm 51:2-4, 12, New American Standard Bible)

In a good marriage, couples often give extra attention to their relationship. They may celebrate achievements, plan for the future, or dig into painful revelations of grievances and hurts, hopefully followed by confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.



Ash Wednesday begins the Lenten season, a period in the year when you can take time to focus on your relationship with God. During Lent, you can share your disappointments, unfulfilled expectations and regrets with God

as you ask, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23-24, NASB).

Though ash looks dirty — the remains of a destructive fire — it serves as the first step toward cleansing. In fact, traditional soaps were made from ash and fat. As you reflect on your life, aided by the various Lenten disciplines to be discussed in upcoming devotionals, you will begin identifying areas of desired change — both brokenness due to your own sin and suffering due to the fallenness of the world. This is the first step toward cleansing.

Fire burns waste and purifies gold. There will be a day when all of your works will be tested by fire. “If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14-15, NASB).

## Respond

As God reveals areas of rebellion or independence from His loving leadership during Lent, allow Him to burn them out of your life now. As He opens your eyes to other brokenness — unfulfilled expectations, disappointments, suffering, and regrets — ask Him to help you trust Him with these as well. Allow Him to begin cleansing you, healing you and ultimately producing in you the wonderful works He’s made you for. This salvation should bring joy — a joy that comes from experiencing the presence of God (Psalm 16:11).

David Lloyd works in Austin, Texas, with Global Church Movements to give every man, woman and child in the metro area ongoing opportunities to see and hear of Jesus’ love for them through a united movement of mobilized churches. Previously, David and his wife, Elaine, led teams pioneering Cru’s ministry in Moscow under the USSR and in Latvia before coordinating Agape Europe’s ministry to leaders and influencers. In his spare time, David has begun writing his first book, “Living on Mission: Stories of Radical Faith, Hope, and Love.”

*Lent - Day 2*

## It's Not Too Late

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*To begin your journey through the Lenten season (and every Saturday during this study), you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. You will begin today learning about lament. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster. Who knows whether He will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” (Joel 2:12-14, English Standard Version)

During a time of prosperity, the people of Israel let down their guard and descended into a period of moral depravity and pagan worship. So God Almighty caused a plague of locusts, fire and drought to come on the land as a warning that judgment was on its way. Then God sent the prophet Joel to tell the people to turn back to Him. He told them it wasn't too late.

Repetition provides emphasis. Twice in this passage, God says to return to Him. Twice the prophet appeals to "your heart," which is the seat of the mind, emotions and will.

The solution to sin and moral decay is to repent and return. When you repent, you acknowledge your wrongdoing, consider the weight of your misdeeds, turn away from bad behavior, and turn toward God. This action is not a surface showing of mock regret but a true change of belief and attitude. The grief, weeping and mourning described in Scripture reflect that change.

One way to express this sorrow is to fast — that is, to give up food for a period of time to help you to focus on God. Ask God to search your heart and reveal anything that violates His standards. Then ask for forgiveness and the help of the Holy Spirit to change.

"Rend your hearts, not your garments." Keep this practice private. Many Jews would tear their clothes to display their mourning in public. Jesus said they

had their reward. Your fasting should not be a show for others, but a special time between you and the Father (Matthew 6:16-18).

History tells us that the Northern Kingdom of Israel did not repent and was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, was devastated by the invading army, but King Hezekiah turned to the Lord, and Jerusalem was saved. God's call to repentance still stands. Which choice will you make?

## Respond

Pray that God will help you to fast, weep and mourn during Lent. Use a time of fasting to ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin, habits or attitudes in your life that need to change, or anything keeping you from drawing near to Jesus Christ.

For more on this topic, read Matthew 6:16-18, Psalm 139:23-24, and Isaiah 57:15.

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*Lent - Day 3*

## An IV Drip for the Soul

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*To begin your journey through the Lenten season (and every Saturday during this study), you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about embracing Scripture and prayer. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.  
(Hebrews 4:12, English Standard Version)

The chemotherapy room is a subdued place. Patients quietly bide their time as the drugs they hope will kill their disease slowly drip into their bodies. It's quiet, somber, yet eerily peaceful. Loved ones accompany most patients, as I did with my cancer-stricken mother, offering encouragement, conversation and even occasional bursts of laughter.

Cancer doesn't infect from the outside in, like a virus. It's a corruption at the cellular level — one's own cells mutate into malformed, sick versions of themselves that replicate, filling the body with disease. When my mother's cancer was discovered, a tumor the size of a cantaloupe had already grown.

In this way, cancer is like sin. You don't "catch" sin like you catch a cold; it's corruption at your cellular level. You're born with it, like many cancer patients are born with the genes that eventually cause cancer to develop.

When you place your faith in Jesus, He takes the cancer of your sin upon Himself. At the cross, the penalty for sin is paid, and its power to destroy you is neutralized. But there is a still-to-come element in Jesus' work; while you remain here, in a still-corrupted body, the effects of the cancer's presence linger.

Hebrews 4:12 describes the word of God in almost medical terms. Scripture is like a surgical instrument or incredibly effective chemotherapy, targeting precisely the infected area it needs

to reach. Time spent reading and meditating on Scripture is like time in the chemotherapy room: peaceful, often quiet, perhaps somber, yet sometimes filled with joy.

Most importantly, present with you in your spiritual treatment room is the greatest loved one of all, Jesus, the Word made flesh, who fully cures your disease. He administers through His Word the targeted chemotherapy you still need.

Drip by drip, healing, transformation and life flow into your thirsty soul.

### Pray

"Jesus, thank You for taking away my sin and forgiving me through Your death and resurrection. Thank You for the promise that, one day, I'll experience that freedom from sin in full. Give me the desire to draw near to You through Your Word, and help me to be patient as You use it as chemotherapy to kill the remaining sin that I know and feel is still present. Amen."

Jason Weimer serves as the Associate Publisher for Cru Press, Cru's resource and publishing arm. He served in Campus Ministry for 13 years before relocating to Cru's global headquarters in Orlando. He and his family enjoy the beach, Disney+, and cheering on Penn State together.

*Lent - Day 4*

# Fasting Can Transform Your Life

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*To begin your journey through the Lenten season (and every Saturday during this study), you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about fasting. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that – rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If any of you wants to be My follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24, New Living Translation)

When Moses received the 10 Commandments, he spent 40 days on the mountain without food or water. When the prophet Daniel waited for God’s deliverance, he fasted, confessing his sins and the sins of his country.



Before Christ began His earthly ministry, He was tempted in the wilderness and He fasted. But why?

When you fast, you deny yourself the necessity of food or the pleasures of this life and, for a time, you make feeding your soul

by hearing from God a higher priority than feeding your body.

When you deny yourself food (or other things you rely on), you humbly admit your dependence on God alone to meet your needs. As your metabolism slows down, so can you, and you can allow the fast-paced world to fade to background noise for a short time.

Down through history, people have fasted at times when they had an urgent prayer request, were looking for direction or were taking on a special assignment. Still, fasting — a staple of the Christian life passed down through generations — may not be as familiar to you as other spiritual disciplines, like having a personal quiet time or praying.

Because we live in a “me-first” culture, we forget that life in Christ is not all about us. We’re tempted to tell God how we want Him to act so He can make our lives easier. “Give me what I want right now. Please don’t make this painful. And by all means, keep me safe.”

Fasting allows you to line up your heart and prayer life with God’s desires rather than pursuing your own agenda. You may fast for a specific time from food or from luxuries like Netflix, social media or even chocolate. Some people fast for a day, others for a week or two, and still others might fast as long as 40 days, the entire length of Lent.

By denying yourself, you invite the Holy Spirit to examine your life and lead you into the plans He has for you

### Pray

“Jesus, I want to live in line with Your plans for my life. What are You asking me to let go of for a time so that I can listen to You more clearly?”

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Anne Marie Winz has served with Cru® in a variety of roles for many years. Currently, she coaches staff members who write stories about how God is at work in their lives and around the world. She lives in Orlando, Florida, with her husband, Mark.

[Learn more about fasting.](#)

# *Lent* Your Day to Rest



It's Sunday — a day to rest.

Did you know that ever since Jesus died and rose again, each Sunday is like a mini Easter? In addition to resting, like God commanded in the Old Testament, the first Christians remembered and celebrated Christ's resurrection every single week.

Today, God invites you to celebrate and rest in the finished work of Christ — for you and for everyone who trusts in Him.

*Lent - Day 5*

## Old to New

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Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.  
(Isaiah 43:18-19, New International Version)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!  
(2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.  
(Colossians 3:9-11, NIV)

**H**ave you ever been thrift shopping?

Thrift shopping is something I've loved for a while because of the unique finds, affordable price tag and the

story behind each piece.

Finding old treasures and bringing them new life is exhilarating. A pair of jeans or a lamp that would have been thrown away can now be your prized possession.

This is what your identity in Christ is like. The old is gone and the new has

come, as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. You can trust that your old self was crucified and that you now have a new identity in Christ. That is something worth celebrating!

You can have confidence that by God's grace He is growing you and sanctifying you. Colossians 3:10 says that those who are in Christ "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." You are being renewed daily by God because of His great sacrifice.

Christ delivers you from old to new through His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. God's grace alone can take what's old and make it new.

By His sacrifice, Christ takes your spiritual brokenness and introduces a new metric that says your hope isn't in your ability to improve; rather, newness comes from redeeming love.

Praise Him that new things can come through Christ and because of Christ. As Isaiah 43:18-19 reminds us, "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (English Standard Version).

May you fix your eyes on Christ and how He has made you new!

### Pray

"Lord, thank you that you make old things new. Grant me the peace to see renewal in my life, and remind me to look only to you to produce this transformative change in me."

Sarah Winebrenner is passionate about connecting others to Jesus in a meaningful way. She lives in Kentucky with her husband, Andrew, and their two sweet kiddos. She adores all things baking, reading, hiking, writing and nail polish.

*Lent - Day 6*

# You Need to Be Healed for Christ's Sake

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He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24, New International Version)

For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (Hebrews 10:14, NIV)

**T**he beautiful delicately-etched drinking glass drops as if in slow motion. It can't be grasped, so it shatters into jagged pieces as it hits the floor. The sound is final.

Some things in life can't be glued back together — at least, not easily. Sin, which violates God's law (1 John 3:4) and nature (Romans 8:4), ravages our souls



and makes them one of those things. Apart from Christ, in our sin, we're lost in darkness and separated from God in ways that we can't do anything about. Sin leads to death, as it fatally wounds the spirit and soul.

But God has a plan for people broken

by sin. He longs to heal us. Jesus took all of your wrongdoing on Himself at the cross. The purpose of Christ's sacrificial death, His death in your place, was to deal with your sin. Christ's wounds heal yours when you place your faith and trust in Him to forgive you.

The sacrifice of Christ makes you right with God and brings you into a relationship with Him. It gives you a clean conscience, which brings peace with God. Because of it, you can have assurance of salvation,

meaning you never have to wonder whether you can be saved. You can have the permanent gift of eternal life.

In these ways, the person who believes is perfected. To be perfected in Christ means that, while sin does remain, its penalty and power — what keeps you from God — is removed by His sacrifice. Jesus made you perfect and holy in God's sight through His death on the cross, paying the cost for your sins.

### Reflect

Take time to reflect on what Christ has done on the cross for you. If you've never heard of Christ's sacrifice for you, [learn more here](#). God offers you an opportunity to be whole. Thank Him that He takes on your brokenness and binds up your wounds because He loves you.

Jan Stewart writes for Cru Storylines™. She values writing inspiring stories about what Jesus Christ is doing throughout the world. Jan enjoys being a wife, a mother of four, a grandma of four and the best friend of Shadow, her loveable border collie.

*Lent - Day 7*

## Forgiven & Free

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The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalm 103:8-12, New International Version)

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

(Romans 7:15-25, NIV)

**L**ied to your parents.  
 Lied to your friends.  
 Gossiped.  
 Cheated in school.  
 Ditched class.  
 Intentionally hurt someone else.  
 Indulged in sexual sin.”

My cheeks burned pink.

I was one of the hundred 15-year-olds charged to confess my sins as part of a religious rite of passage. During this exercise, my confessor listed sins one-by-one while, with a nod or shake of the head, I either confirmed or denied my guilt. Though it was meant to make confession easier on our young souls, the drill made my heart beat fast and my stomach tighten as the list grew longer.

Growing up, I could relate to King David, who said, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3, NIV). I had a nagging sense of falling short. Sometimes, I was not sure why things I did were wrong, like when I messed up a ritual at church. But sometimes, I was keenly aware of my wrongdoing, like when I spoke spitefully to my brother, though I loved him dearly.

As I carried those moments with me, I wondered how to be better. I felt little relief after confession

or ritual prayers meant to ease my guilt. Those moments grew into obsessions with my inadequacy and with becoming clean. And the obsessions grew into thoughts I couldn’t escape.



I learned later that this was due, in part, to an anxiety disorder\* that went undetected for years. But even that revelation could not refute the truth that I had chosen to do sinful things which I could not undo.

Years later, I sat across from a friend who’d been determined to help me understand the love of God.

I knew the story she shared about Jesus and the cross, but this time I snapped to attention. I stopped her and said, “Okay. I get it. Here’s what I don’t get. What do I have to do, and what do I have to avoid, to make sure God never stops loving me, to make sure I’m okay?”

She looked me in the eye, smiled, and said, “You never did anything to make God start loving you. You’ll never do anything to make Him stop.”

Immediately, I said, “Wait ... what? Just like that?” My dear friend nodded, and I sat stunned, relieved in a way I’d never been before. Tears stung my eyes

as I understood. That was why Jesus died: to show me that, in Him, my guilt can be forgiven once and for all, and that I really do belong to Him forever.

A weight lifted, and we both began to laugh. I was free. I could finally breathe. Later, I learned that I could walk in love rather than worry. Nothing can change what is true about me: I am forgiven and free, and I don't have to carry the weight of those moments anymore.

## Reflect and Respond

What moments or patterns of sin weigh you down? Write one or two down and confess them directly to God. Give them to Him, remembering that Christ paid for these sins and more when He died on the cross. Then read Psalm 51, knowing you are a new creation, clean and forgiven in Christ.

*\* This devotional addresses a mental health issue that affects people from all walks of life. While addressing pieces of this issue within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

Rebecca Kelsall is a full-time writer for Cru® in Orlando, Florida. Her family consists of herself (a native New Mexican), her husband (a born-and-raised New Englander), their dachshund-beagle, Belle, and their brand new baby boy. Some of her greatest passions include Jesus, culture, family and stories.

*Lent - Day 8*

# Lost on the Inside

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“There was a man who had two sons...”  
(Luke 15:11-32, New International Version)



**R**esentment about serving builds where I used to enjoy it.

Envy rises toward people who appear to lead a simpler life.

I tabulate the work I've accomplished for Jesus before clocking out of good deeds for the day.

Do you, as I do, tend to function like you're God's employee instead of a beloved member of His family?



When I'm in this kind of funk, the story of the father and his sons in Luke 15 snaps me back to reality.

A wealthy father has two sons, and one asks for his inheritance early. This son, the younger, parties his fortune away

while the other stays at the family farm, working hard to build the estate. I get that life — the life of the dutiful child.

Then the younger son returns completely broke, willing to take the place of a servant. Instead, he's welcomed back as a cherished son.

The older brother — the responsible one — now spews his resentment. He's never felt celebrated, and he's angry. He was there the whole time working so hard, being so good, but missing out on life.

The father finds his older son outside the house and pleads with him. "Everything I have is yours," the father says. "You are always with me," he adds, pleading for deeper understanding. We are left wondering about this older brother. Does he get it? Is he ever able to receive what his father wanted to give him: an invitation into his presence, to his wealth? We are left wondering how he will respond.

Regardless of whom you identify with in Jesus' story, this invitation is extended to you too.

If you relate to the younger son, will you come home and embrace the father waiting for you? Or will you remain far from the family, hoping to work something out on your own?

If you, like me, relate to the elder brother, will you remain in the darkness, lost outside the celebration, resentful because you worked so hard for so long to earn something that was free all along? Or will you join in on the party, accepting God's free and complete favor extended to you through His Son, Jesus?

## Respond

Spend some time reflecting on Luke 15. When have you felt lost, resentful or like you had to earn God's acceptance? What did the older son feel that he deserved? What did the father hope his older son would see about their relationship? How is the father's character in the story similar to or different from what you understand of God?

Read more about [what it's like to have a relationship with God.](#)

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Alison Wilson currently works with college students at Texas A&M University. She spent the first 13 years of her adult life as an overseas missionary with Cru®. Her three kids and husband depend on her to keep the fridge stocked: the modern version of going to the well. When she gets the bug to write, she blogs at [eternalwaitofglory.com](http://eternalwaitofglory.com).

*Lent - Day 9*

# Shared Glory, Shared Suffering

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For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.

(Romans 8:14-17, New International Version)

I remember the moment I realized how tightly my heart and spirit were gripped by fear. On a summer mission trip to Juneau, Alaska, I watched everyone around me take steps of faith despite their fear. One student stepped toward vulnerability,



sharing her story with courage. Another stepped toward bold evangelism, inviting locals into community with us and with God. As I observed from a comfortable distance, it struck me that I'd never experience the Lord like my peers were if I stayed on the sidelines.

I took my first real leap of faith into a lake, hand-in-hand with my small group. In total disregard for my fear of water, I jumped; when I climbed back onto the dock, I couldn't believe I had done it. I finally turned away from fear and stepped out in faith, trusting God completely, and I felt weightless. It was liberating. No longer bound by my fears, I was free to experience the fullness of God's presence with me as I discovered new courage to do things I had been afraid of for so long. This is exactly what the Spirit's presence promises: disencumbering assurance, peace beyond measure and freedom from fear.

This same kind of freedom comes with your adoption into the family of God. When you invite Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit enters your life. At that moment, you become God's child. Like an orphan adopted by a loving family, you do not do anything to earn your place as God's child. Your adoption is a permanent gift given through the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word used in this Bible passage for "adoption to sonship" refers to the full legal standing of an adopted heir in Roman society. Through adoption, you gain an inheritance — but what do you inherit? Romans 8 says that you are God's heir and a co-heir with Christ, meaning you share in Christ's inheritance. Your adoption into the family of God qualifies you to share in the same victory and joy as Jesus.

While you share Christ's victory, you'll also share His suffering. The Holy Spirit frees you from bondage to fear, but He does not eliminate suffering from your life. You will suffer disappointment, defeat, grief, frustration and obstacles far beyond your control. But the good news of your adoption is this: even when trouble comes your way, you don't have to be afraid. Your seat at the family table is eternally reserved. Your adoption grants you full access to a heavenly Father who sees your grief, knows your heartache and delights in caring for you.

You don't have to fear disappointment, defeat or grief because you are a child of God. And His love for you — like His love for Jesus — is infinite. Suffering will come, but so will glory, and both are shared. As a co-heir with Christ, a child of God, whatever comes, you can rest easy knowing that you'll never have to endure suffering alone.

### **Reflect and Respond**

Think of a time when God used your suffering to bring you closer to Him or to accomplish something that you hadn't expected.

What might help you to remember that you are not alone when you are suffering?

In light of your adoption, what might be keeping you from experiencing the fullness of God's presence?

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*Lent - Day 10*

# The Power of Repentance

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*Every Saturday during this study, you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about repentance. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight; so You are right in Your verdict and justified when You judge. (Psalm 51:1-4, New International Version)

Saying “I’m sorry” has never been easy for me. I don’t enjoy admitting when I’ve messed up. I’ve learned, though, that if I don’t apologize when I’ve done something wrong, my relationships inevitably suffer.

I see this in my relationship with God too. Sin damages my fellowship with Him, but repentance

— the act of turning away from sin and surrendering anew to God’s authority — brings restoration and peace.

King David learned the importance of repentance after having an affair with a married woman and sending her husband to the front

lines of war to die. Psalm 51 shows his anguish over his sins. His prayer of repentance can serve as a model for you today.

Repentance acknowledges that your heart is prone to wander away from God, and it places God back in His rightful place on the throne of your life. The purpose of repentance isn’t to spend time wallowing in shame but to allow the Holy Spirit’s conviction to draw you back to God. He has already

paid the price for your sins, and He has the power to bring you victory over that sin.

If it’s been a while since you’ve practiced the healthy discipline of repentance, Lent is a great time to incorporate it into your spiritual walk. His love is perfect; His mercy is abundant. Like David, cry out to Him and trust that He’s able to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. And then enjoy the sweet fellowship that comes with being right with God.

### Pray

“God, thank You for Your goodness and mercy. I acknowledge that I am guilty of \_\_\_\_\_. Please forgive me and create a clean heart within me. I surrender to You and ask You to help me live a life that pleases You. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Jayna Richardson is a writer, homeschooling mom and nature enthusiast. She works for FamilyLife® and lives with her husband and kids in Arkansas..



# *Lent* Your Day to Rest



It's Sunday — a day to rest.

Did you know that ever since Jesus died and rose again, each Sunday is like a mini Easter? In addition to resting, like God commanded in the Old Testament, the first Christians remembered and celebrated Christ's resurrection every single week.

Today, God invites you to celebrate and rest in the finished work of Christ — for you and for everyone who trusts in Him.

*Lent - Day 11*

# The Truth Will Set You Free

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The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:15-16, New International Version)

**S**top. Take a deep breath. Inhale. Exhale. Again.

You never notice that you're breathing unless you're asked to breathe — like right now or at the doctor's office. But you are constantly breathing.

It's the same with your thoughts. Every day, all day, you make choices based on thoughts you are unaware of. Often these thoughts are negative. Lies, doubts, worries and fears creep in unnoticed.



How can you be aware of and replace negative thoughts with what is true about you, about God and about reality?

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 2:15-16 that those who have accepted Christ “have

the mind of Christ.” With Christ’s Spirit, you have the ability to think like Him.

You can begin recognizing lies you are believing by comparing your thoughts and beliefs with God’s Word. We all have lies we believe that are sometimes hard to articulate, but when we confess them and bring them into the light of God’s Word, we can experience freedom. (For example, perhaps you’re believing that you’re alone in a tough

situation and have to figure it out on your own, when, in reality, if you belong to Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells you. God is with you always and longs to give you the wisdom you need.)

I practice walking in this freedom throughout my day by simply asking, “What am I honestly believing and feeling about what I’m facing right now?” Then ask, “What would God say about what I’m facing right now?” Then I pray that God would give His wisdom and lead me to answers in the Bible. When I open a dialogue with God in prayer and depend on His Spirit to guide me, God begins to replace lies with truth I find in Scripture.

Jesus fought off lies this way when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan came at Jesus from all angles, including by distorting Scripture. But each time Satan tried to tempt Him, Jesus responded by quoting directly from the Old Testament. “It is written,” replied Jesus when Satan pressed Him to change stones into bread, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (NIV).

John 8:31-32 is a great reminder that holding on to Christ, the Author of truth, makes all the difference: “Jesus said, ‘If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (NIV).

## Reflect and Respond

What is a lie or worry that keeps you from the freedom that Jesus offers? Is it that you are not worthy of love? That you can't handle whatever you are facing? That God won't take care of you? Breathe out your negative thoughts by writing them down or saying them out loud. Then ask God what He would say about these things? What does He say about you?

Don't know what God would say? Look for Scripture related to what you are facing. Memorize these truths. Breathe in these truths every day.

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Brian Barnett is a writer for Cru Press and team leader for the campus ministry in Southeast Virginia. He has been married to Brooke for 14 years and has two children, Graham (9) and Cara (6).

*Lent - Day 12*

# Refreshed Through Your Tears

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You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;  
You have loosed my sackcloth  
and clothed me with gladness,  
that my glory may sing Your praise and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever!”  
(Psalm 30:11-12, English Standard Version)

“Joy is gone from our hearts, our dancing has turned  
to mourning. ... Restore us to Yourself, O LORD,  
that we may return! Renew our days as of old.”  
(Lamentations 5:15, 21, NIV)

“‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to Me  
with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and  
with mourning...’ Return to the LORD your God,  
for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and  
abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:12-13, ESV)

**R**emember in 2020 when the pandemic brought life as we know it to a screeching halt? Travel and events were canceled, work and school were done differently, and many people even died. As you grappled with how to process your losses — both big and small — maybe you came across the term “mourning.” Mourning is the way people have traditionally expressed their sadness

when someone dies. But in the age of global pandemic, mourning became a regular practice for all kinds of losses.

The Bible talks extensively about mourning over death: David grieved deeply when his best friend, Jonathan, died. And Jesus’ disciples were

distraught when He was crucified. The Bible makes it clear that there is a place for mourning over loss. But the Bible also makes it clear that there is another kind of mourning that is more future-oriented. Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 5 that because of their rebellion, the Israelites’ joy is gone from their hearts; their dancing has turned to mourning. Yet later, he cries out in prayer, “Restore us to Yourself, O LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old.”



During Lent, many choose to give up something in order to focus more fully on God. But Joel 2 implies that returning to the Lord involves more than letting go of bad habits or personal indulgences. While doing these things can be a helpful practice, truly returning to God requires intentional time for reflection on the ways you have displeased God. The Bible frequently refers to this as repentance. But repentance includes more than looking back. The forgiveness you receive when you mourn over and repent of your sin projects you forward to experience more of Jesus, who is the only one who can truly turn your mourning into dancing.

### Pray

“Father, there are many ways in which I displease You. During Lent, more than giving up something, I want You to show me my sin. Give me godly sorrow that brings repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10) and refresh me in my daily walk with You.”

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Janet Beal has served with Cru® for 59 years, spending more than 50 of them in Latin America. She currently serves on the leadership development and human resources team for Latin America and the Caribbean. Janet loves to read, do cross stitch projects and hang out with friends.

*Lent - Day 13*

## Jesus Loves “Doubting Thomases”

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Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:24-31, New International Version)

Doubt gets a bad rap in many Christian circles. In today’s passage, we see someone whose uncertainty became so well known, his name became synonymous with doubt. “Doubting Thomas” is about as desirable a nickname as “Party Pooper” or “Debbie Downer.” Feeling doubt would likely not be anyone’s preference, just as most people prefer not to feel discomfort, sadness or anger.

But is doubt bad?

Many people add insult to injury by heaping shame on themselves when they feel doubt. But like discomfort, sadness and anger, doubt is not wrong in and of itself.

Look at how Jesus responds to Thomas, who doubted even his fellow disciples’ eyewitness testimony. He isn’t harsh with His friend, but He offers to meet him exactly where he is. He provides what Thomas needs to move from doubt to trust that Jesus is exactly who He says He is.

Jesus goes on to give a blessing for all who won’t have the opportunity to touch Him in the same way Thomas did but who will hear and believe nonetheless. Thomas’ story ought not to be used to shame or discourage anyone. Instead, Jesus went out of His way to comfort and encourage His followers.

If a little child falls, good parents don’t stand over them, arms crossed, foot tapping, yelling for them to get up or be disowned. A good parent goes to

the child, offering a hand and an encouraging word. God is a good Father. He is patient and kind. Even when we cannot sense Him close by, we can keep calling out and trust that He hears, He cares and He will respond in love.

### Reflect

How do you feel about your doubt? How do you think Jesus feels about your doubt? Calling out for help is itself an act of faith. Don’t worry if you feel uncertain even as you call.

For a deeper dive into your doubt and how the Lord can walk you through it, consider reading *Doubtless: Because Faith is Hard* by FamilyLife® staff member Shelby Abbott.

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Laura Way serves on the editorial team for FamilyLife®. She and her family settled in Orlando, Florida, after living in Asia for almost seven years. You can find her writing more about faith and mental health\* at FamilyLife.com and hopeforthesojourn.com.

*\* While addressing mental health issues within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

*Lent - Day 14*

# Lighting Lanterns

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“I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;  
I will lead them in paths they have not known.  
I will make darkness light before them,  
And crooked places straight.  
These things I will do for them,  
And not forsake them.”  
(Isaiah 42:16, New King James Version)

“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever  
believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”  
(John 12:46, NKJV)

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,  
a holy nation, His own special people, that you  
may proclaim the praises of Him who called  
you out of darkness into His marvelous light.  
(1 Peter 2:9, NKJV)

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light  
to my path.” (Psalm 119:105, NKJV)

**B**efore the invention of electricity, oil lamps were common. Add oil, trim the wick and light the lantern.

Without light, darkness is deep, real and often frightening. When a lantern flickers out, the darkness feels complete.

Jesus frequently uses lamps and lanterns in His analogies, comparing His truth and love to physical

light (Matt. 5:14-16) or using light to call for a prepared expectation of His return (Matthew 25:1-13). In the New Testament, Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World — and we are invited into His light.

There's something inside each of us that feels dark — something

that weighs heavily on our hearts. Our experiences are different, and each of us feels that burden in a different way. Our life stories are all filled with hardships and difficulties that reveal darkness in our lives.

When you come to Jesus for the first time, you're cloaked in darkness. Your sin and shame cast shadows over your heart. You're walking through

the world blindly. But Jesus, the Light of the World, reaches you through the darkness and pulls you into His beautiful and glorious light. Jesus, the ultimate lantern, the ultimate guide, sees each detail of your pain and sin.

Throughout your life with Christ, darkness will creep back in.

As a human, you're sinful. As a child of God, you're forgiven. Although you will continue making mistakes, Christ's forgiveness breaks through every barrier. Likewise, difficulties will come that you did not cause, but which affect you greatly. Even in these dark places, Christ is your eternal lantern.

### Reflect and Respond

How have you seen Christ's light in your life? How has He broken through your darkness? What parts of your life need the light of Christ the most? Reflect on this in a quiet moment with the Lord today.

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Jennifer Squires moved to Orlando, Florida, to work as a writer with Jesus Film Project®, and she serves as an administrative assistant. She seeks to reach people through her words and actions, pointing them to Jesus in all she does.



*Lent - Day 15*

## Free at Last

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“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”  
(John 8:36, New International Version)



**I**magine going without food for over a month. Jesus had been fasting in the desert for 40 days when Satan visited Him. “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread,” the devil said to Jesus (Luke 4:3, NIV).

Certainly, Jesus could have satisfied His hunger this way if He wanted to. But He didn’t. Why? What’s wrong with getting the food you need to feed your hungry body?

The problem was not with bread or eating, but with timing and the one suggesting the miracle. Jesus refused because He always does what the Father wants. He was not about to follow the devil’s suggestion to simply satisfy His own desires.

This story illustrates how temptation works in your life. The desire for sexual fulfillment, meaningful worship, fulfilling relationships and pleasure is God-given. When and how you fulfill those desires can make all the difference in whether they honor God or not. Eventually, you will find that satisfying your desires in your own way rather than God’s way doesn’t bring ultimate joy or peace. Actually, it enslaves you (John 8:34). But waiting on God and trusting Him to give you what you need will bring you true freedom.

Speaking to a crowd, Jesus said, “If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32, NIV).

Free from what? Free from destructive patterns of sin and free to embrace Jesus’ way of life as you depend on God. When you’re tempted to rush ahead of God and get what you want your own way, ask Jesus for help. He knows what you’re facing because He was tempted too. He wants you to experience the freedom, peace and purpose that He offers to those who follow Him.

### Reflect and Pray

What’s one desire you’re trying to fulfill in your own way? How might God’s way be different?

Consider this prayer: “Jesus, I know that You understand and have compassion for me because You stood up to all kinds of temptation and overcame death itself when You died in my place. Help me to desire Your ways and wait for You to satisfy my desires and needs. Help me live out the freedom I have in You, to love you with all of my heart and to love my neighbor as myself.”

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Jane Fox is a field staff member with Bridges International™ at Kansas State University. She also works for the Bridges Innovation team. Jane is passionate about helping international students understand Scripture and embrace Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior.

*Lent - Day 16*

# Personalizing Your Prayers

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*Every Saturday during this study, you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about prayer. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’” (Matthew 6:9-13, New International Version)

**G**od longs for you to engage with and enjoy your relationship with Him. As you pray — and experience how He answers — your relationship with Him grows in trust, and you can have peace in whatever challenges you’re facing. There are six important steps to personalize your prayers, all found in Matthew 6:9-13. These steps include worshiping, surrendering, requesting, confessing and inviting protection.

Pray by using your own words that reflect your unique journey with God.

**“Our Father in heaven.”** Pray to the Father who is in heaven. Remember that He is in control. This leads to peace and confidence.

**“Hallowed be Your name.”** Worship God for who He is. Thank God for His love, grace, forgiveness and sacrifice. Focusing on His attributes puts your circumstances into perspective and reminds you of why you can trust Him.

**“Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** Pray for God’s will to be done by surrendering your plans to Him. Pray for His power, position and presence to be evident on earth.

**“Give us today our daily bread.”** Ask God for the things you need. Share with Him your deepest desires and longings. He is your

provider, protector and sustainer. Trust Him with what you need today. Trust Him with your unmet desires. You don’t need to worry about tomorrow. He will be there to care for you.

**“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”** Confess your sins to God, turn from them, and ask for forgiveness. Forgive others as God has forgiven you. Release your pain to Him for justice and experience the freedom of forgiveness.

**“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”** Pray for victory over temptation and protection from the attacks of Satan. God can break every addiction\* or sin in your life.

## Pray, Reflect, and Respond

How could praying through each of these topics daily help you in your relationship with God?

Pray every day this week following this model and note how it impacts your relationship with the Father.

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Holly Melton is an author, speaker and ministry trainer. She loves to train others in evangelism, discipleship and knowing God's will for their lives. She's traveled to 30 countries to share the gospel and minister to missionaries in the field.

*\* This devotional addresses a mental health issue that affects people from all walks of life. While addressing pieces of this issue within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

# *Lent* Your Day to Rest



It's Sunday — a day to rest.

Did you know that ever since Jesus died and rose again, each Sunday is like a mini Easter? In addition to resting, like God commanded in the Old Testament, the first Christians remembered and celebrated Christ's resurrection every single week.

Today, God invites you to celebrate and rest in the finished work of Christ — for you and for everyone who trusts in Him

*Lent - Day 17*

# Looking for Water and Roots

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For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

(Jeremiah 2:13, English Standard Version)

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ou stuck your foot in your mouth — again — and you can't rest as your mind rolls endlessly through the ways the conversation should have gone.

You study your bank account history to try to match up where your money went this month and wonder what you can cut out of your spending in order to pay those unexpected bills.

You feel lonely and constantly scroll on your phone to see if anyone commented on your most recent social media post — and to see if friends are hanging out without you.

When the stress of life bears down on you, where do you turn? Does your solution make everything better, or is it only a temporary fix for a deeper issue?

While I might figure out how to cope with any of these examples from my own life in the moment, there's always something else — another problem or obstacle — waiting to keep me awake. How can I rest when I'm so easily shaken by the next thing?

We all wander, looking for answers to whatever challenges we encounter. It can feel like an endless journey, as our temporary solutions never fully fix our problems.

God identifies our problem in Jeremiah 2:13; His people have turned their backs on Him, the true source of life.

Not only that, but God says His children have a second problem. We look for what we need for life — water — in places that regularly run dry. But Jeremiah 2:13 also gives us the solution: God Himself is “the fountain of living waters.” While a tank for storing water may become empty, a fountain has its own source and continuously flows with fresh water.

A few chapters later, Jeremiah tells us what happens when you go to this fountain as your source of life:

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8, ESV)

Isn't that what we all want? Instead of wandering, we want to be rooted. Instead of anxious\* and fearful, we long to be calm and unafraid.

When your trust is in the Lord, you find your roots in Him. Christ satisfies your deepest longings. When you are rooted in Him, you can rest secure because the living water He offers will never run dry.

## Pray and Respond

Set aside some time to spend in silence and in prayer, asking God to reveal to you where you are wandering, looking for stability and meaning from things that will never fully satisfy.

How are you craving “rootedness,” and what would it look like to bring that need to Jesus and find your roots in Him? Take some time to explore what Scripture has to say about Christ’s character and how He can help you rest from your particular wandering.

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Samantha Barnes works with Cru® at the University of Arkansas. When she’s not hanging out with college students or cheering for the Razorbacks, she and her husband Eric enjoy taking their son and their border collie on outdoor adventures.

*\*Anxiety can affect people from all walks of life and may point to a deeper problem, like an anxiety disorder. While addressing parts of this issue within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

*Lent - Day 18*

## Who Do You Play For?

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Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in His flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. (Ephesians 2:11-22, New International Version)

What makes a movie great? In my opinion, it's when it touches on themes that reflect the passions in me. I love watching movies about unity; even the thought of a team that's not united makes me feel anxious.

A favorite movie of mine is "Miracle," based on the 1980 U.S. hockey team that beat the odds to win the gold medal. If you haven't seen it, then after you read this, you have to check it out!

Here are the basics: the team is filled with former players from Minnesota and Boston — arch rivals. The task given to coach Herb Brooks is to get this divided group to play as one united team. Good luck.

At the film's turning point, the players realize they no longer play for Minnesota or Boston, but for Team USA. They only begin moving toward their goal once they realize that what unites them — that greater identity — is stronger than what divides them.

The task given to coach Herb Brooks is similar to the one Jesus took on Himself: to bring two radically opposed peoples together as one. The Jews, who were God's people from the start, and the Gentiles, who had always been their enemies. The solution found in "Miracle," though, is only a shadow compared to the ultimate solution found at the cross.

At the cross, Jesus reconciled both people groups to God the Father and, consequently, to one another.

If the church today is going to bring the gospel to all nations, then, like the U.S. hockey team, we will have to see that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. We, too, will need to believe that the team we play for now is more important than any one we played for before.

### Reflect

As a Christian, before you are anything else, you are a follower of Christ. Often, nationality, church denomination or even political affiliation competes for this top spot in our identity.

What is fighting for that top spot in your heart? Confess this to God, knowing that He has already forgiven you for placing something other than Him first in your life. Pray and ask that the church today would see that what unites it is stronger than what divides it.

Thomas Rodrigues serves with Cru® in Buffalo but was born and raised in Montreal. Some of his favorite things about being on staff include summer missions, spring break, getting to teach and doing the hard work of evangelism. In his free time, he loves watching sports, staying active, good coffee and lazy Saturday mornings.

*Lent - Day 19*

## Where God Sets the Lonely

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Sing to God, sing in praise of His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before Him — His name is the LORD. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, He leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

(Psalm 68:4-6, New International Version)

“In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

(John 14:2-3, English Standard Version)

**M**ore than three years ago, I unloaded a car full of belongings into an empty room. I moved in furniture and tried to feel at home across the country, but I quickly found that transition and loneliness are inseparable.

The start of a new season might feel isolating, or maybe you sense a missing connection with people

in your day-to-day life. You feel it deep in your soul: God made you to be among others.



At the very beginning, in the book of Genesis, God said it was not good for Adam, the man He created, to be alone (Genesis 2:18). So He crafted a companion: Eve. Human community

comes in many forms. For me it came in the shape of a new church family, friends and co-workers who kept me from hiding my struggles and encouraged me to get help when I needed it.

But even more than the physical presence of relationships, humans need a spiritual connection. The Scripture readings today point to where you can ultimately find a home and the dearest friend. God meets His people in their need for family and

community. The fatherless have a father because God draws near to them in their loneliness.

You were once separated from God. After Jesus died on the cross to bring forgiveness for sin, He came back to life so that you could live forever with Him. Every person who accepts this gift experiences never-ending togetherness with their Creator and will one day live in a home that Jesus has prepared. Have you accepted Him?

### Respond

If you feel alone, sometimes it can seem impossible for your situation to change. But you can take a small step forward. Try writing down your thoughts to God and sending a text message to a friend. Community requires a jump to enter in and faith that God will provide.

If you've never heard about the God who meets us in our loneliness and need, read more about His love for you and how to welcome Him into your life [here](#).

Rachel Streich serves as a journalist with Cru®. She grew up in Minnesota, graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with a journalism degree in 2014, and has since lived across the country and overseas. She loves sharing real-life stories.

*Lent - Day 20*

# Difficult People

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Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

(Luke 23:34, New International Version)

**I**s there a person in your life who is difficult to get along with?

I know there's someone in my life. This person has hurt me in so many ways that it actually affects my character. While we're responsible for our own character, the effect others have on us develops our character. For example, if you've experienced abuse, you may be distrustful. In my case, a competitive personality has left wounds on my soul. Sometimes, I wonder if they hurt me intentionally or if it's just second-nature for them.



Jesus, hanging on the cross, looked down and saw soldiers — the ones who had beaten and ridiculed Him and who nailed His hands to the beam. They were gambling to see who could get His only possessions: His worn out clothes.

In that moment, Jesus' character — who He was at His core — rose above unimaginable pain. Seeing beyond the rough exterior of foreign, dirty soldiers, Jesus peered deep into their souls. He saw their pain from the past. He also saw their pain in the future. It all hinged on His forgiveness.

Would He be able to forgive these men? Would He be able to take on the sin of not only these people but of all mankind? Would He take on my sin?

Even in His weakened and vulnerable state, Jesus did not give into anger, self-centeredness, self-righteousness or revenge.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” he pleaded, requesting forgiveness from His Father, who had the power to rain fire on the soldiers.

In that moment of human weakness, Jesus didn't sin. He selflessly laid down His rights to grant others something they didn't deserve: forgiveness.

Do I still struggle to forgive? You bet I do! But just as Christ forgives me and those soldiers, I have the choice to look at the person who hurts me and pray, “Father, forgive them, for they really don't know what they are doing.”

## Reflect

Who is the person you struggle to forgive? Why?

What is a past situation or harm that is difficult for you to forgive?

What is something Jesus has forgiven you for?

Pray that Jesus will give you the grace to forgive your difficult person, just as He has forgiven you.

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Maggie Bruehl served with Cru® for almost 45 years, leaving after a cancer diagnosis. But she has continued to serve as God gives grace and strength. She is married to Roger, lives in the area of Orlando, Florida, and has four adult children.

*\* Trauma from painful relationships can leave lasting scars. While addressing parts of relational trauma within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

*Lent - Day 21*

# Why You Need to Relax in the Lord

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Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from Him. (Psalm 62:1, New International Version)

“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28, NIV)

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9, NIV)

“*I*’m late, I’m late! For a very important date! No time to say ‘hello, goodbye,’ I’m late, I’m late, I’m late!” So said the White Rabbit in “Alice in Wonderland.” Similarly, life can seem like a series of things to do or places to be without a moment



to just breathe. My husband and I were headed to chemo treatments for him, doctor’s appointments and tests for the past two and a half years, which felt like we were continuously rushing about. That hectic pace can lead to exhaustion.

God has a better idea.

David writes in Psalm 62:1 that he waits for God’s deliverance from his enemies. This waiting involves being silent before God, expectantly waiting to hear from Him and meditate on His Word. While the world would tell us to hurry, to get more done and take charge, often, like Mary in Luke 10:38-42, the Lord wants us to just sit and be with Him. Totally depending on God’s timing and wisdom leads to confidence in Him and a rest you cannot experience anywhere else.

Jesus offers rest when you are feeling weary. Just as you don’t achieve eternal life through anything you do, the Christian life cannot be lived by your own

efforts. The rest Jesus promises is not just freedom from uncertainty, anxiety, fear and despair, but it is a peace of heart and mind.

God wants you to enjoy what is called a “Sabbath rest,” which is taking time to step away from the daily schedule and have some downtime with Him. Some people spend part of a day focused on the Lord every month or so to do just that. He also gives us a reminder weekly to rest in Him on the Sabbath day, which for Christians is usually Sunday (though some do this from Friday evening to Saturday evening because they serve in their church on Sunday).

This rest involves an awareness of being in the sacred presence of God to worship and praise Him for who He is and the creation He has made. This time of rest points you to the eternal rest He’s promised for all who trust in Him.

As Augustine prayed, “My heart, Lord, does not rest until it rests in Thee.”

## Reflect and Respond

Choose rest when you're feeling weary and exhausted. Today, thank God for two specific things He has provided so you might have a forever relationship with Him. Or consider planning a day when you can get away for a few hours and spend time in the presence of the Lord.

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Jan Stewart writes for Cru Storylines™. She values writing inspiring stories about what Jesus Christ is doing throughout the world. Jan enjoys being a wife, a mother of four, a grandma of four and the best friend of Shadow, her loveable border collie.

*Lent - Day 22*

# Lyrics for Your Life in Christ

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*Every Saturday during this study, you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about reading, studying and memorizing Scripture. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

How can a young person stay on the path of purity?  
 By living according to Your word. I seek You with all my heart; do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.

(Psalm 119:9-11, New International Version)

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

(Psalm 119:105, NIV)

As soon as the first note dropped, I knew the song. Memories of junior high flooded my mind — the friends, the fashion and the emotions. I sang along without missing a word.



“Alright stop, collaborate and listen.” You know the rest.

My wife jokes that my brain works like a steel trap. Decades of useful and useless facts accumulate like boxes in an attic. I only need a small nudge — a song, a movie or a photograph

— and everything comes tumbling out.

I don’t think I’m alone. I believe most of us can rattle off the lyrics to a song we haven’t heard in ages and then sit back in wonder at what just happened.

If you’re like me, you have hidden away the lyrics to dozens and dozens of songs because you spent days playing music on repeat so you could perfect the most complicated rhymes.

You’ll find your relationship with Scripture is no different. As you spend time reading and studying what God has revealed in the Bible, He will open

your eyes, that you may see wonderful things in His law (Psalm 119:18, NIV).

As you treasure it and hide it away in your heart, you will love what He loves more and more. You will do what He does. You will go where He goes.

Your life will be transformed because you’re not just hiding away silly lyrics in the back of your mind. You’re meditating on God’s own words, and they pierce your heart.

### Respond

Ask God to increase your love for His Word so you might know and love Him more.

Read Psalm 119 and write down all the ways God’s Word blesses and transforms those who delight in it.

Commit to hiding God’s Word in your heart by memorizing important verses or passages.

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Ben McGuire serves as an international sending coordinator and a theological development coordinator with Cru®. He lives outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife, Jill, and their three children, Reece, Wyatt and Claire.

# *Lent* Your Day to Rest



It's Sunday — a day to rest.

Did you know that ever since Jesus died and rose again, each Sunday is like a mini Easter? In addition to resting, like God commanded in the Old Testament, the first Christians remembered and celebrated Christ's resurrection every single week.

Today, God invites you to celebrate and rest in the finished work of Christ — for you and for everyone who trusts in Him.

*Lent - Day 23*

## Steady in the Storm

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Soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with His head on a cushion. The disciples woke Him up, shouting, “Teacher, don’t You care that we’re going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, He rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!” Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then He asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

(Mark 4:37-40, New Living Translation)

I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

(Psalm 16:8, New International Version)

F

ew experiences produce as much suspense, uncertainty and sheer panic as being on the deck of a ship in the middle of a sudden storm, like in the scene from Mark 4.

Perhaps this imagery stirs up memories of experiences you've had. The vast ocean, like the circumstances and situations of your life, can

change underneath you without warning. Your boat is completely rocked, taking on water, while you desperately try to keep your footing to steer toward safety.

The disciples in this passage could certainly relate. Jesus asked them to sail to the other side of the Sea of

Galilee — this was His mission they were on — when they were caught off guard by a sudden storm. They scrambled to handle it on their own, which makes sense, since there were experienced fishermen in this group. Likely, they thought they could get through with enough strength and skill.

When did the panic start to sink in? My guess is when their own efforts failed and they realized the fierce waves were simply too much.

You'll notice their question to Jesus, "Don't You care about us?" Their panic reveals two lies you might also believe:

1. This storm is not only out of your control but out of God's control.
2. Because of what's happening, He must not care about you. Maybe He has abandoned you.

In the moment, it can feel impossible to entertain anything other than lies like these. The disciples likely believed them because their eyes were on the size of the waves and strength of the storm. They forgot who was in their boat.

When your focus is on your circumstances, no matter how overwhelming or dangerous, it can be easy to forget Jesus is right there with you.

As the storm disappeared with just a word from Jesus, the disciples realized He was sleeping because He was in complete control the entire time.



## Reflect and Pray

Spend time reflecting on a situation in your life that feels as hopeless or overwhelming as this storm.

Ask Jesus “Where are You in this situation? How can I focus on You and not the storm?”

Invite the Holy Spirit to remind you, as the disciples were reminded, that Jesus is greater than the storm. Even if the boat feels rocky, with Him right beside you, you’ll be unshakeable.

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Nick Audas is passionate about helping others encounter Jesus deeply. He has done this frequently in his role as a missionary with Cru®, serving for the last five years in New York City. He, his wife and their two crazy kids are now soaking up the sun as they serve in Orlando, Florida.

*Lent - Day 24*

# Have It Your Way, Lord

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“Humble yourselves ... under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.”  
(1 Peter 5:6, English Standard Version)

“What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’”  
(Isaiah 45:9, New Living Translation)

T

he season of Lent occurs during springtime, when, in much of the U.S., bare ground appears after the snow has melted away. Has the lifeless soil ever reminded you that God formed Adam, the first human, from dust?

Imagine the Lord bending down to scoop up fine clay. Now, imagine yourself in the hands of God.

God says several times in the Bible that you are like clay in a potter's hands. He is making you into an object of beauty to display Christ to the world.



But if you're like me, you often resist God's molding.

Isaiah 45:9 explains that opposing God's shaping is as absurd as clay that talks back to the potter. God created you, loves

you and wants what's best for you, but you resist because of your sinful nature.

God told the prophet Jeremiah to watch a potter at work. The potter began spinning the clay, carefully but firmly shaping the lump of clay into a beautiful vessel. Through observing a potter at his craft, Jeremiah could understand the importance of God's

people submitting to God's gentle, forming power. Jeremiah received this message from God for the people: "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand" (Jeremiah 18:6, NLT).

In the same way, Jesus speaks to you. You don't have to grasp for control. You're in the hands of a potter who has proven with His own life that you can surrender without risk of harm. "Learn from Me," Jesus says, "for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29, NIV).

## Respond

Watch a potter transform lifeless clay into a useful and beautiful vessel. Think about how the form adds to its function and consider how God's artistry is at work in you. Choose a verse to write on a card and keep it with you, reminding yourself that you are clay in a faithful potter's hands.

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Errica Stevens has served in campus ministry for 42 years. Whether in the U.S. or abroad, she has always led multicultural Bible studies during that time. Since 2000, she has been with Bridges International.

*Lent - Day 25*

# God Spoke Through My Dirty Windshield

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All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;  
all who go down to the dust will kneel before Him —  
those who cannot keep themselves alive.  
(Psalm 22:29, New International Version)

He is before all things, and in Him all things  
hold together. (Colossians 1:17, NIV)



One memorable morning when I was 25, I took my black — and often dirty — car through a car wash before parking at a Southern California beach to read and journal.

That morning, I brought something new to read: a book of Charles Spurgeon’s sermons. His

paraphrase of Psalm 22:29 fascinated me. In it, he says, “No one can keep their soul alive, not even for an hour.”

I was captivated by imagining God keeping me alive — body and soul. Then, when I returned to my car, I found that a bird had dropped a giant

splat on my windshield, directly on the driver’s side, blocking my view. I immediately amended Spurgeon’s line and declared, “No one can keep their car clean, not even for an hour.”

“God, you have such a sense of humor,” I chuckled as I drove home.

When we think of pride or self-righteousness, we often conjure up images of the ultra-religious, who must do everything perfectly and believe that is their salvation. But, in truth, pride is more than that.

It’s any desire to have control over our lives, rather than trusting them to God. Humility is realizing that God is the one who keeps our heart beating moment by moment — and He controls everything else as well.

In the years since, I have experienced the realities of my inability to control, manage, change or improve many things in my life. When I attended Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered recovery\* program, to address my anger, I learned to recite the “12 Steps of Recovery” along with Scripture. Steps one and two continue to echo in my mind frequently: “My life has become unmanageable ... and I believe a power greater than myself can restore me to sanity.”

Many would call those first two steps of recovery an act of repentance, of turning away from self-sufficiency toward God. You, too, can turn away from destructive behavior to God’s loving, healing embrace.



## Reflect and Respond

Take a few moments now to sit in silence with God. As you close your eyes and breathe deeply, notice what appears on the windshield of your life. Notice what feels unmanageable to you. Imagine bringing yourself to Jesus, who has a look of compassion on His face. Rest a while with Jesus, knowing you are loved and you are safe with the One who keeps your soul alive. Talk to Him as you feel led, or simply enjoy being with Him in silence.

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Courtnee White hails from Northeast Ohio and has served with Cru® for 23 years. She and her husband are the parents of three elementary-aged kids. She comes from a family of hands-on people who create amazing things, but she usually does her best work when her mind tumbles words together.

*\* This devotional addresses a recovery program often attended by people with psychological and emotional challenges or addictions. While addressing parts of relational trauma within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

*Lent - Day 26*

# Freed to Focus on God and Others

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Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40, New International Version)

“Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love them and show Myself to them.” (John 14:21, NIV)

**A**t the sprawling green botanical garden in Lilongwe, Malawi, a young mother, child on hip and Bible in hand, paces back and forth in prayer.

I wonder what trouble brings this mother out here to pray. Is a crucial relationship in trouble? Is someone she cares for sick? Is her business failing?

Or perhaps she is just out here spending time in prayer with the Lord.

A person can go out of their way to spend time with the Lord — and not just when their world is caving in. Perhaps she moved the focus from herself and the harried life of motherhood to steal away a few

minutes to focus on God. If so, as the Lord renews her strength, she can face the world and be there for her family and others.

Christ’s top two commandments are to love the Lord and love others. Every other commandment simply details how to live this out.

How do you know that you love God? It turns out that obeying God can be an indicator of your love for Him. The true mark of your love for God is that it causes you to become more willing to do what He asks of you.



If you love God, you will care about what He cares about. You will want your thoughts and actions to be pleasing to Him.

And how do you measure your love for others? How you love yourself is the measure you will use to love others. You must put others before yourself if you are trying to truly love them. (Although, we also must remember to share the love of Christ with others, we need to spend time being filled with Him ourselves.)

As you focus on loving God and others, you will begin to experience the resurrected life of Christ in a very real way.

### Respond and Pray

What areas of your life do you need to bring to the obedience of Christ? In what ways have you put yourself before others lately?

Consider this prayer. “Father, I desire to love You by my actions as well as my words. Help me to be fully yielded to You and to consider others better than myself. Amen.”

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Grace Balusi is a missionary from Kenya. She currently serves in Lilongwe, Malawi, together with her husband, Robert, and their three children. She loves to read, write and have a good laugh.

*Lent - Day 27*

# The Power to Live Courageously

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“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

(Joshua 1:9, New International Version)

When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God,  
whose word I praise — in God I trust and am not  
afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

(Psalm 56:3-4, NIV)

What does fear look like for you? There are two things I tend to experience in the midst of fear:

I feel alone.  
I feel stuck.

Fear makes me feel unable to live out my faith. It keeps me from standing boldly in my convictions. Sometimes I lack the confidence to share my faith, or I say no when God is calling me to say yes.

While Christians are not immune to feeling afraid, God has provided everything we need to move from a life of fear to one of courage.



Joshua was called to step into the role of leading God's people after Moses died. Moses was a great leader, so Joshua felt intimidated and fearful.

Then, in Joshua 1:9, God tells him, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.

Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." God's command is to be courageous and keep going where God is leading. God's promise to Joshua is

also ours: He will be with us wherever we go. So why remain stuck in fear?

The Bible reminds us how to move from fear to faith. In Psalm 56:3-4, David says, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise — in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

These verses are a declaration of what it means to move from fear to courage by trusting in God. When you remember that God is in control, that He is with you and that He has called you to keep moving forward, then your fear fades and courage grows.

Fear produces things in your life that prevent you from living for God. You cannot conquer fear on your own, but God has given you everything you need through His Spirit, who can help you choose to act in faith even if you still feel afraid.. In all things, God is with you. And remembering you are not alone but have the sovereign God of the universe by your side makes you brave.

## Respond and Pray

What is one way you can choose courage over fear this week, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and trust God to use you for His Kingdom? What does it look like for you to trust God in the midst of something that makes you afraid?

Consider this prayer: “Jesus, I know that I can do nothing without You. Any courage I have comes from You. I believe that You will give me the strength and boldness I need to live out my faith and walk with You daily. Help me to rely on You to take me from a place of fear to a place of courage and faith.”

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Kailene Lewis and her husband have been on staff with Cru® in Indianapolis, Indiana, for six years. She was involved with Cru as a student at Boise State University, spent a year serving abroad in Moscow, and now works with college students on the Indy Metro team . One of her favorite parts about being on staff is helping students grow in their faith.

*Lent - Day 28*

# Serving Others out of Gratitude

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*Every Saturday during this study, you will learn about common spiritual disciplines that many followers of Jesus practice during Lent. Today you will learn about service. These disciplines are valuable tools to draw near to God when they come from a heart seeking to do just that — rather than a heart which hopes to justify itself through these works or simply check a box on its Lent “to-do” list. We hope these insights will encourage you and help connect you to the Father throughout these 40 days.*

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:1-4, English Standard Version)

I peered into a mostly dark storeroom. Light glinted off of coins filling 21 large plastic buckets. It looked like my eight-year-old self would have expected a pirate’s cave to look, plastic aside.

Two of the stronger men grabbed a bucket. Struggling together, the bucket just inches from the ground, they moved it outside. Men and women wearing plastic gloves — instead of eye patches — pulled out coins.



Coins went onto a screen laid over a trough. Small rocks and trash fell through. The coins were rinsed.

Next, they poured the coins into a pan of cloudy liquid that emitted a mild chemical odor. They massaged

the coins, removing accumulated corrosion and grunge. Then the coins were sorted by value and, in a few cases, country of origin.

As they worked, the men and women chatted cheerfully. Words about children, grandkids, gardens and lawns filled the air. But instead of working on their own yards or spending time with their families, they were there to serve.

The coins came from fountains at a local theme park. The park donated them to a home for children with serious disabilities. But in the buckets, the coins weren’t bankable. Only after sorting and cleaning would they be usable.

The joyful afternoon ended with treasure for the children living at the home. And for the adults there to help, it didn’t feel like work. They’d experienced the love of Jesus, shown by His willingness to give His life on Good Friday, and they shared that love in a small way with others. As the home’s staff members and residents saw the volunteers work, they were seeing Jesus’ love in action.

## Respond

How would you like to share your experience of Jesus’ love in action? Today, would you pair up with a friend and find a way to show the love of Jesus through a nonprofit organization in your community? Serve a meal, clean a lawn or, if you’re fortunate, sort a bucketful of coins.

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Mark Winz has worked with Cru® in a variety of communications roles for more than 30 years. He’s also served in a number of roles in his local church. He lives in Florida with his wife and misses his two adult children, who fled the state after college.

# *Lent* Your Day to Rest



It's Sunday — a day to rest.

Did you know that ever since Jesus died and rose again, each Sunday is like a mini Easter? In addition to resting, like God commanded in the Old Testament, the first Christians remembered and celebrated Christ's resurrection every single week.

Today, God invites you to celebrate and rest in the finished work of Christ — for you and for everyone who trusts in Him.

*Lent - Day 29*

# Learn to “Sleep Like a Baby”

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“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast  
 and have no compassion on the child she has borne?  
 Though she may forget,  
 I will not forget you!  
 See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands;  
 your walls are ever before Me.”  
 (Isaiah 49:15-16, New International Version)

People often use the phrase, “I slept like a baby.” I’ve always found that funny. When my children were babies, they woke up every three hours and cried, which didn’t exactly make for a restful night’s sleep.

But there may be another way to understand this phrase. You see, when babies are awake, they are generally demanding, needy and completely helpless.



They are also incredibly fragile, and the world around them is too large for them to grasp, understand or navigate.

Maybe that’s not so different from your everyday experience. The world is too big — it’s too complex, too intense and too mysterious. You’re

ultimately out of control. That can make you feel deeply anxious, restless and insecure.

In Psalm 131:1, the author gives you a helpful way forward. He says that he chooses not to “concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.”

He chooses to surrender his proud need to know and control everything around him. Instead, he quiets himself. And what does this feel like?

Picture this image: a sleeping child melted into the safe, protective arms of the one who has already met and will always meet its needs. This is the image of complete peace.

With God, you are like a child in its mother’s arms. In a few hours, you may wake up screaming and demand to have your needs met yet again — and God will be there, ready. This is the image of God the Scriptures present — moment by moment, whenever you feel anxious, restless or insecure, come and surrender your need to know everything and to be in control. He’ll be there to give you the nourishment, comfort and rest you need so you can “sleep like a baby.”

## Respond

Go to a quiet place to pray, and hold your palms out in front of you. As you do this, acknowledge every thing or situation in your life that is causing anxiety, restlessness or fear. Tell Jesus how each thing is affecting you. Ask Him for what you need — not what you need Him to make happen, but what you need as you're going through it. It might be peace, rest, freedom from fear or something else. At the end of this prayer, turn your palms over symbolically, as if you're dropping something out of your hands and into His. Practice this every day for a week, asking the Holy Spirit to help you release your cares to Him (1 Peter 5:7).

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Nick Audas is passionate about helping others encounter Jesus deeply. He has done this frequently in his role as a missionary with Cru®, serving for five years in New York City. He, his wife and their three crazy kids are now soaking up the sun as they serve in Orlando, Florida.

*Lent - Day 30*

# Pure Water for Your Thirsty Soul

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He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things (Psalm 107:9, New International Version)

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35, NIV)

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or three months, our family lived without indoor plumbing in our home. Contamination in our well resulted in twelve weeks of us driving to the YMCA for showers and using bottled water to brush our teeth. In that season, I learned to appreciate water in ways I hadn't before.

In John 6:35, Jesus promises that with Him, you will never be thirsty. This metaphor of living water took on new meaning for me when clean water no longer flowed easily from my tap. In the days of the prophets, and in many places of the world still, water is neither conveniently available nor guaranteed. And sometimes, like with my well, it's contaminated.

Sin, like the pollution in my well, muddies our longings to the point that it's hard to make sense of what's true.

It's human nature to mistake our lack of something for a lack of God's provision. When I peer deeply into my desires, I usually find that what I'm longing for is more of God, not the thing I thought I needed.

Jesus says when He gives you water, it's like your soul returning home. Jesus promises companionship (Matthew 28:20), shared glory (1 Corinthians 2:9) and joy that leads to dancing (John 15:11; Psalm 30:11). God can even use hardship to quench your thirst because it forces you to rely

more on Him. In the end, you get more of what you really need: Him.

God's Word brings prosperity, not by way of convenience or material wealth but in sustenance. He guarantees that His Word always produces fruit in your life. That's the kind of promise only God can make! Only His guarantee of "always" can quench any and every longing that you or I might mistake for lack.

### **Reflect, Respond and Pray**

What do you feel you are lacking right now? How does what's missing help you identify an aspect of God that you long for?

Read Isaiah 55 and circle or list the things from this passage that God promises to provide.

Praise God for His promises, and pray that He will quench your thirst by giving you more of Himself.

Keri Armentrout is the author of "Like Jesus: Following God in the Digital Age" (CruPress). She has served with the campus ministry for 20 years in the U.S. and overseas.

*Lent - Day 31*

# God Brings Hope Out of Despair

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“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”  
(Isaiah 41:10, New International Version)

I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in Him.” (Psalm 40:1-3, NIV)

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains. (Psalm 107:13-14, NIV)

“*I*’ve got bad news,” the property manager said. “Your tenant filled the radiators in your house but forgot to turn off the spigot, so water’s pouring out of the walls and ceilings. The damage is \$6,000.”

That’s when I stopped sleeping.



One November evening, several weeks later, my wife said, “You don’t look well. Are you coming down with something?”

Lying down, I had what turned out to be my first-ever panic attack.\* Having no prior experience with one, I

was certain that whatever else was going on, this was a spiritual attack.

Gripped by unreasoning terror, all I could do was fall on my knees and pray silently. I tried reading aloud from the Psalms, but the panic was so great, I couldn’t even speak.

Finally, I cried out, “Jesus!” and instantly I could speak again. I began reading aloud through the Psalms, fervently praying David’s words back to God.

A wise colleague said, “Call your doctor. Satan takes advantage of us when we’re physically and emotionally weakened.” I began taking medication after being diagnosed with depression and anxiety. The medication was wonderful in treating the immediate symptoms but was difficult to transition from.

For three months, I saturated myself with Scripture, prayer and worship music, especially hymns with deep biblical truth. As I clung to God like I never had before, He met me in many sweet ways.

Scriptures I’d read numerous times leaped off the page, encouraging me and reminding me of what was really true despite any fears. Slowly, God rebuilt me emotionally and spiritually. Spring’s arrival matched the blossoming of hope and joy anew within my heart.

## Respond

Are you struggling with overwhelming fears or worry? Regardless of what you might feel is true, cling to God and the truth and promises in His Word. Pour out your feelings and struggles in a prayer, journal or conversation with trusted friends. Read, memorize and pray through Psalm 91 and 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Listen to and sing uplifting praise songs and hymns like “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” or “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Use Jesus’ delegated authority (Matthew 28:18-20) to resist and rebuke any spiritual attacks.\*

*\* This devotional addresses mental health issues that affect people from all walks of life. While addressing parts of these issues within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

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Born in Colorado, Mike Chapman majored in acting and radio, TV and film at Kansas University. Since 1983, he’s served with the campus, Hollywood and military ministries of Cru® and now works at Cru’s World Headquarters at Lake Hart in Orlando, Florida. He and his wife, Michelle, have two children, Angel and Eric.

*Lent - Day 32*

# Recovering From a Year of Worry

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The LORD is on my side; I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?  
(Psalm 118:6, English Standard Version)

You keep him in perfect peace  
whose mind is stayed on You,  
because he trusts in You. (Isaiah 26:3, ESV)

It's fair to say that 2020 and 2021 were years of lasting change for many. They brought a global pandemic as well as rising unease and disunity. For me personally, the first was an especially difficult year. For most of the year, I was looking for a job,



expecting my second child, and living with my in-laws. Each of these on their own would be enough to cause anxiety\* in many people. Combine them, and you have the perfect recipe for stress stew. A dish of disquiet. A casserole of concern.

Maybe you can relate.

No matter what you want to call your meal of melancholy, it helps to remember that God is with you through it all.

This doesn't mean ignoring the pain and evidence that the world is not as it should be. It is worth lamenting the brokenness you see and experience. It's equally important to pray for God's direct intervention in the fallenness of our world.

However, we must also remember that God is already at work redeeming it all. The kingdom of God is not just a future paradise. It is a present reality for those who know Him. He is here. Now.

Over time, the personal struggles I mentioned worked out wonderfully. I found a job I love, welcomed my precious son into the world and found a wonderful home, not just for my wife and our children, but with space to allow her elderly grandfather to move in. Nonetheless, I know that God was working something eternal in me as I gave Him my worries and trusted Him for His presence and peace.

Jesus took time to institute communion the day before His crucifixion — a symbol reminding us of his own body and blood there for us. He is by your side in even your darkest moments too.

When things are at their most difficult, seek peace not in your temporary circumstances but in the unending companionship and promises of a God who knows your pain and whose ultimate plan is to make everything right.

## Pray

“God, help me to find Your peace even in the middle of what’s on my plate today. Just as You were able to sleep aboard a boat tossed by wind and waves (Mark 4:35-41), grant me supernatural peace. Keep my mind fixed on You, not on my circumstances.”

*\* This devotional addresses mental health issues that affect people from all walks of life. While addressing parts of these issues within the context of Christian community is important, there are times when further professional help may be required. It is OK to ask for help! If you are in this situation, please seek out a mental health professional. A tool to find a professional in your area, along with other resources, can be found [here](#).*

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Elliott Dodge lives in Houston, Texas, with his wife and their two children, Indy and Mo. He is passionate about seeing God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven, and he is likely fasting from Dr Pepper during Lent.

*Lent - Day 33*

## Strength for Weak People

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But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” 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, New International Version)

M

ost of my notions of weakness and strength come from what I've observed in the world. It seems that the big strong guy wins and the little weak guy loses. A scramble for success and power leaves no room for weakness. So most of us shun and avoid it in every form. In avoiding weakness, we can

grow restless, willful, overly driven, stressed, impatient, isolated, unrelatable, harsh, selfish or unempathetic. A fun way to live, right?

Yet God offers us an entirely different way. In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul shares from his own struggle that God's way is not the world's.

God chooses the foolish to shame the wise, taking what is nothing and making it grand (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Just think of the disciples Jesus chose. A bunch of normal people — fishermen, farmers and a tax-collector — were his selected team to spread the kingdom of God to the world.

Ultimately, God uses the human weakness of His own Son, Jesus Christ, to show off His strength. At the Cross, Jesus willingly becomes worse than weak — a curse (Gal. 3:13) — and in so doing displays God's strength in the form of love, sacrifice, redemption, resurrection and adoption.

At the Cross, God reverses the curse of the Fall, including the world's way of thinking. Strength, once associated with power, becomes strength bound to surrender and alignment with God's ways. Weakness, associated with vulnerability and loss, becomes weakness associated with infinite gain.

His presence with you changes everything. So don't be afraid to be weak today. Take it as an opportunity to rejoice that God uses weakness and humility to revolutionize the world.



## Respond

By exercising your awareness of God's presence with you and by meditating on His Word, you will discover an inner strength that will not only carry you through the trials of life but will bring with it a joy that will grow in eternity.

Take a minute to read [Hebrews 4:14-16](#).

How does Jesus' sympathizing with your temptations and weakness make you think about your own weakness?

When reading the Bible, look for examples of how God chooses the way of weakness to display His strength.

If you have extra time, look at Jesus' blessings in [Matthew 5:1-12](#). Do you see yourself in the progression of these verses?

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Philip Long is a writer, woodworker and illustrator.

*Lent - Day 34*

# Jesus' Triumphal (Yet Humble) Entry

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The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

“Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
behold, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”  
(John 12:12-15, English Standard Version)

**I**t doesn't take much imagination to picture a king riding into battle, galloping in on a white horse, sword ready, armor gleaming. Yet Christ's triumphal entry described in John 12 shows us a true king doesn't need all of those fancy props.

On what we now call Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a humble donkey. Yet He received a royal welcome. Cloaks and palm branches rolled out on the road before Him like a red carpet. A crowd gathered, waving branches and cheering.



The Jewish people knew by heart the prophecy of Christ's coming. Their shouts of "Hosanna" were a hope-

filled cry for help. Jesus' entry into the city staked His claim on both His throne and His people. It was a public declaration of who He was: Messiah, Savior and King.

King Jesus wouldn't rescue as they expected — sword in hand, ready to deliver His people from the pressing Roman authorities. Instead, He would lay down His sword — lay down His own life — to deliver them from a greater, hidden oppressor: their own sin.

Sadly, the crowds would turn on Him in a few days' time, blinded by the bonds of sin that truly held them.

But these bonds hold us no longer because of the sacrifice only the one true King could make.

Our souls still cry out, "Hosanna!" King Jesus responds as only He can: defeating our enemies — sin and death — and making us free forever.

## Reflect

What is one way you need God to deliver you today?  
Is there a sin you can't seem to escape? Envy, anger,  
control or addiction\*?

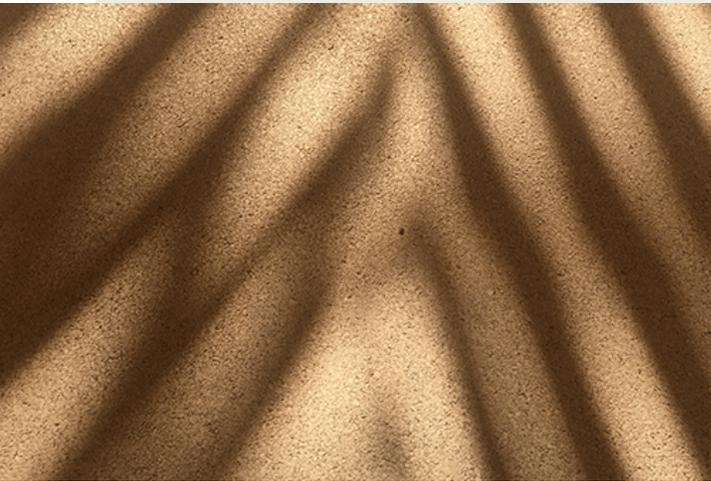
Make no mistake: Christ's claim on you is real. If you've invited Him into your life, you are His. He is your King and Savior. Ask Him to free you of any sin holding you back today. Then follow him, however his answer may look, knowing that he will always lead you to freedom.

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Lisa Lakey is a wife, a mom of two, a writer and the lead editor for FamilyLife®. She writes from her kitchen table in central Arkansas with a cup of coffee in one hand and kids and pets circling at her feet.

# Lent

## Your Day to Rest



Today is Palm Sunday, the day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was welcomed as the long-awaited king.

As you rest today, take some time to read and reflect on Matthew 21:1-11 (New International Version):

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

*Lent - Day 35*

## **The Voice of Grace: How God Moves You From Rebellion to Obedience**

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For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-13, New International Version)

**T**

here are many ways to get someone to do something. Parents and children know how this works. You can use a reward (“If you clean your room, I’ll give you a donut”). You can use persuasion (“Wouldn’t it feel nice to have a clean room?”). You can use threats (“Clean your room right now or no

Netflix for a week”). You can even use passive-aggression (“Well, when you get typhoid from the filth in your room, don’t expect me to nurse you back to health!”).

These techniques come naturally to most people. But what about God? Does God use passive-aggression to

get you to do what’s right? Does God threaten you to keep you from doing what is wrong?

Paul’s letter to Titus includes an insight into God’s method of growing you from a rebellious child to a person who loves and obeys Him. It is God’s grace that teaches you to say no to what is wrong and yes to what is right.

God’s primary tool for your transformation is not the threat of punishment but the promise of forgiveness. His love changes you into the person He wants you to be.

The story of Easter you are preparing to celebrate this weekend reminds you that, when God saw the mess of your life, He did not condemn you from afar, but drew near and entered into our world to bring a solution. At the Cross, God demonstrated His grace and kindness to you. Now you, His follower, can tune your ear to the voice of grace and to love and obey Him because He first loved you.

### Reflect

*What motivates you to obey God?*

*How can you listen to grace as it teaches you to say no to what is wrong?*

*Where is God asking you to say no? Where is He asking you to say yes to Him?*

Josh Irby has been on staff with Cru® for the past 20 years, serving much of that time in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is married with five kids and now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.



*Lent - Day 36*

# A Confidence in Your Foundation

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So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”  
(Hebrews 13:6, English Standard Version)

In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence,  
and his children will have a refuge.  
(Proverbs 14:26, ESV)

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:8, ESV)

**A**re you ever amazed at the immense faith of a fellow believer? Or at how confident they are? Does anyone in the Bible come to mind? For me, it's Moses.

Moses was one of the most important prophets in the Old Testament, leading the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt and acting as God's mouthpiece to communicate His Law.

The crazy thing is that when God first called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, Moses refused! In

Exodus 4, as God speaks to Moses through a burning bush, giving him explicit instructions and encouragement, Moses continues to waver in his desire to obey, saying, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else" (Exodus 4:13). But God had patience with him and helped him embrace the

faith and courage he needed for the job.

Moses' confidence didn't grow overnight, and it didn't grow without him leaning into his fears and working through them. But he also didn't have to overcome his insecurities alone. God was with him. Only after Moses saw God miraculously free the Israelites from Pharaoh, divide the Red Sea and

provide food and water for masses of people as they wandered in the desert could he confidently declare, "It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

God led Moses from a place of insecurity to a place of confidence, bravery and faith. Moses' confidence didn't stem from himself, but from his firm foundation; he was rooted in God.

You may have moments of insecurity and fear, but because of who you are grounded in, you can walk confidently knowing that, although the ground may shake, God will be there to secure your footing.

There will be times in your life when Hebrews 13:6, "The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear," will flow easily from your mouth. At other times, though, the process of growing in faith will not be easy. You'll take steps along the way that are scary, and you'll need to trust that God will meet you in a vulnerable place.

When you reach a decision point or a place that makes you feel insecure, just pause. Remember God's faithfulness to Moses. Remember the great love Christ demonstrated for you on the cross. Remember the times His presence covered you and His strength filled you. Remember He did not leave you then and He won't leave you now.



## Reflect and Respond

What are some instances when God strengthened you and was your rock in the midst of a hard time? Write them down, praising and thanking Him that you can have confidence in His faithfulness and love.

After focusing on your past, focus on your present. In what area or areas of your life do you need to ask God to help you find your security and confidence in Him?

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Brandie Alvarez was born and raised in California. She currently works with the ministry of Destino®, a Christ-centered movement aimed to empower and raise up a generation of Hispanic and Latino students. She enjoys traveling, finding new coffee shops and watching documentaries.

*Lent - Day 37*

## Connected to the True Vine

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“Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.”

(John 15:4-5, New International Version)



One chore my children like to help with is picking up sticks and branches from our yard. Even at a young age, they understand those withered, scrawny sticks aren't good for anything. While trees and vines in our yard produce beautiful

flowers and fruit, a branch can't produce anything if it isn't connected to the tree.

I like to think of myself as independent, capable and self-sufficient. But the truth is, apart from Christ, I can't accomplish anything, much less something of eternal value. I was born

with a sin nature that separated me from God; I was a dead branch right from the start. Even my first breath on this earth, my first word and first step, were a gift of God's common grace.

But Jesus' death on the cross on my behalf enabled me to be united with Him. Miraculously, we "dead branches" have been grafted into the True Vine.

We can bear fruit — live out qualities such as love, patience, joy and self-control — when we stay connected to God through daily prayer and Bible study. And we can help other "dead branches"

experience new life when we share who Christ is and what He has done.

## Reflect and Pray

Are you grateful to no longer be a "dead branch" on the ground? Thanks to Jesus' death and resurrection, you have life, purpose and hope here on earth. If you've put your trust and faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are no longer separated from God. You are united to Him like beautiful, fruitful branches extending from a steadfast source of life. Not only can you experience the joy of connection to Christ now, but you can also look forward to one day being fully united with your Lord in eternity.

Consider this prayer: "God, I acknowledge that apart from you, I can accomplish nothing of eternal value. Please help me to bear good fruit in my actions and attitudes as I stay connected to you."

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Jayna Richardson lives in Jacksonville, Arkansas, and serves with FamilyLife®. She loves reading, writing, traveling, and spending time outdoors with her husband and two kids. She blogs at [jaynarichardson.wordpress.com](http://jaynarichardson.wordpress.com).

*Lent - Day 38*

## Where You Look Matters

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Peter said to Him, “Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You!” And all the disciples said the same.”  
(Matthew 26:35, English Standard Version)

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard.  
And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” (Matthew 26:69-70, ESV)

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ...  
When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. (John 21:4, 7, ESV)

Sweat begins to drip as my shoes pound the treadmill track beneath me. My eyes catch a glimpse of the football game on the TV to my right. Soon enough, my neck is completely turned, waiting for the quarterback to call the next play. But I can hear the voice of a cardio class instructor replay over and over in my mind: “Look straight ahead!”



The more I’ve run, the more I’ve learned that where I’m looking matters. If I look anywhere but straight ahead, not only do I risk falling off my treadmill, but I risk injury.

Centuries ago, the apostle Peter learned a similar lesson. Hours before Jesus’ death, Peter adamantly stated that he’d never leave Jesus. But in His darkest hour, Peter did.

Let me ask you a question: Where do you think Peter was looking at that moment?

Peter no longer had his eyes set on his friend, whom he said he would never deny. Peter’s eyes were shifting to the aggressive crowds on his left and on his right. I imagine Peter was afraid that he’d receive the same fate as his Lord. So he responded, “No, I

don’t know Him!” His heart broke when he realized what he’d done.

But after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter took a fishing trip. When Peter heard that it was the Lord on the beach cooking breakfast, he didn’t even wait for the boat to dock. He dove into the water, looking straight ahead to Jesus. I imagine he had in mind the love, grace and forgiving nature of his friend. Now, Peter was running to Him alone.

Where you look matters.

If you want to grow into a faithful leader like Peter, you too must learn to keep looking at Jesus, even during fearful times. You can do this by making a daily habit of reading Scripture and talking to Him through prayer. As Peter would later say, “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him” (2 Peter 1:3, NIV).

So, where are you looking today? How can you fix your eyes on Jesus?

## Respond

One of the primary ways you can focus on Jesus is through studying His Word. It can be a challenge to consistently do this, so you need to be intentional.

Before moving on, read the full account of Peter's denial of Jesus in Matthew 26:69-75 and his joyful reunion in John 21:1-20.

Open your calendar and block out 15-30 minutes each day to help you keep your eyes on Jesus this week.

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Thomas serves with Cru® in Buffalo, New York, but was born and raised in Montreal. Some of his favorite things about being on staff include summer missions, spring break, getting to teach and doing the hard work of evangelism. In his free time, he loves watching sports, staying active, good coffee and lazy Saturday mornings!

*Lent - Day 39*

# The Torn Veil of Victory

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And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.  
(Matthew 27:51, New King James Version)

**R**eading the phrase “the veil was torn in two” today doesn’t hold as much weight as it did in Jesus’ time. What comes to mind when you picture a veil? Possibly a bride? So, why would a veil have anything to do with Jesus dying on the cross?



In fact, this moment was monumental, and there is more to it than you may be able to see from your twenty-first-century perspective.

The temple was where God chose to make His home with His people. Within the temple, behind a heavy curtain

(called a veil) was the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter this sacred space, and only after following elaborate instructions for purification.

The ripping of the veil at Jesus’ death represents something profound. Jesus offered the final sacrifice for purification — Himself. The moment that looked like ultimate defeat, Jesus’ death, was actually ultimate victory because of what His death (and resurrection) accomplished.

The violent tearing of the curtain represents both Jesus’ gruesome death and sacrifice for our sin, as well as the removal of the barrier between people and God. Now that the curtain was left ripped and open,

sinful people could enter into God’s presence. With sin taken out of the equation through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, all people could finally come freely into fellowship with God (see Hebrews 10:19-22).

The moment you confess Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you step into an eternal relationship with Him. No longer does the temple hold the presence of God, but His presence lives in you. As the Holy Spirit empowers you over time, you will experience Christ’s redemptive work in every area of your life.

### Reflect and Pray

Read the full account of Jesus’ death on the cross in [Matthew 27:45-55](#).

Also read [Hebrews 10:19-22](#). What is one way your life is different because Christ tore the temple veil in two?

Consider this prayer: “Jesus, I’m amazed by Your wondrous mercy and love. Clear my mind and help me to focus on You. Thank You for giving your life in my place and for opening the way for me to have a restored relationship with You forever.”

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Brandie Alvarez was born and raised in California. She currently works with the ministry of Destino, a Christ-centered movement aimed to empower and raise up a generation of Hispanic and Latino students. She enjoys traveling, finding new coffee shops and watching documentaries.

*Lent - Day 40*

## With You in the Dark

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As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

(Ephesians 2:1-5, New International Version)



The first Holy Saturday experience for Jesus' followers was colored in dark tones and painted with despair. After witnessing Jesus' death on the cross and burial in stone, His followers were left without their teacher, their healer or their hope.

They were without the One who spoke words of eternal life. Without the One who turned their lives right-side up. Without the One they intended to follow the rest of their lives.

A deafening "without" echoed on that mournful Saturday.

If you've lived long enough, you've experienced dark moments when you've felt alone. When the power of death felt present in your life. When you've been without. Easter Saturday reminds us of God's power to turn "without" into "with."

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, reminds them of the death they once knew — full of overwhelming passions, unsatisfying desires and destructive cravings. These are dark sentences ending in wrath. But Paul tells them that in the face of this darkness and despair, God made them alive with Christ.

How did God do this for them? How does He do it for you?

Instead of leaving you alone in your darkness and despair, He enters into that pain to be with you. The

cross on Friday and the grave on Saturday were the lengths to which God was willing to go to take your sin and death upon Himself.

He came to be with you in your darkness so you can be with Him in His life. By His grace, you do not have to remain in this Saturday despair, but you can live with Him in His new Sunday life.

The good news of the Easter story is that God made a way for you to be alive with Christ.

If you're like me, the word "with" has never sounded so good.

## Respond

How are you experiencing the darkness and death of Saturday in your life right now?

What would it look like to ask Jesus to be with you in those dark places so you can experience life with Him? If you've never experienced the love and grace of God, take time to read more about [Knowing God Personally](#).

Josh Irby has been on staff with Cru® for the past 20 years, serving much of that time in Sarajevo, Bosnia. He is married with five kids and now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

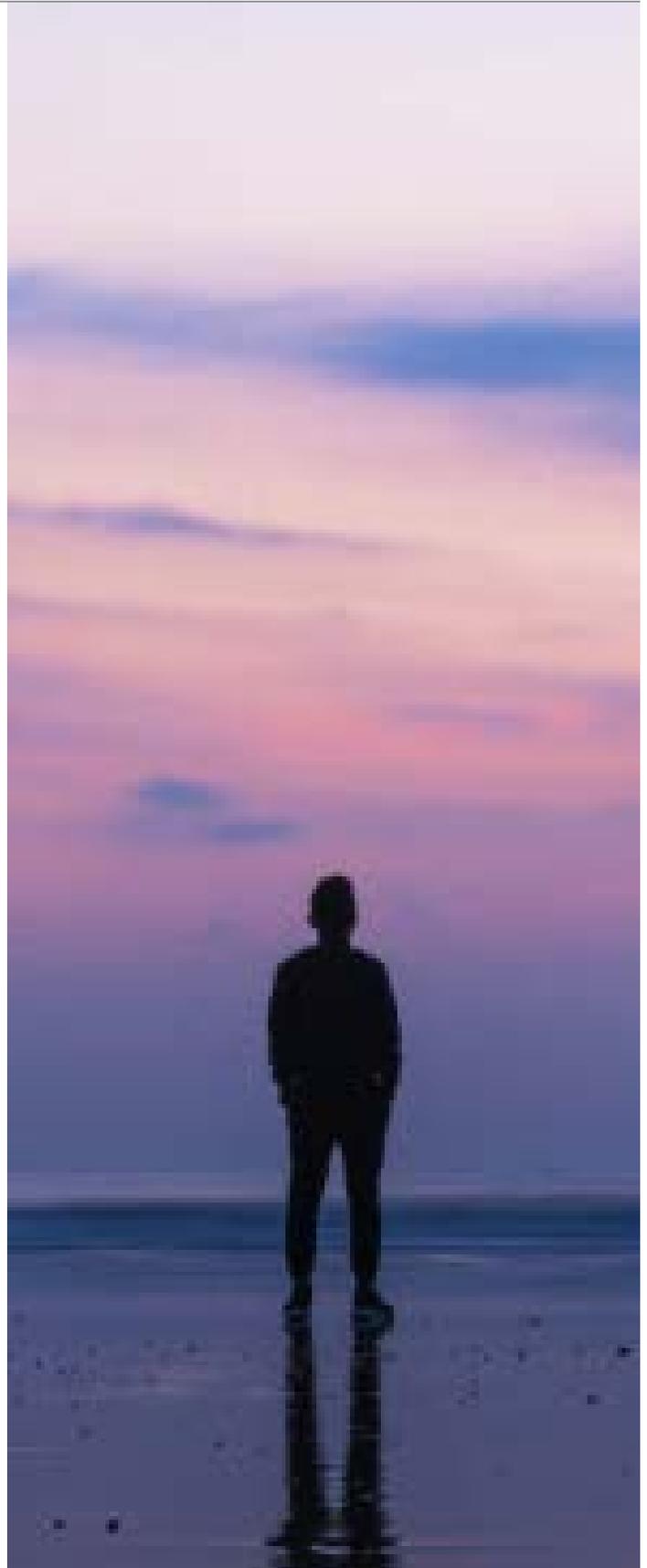
## *Resurrection Sunday*

# The Transformative Relationship

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“He is not here, for He has risen.” (Matthew 28:6, New American Standard Bible)

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20, NASB)



**F**

or a unique period of human history, Jesus — God in human flesh — dwelt among us as a man. Being eternally God, when he came to earth, he became fully human as well. Because he is both God and man, he can be in heaven seated at the right hand of the Father and also be everywhere else at once.

Jesus is rightly called Immanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).



He took on flesh to live with us, die for us, and be raised from the dead, leading the way for us to follow.

His presence, power and authority are not merely confined to upper rooms, open fields or sandy seashores.

Jesus is in every home, workplace and recreational space as He accompanies His faithful followers into all spheres of life. He is especially with and among His children. He is here with you.

As a follower of Jesus, you can have confidence through His resurrection that your sins are forgiven. Everything Jesus promised in His teachings you can trust to be true. You are a child of God, you will live forever with Him and your life on earth will be transformed as you continually entrust Him with it.

Jesus promised that the result of a close relationship with Him is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, New Living Translation). These traits that He exhibits through you enable you to be an inviting and effective ambassador of His wherever you go. He is with you always, the senior partner in an ongoing quest to change the world, one life at a time.

### Respond

Thank God that He wants to go through life with you, and ask Him what the first change you need to make is to experience life closer to Him. Rejoice in the amazing grace we remember on Resurrection Sunday, which promises we can dwell with God, and He with us, for eternity.

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David Lloyd works in Austin, Texas, with Global Church Movements to give every man, woman and child in the metro area ongoing opportunities to see and hear of Jesus’ love for them through a united movement of mobilized churches. Previously, David and his wife, Elaine, led teams pioneering Cru’s ministry in Moscow under the USSR and in Latvia before coordinating Agape Europe’s ministry to leaders and influencers. In his spare time, David has begun writing his first book, “Living on Mission: Stories of Radical Faith, Hope, and Love.”

Happy  
Easter!