



28 Day

Prayer Guide

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Day 1 – March 13

ACTS 10:1-4

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

There may not be much written about Cornelius' life in the book of Acts but one thing we are told is that he prayed regularly to God. We aren't given details of his prayer life such as when he prayed or how he prayed. We are simply told that he consistently spent time with God in prayer.

Prayer isn't some magic potion to get God to move on our behalf. Instead, it is a crucial way to align ourselves to the work and the purpose of God. At the core, it is an invitation to walk with God intimately.

Here is a thing that shows up over and over again in the stories of people who walk closely with God and have lived life with this kind of big and bold faith. They all prayed regularly! Jesus' disciples certainly saw this pattern in Jesus and saw an unmistakable connection between Jesus' prayer life and his life of uncommon clarity and power. And so they asked Jesus, "teach us how to pray!"

As we embark on this prayer journey for the next 28 days, let's ask God to also teach us how to pray. And as we pray regularly, may our expectations and anticipations to see and experience God be increased daily.

Mark Batterson says, "***change of place and change pace brings about change of perspective.***" For the next 28 days, set aside a certain place where you can go to God in prayer daily. It could be a closet, a local park, or your favorite coffee shop, but build a consistent rhythm for the next 4 weeks and prioritize your time with God in prayer. Your goal is to be consistent, daily, and be expectant! So, mark your place and time and see if God doesn't show up more regularly in your life.

PRAY

***Lord, teach me how to pray.
Before I share what's in my heart, help me to make space to hear what is in yours.
Amen.***

Day 2 -March 14

LUKE 11:1-4

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say:

"Father hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

A. W. Tozer said, *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."*

It's a simple but sharp wake-up call for us to examine the connection between our 'theology' (whether conscious or unconscious) and everything else about our lives. It helps us take a step back and reflect on that connection.

What kind of a God do I believe in?

What kind of a God don't I believe in?

How might that then shape me in various ways?

Order of things matter, and Jesus teaches his disciples in our passage that when they pray, start by seeing God as your heavenly father. To refer to God as a father may be as normal as prayer itself for us in the modern church. But it was anything but normal for the first century Jews.

Before we jump to what we pray about, Jesus wants us to know who we are praying to. And the God of Heavens is also our Heavenly Father. And because of that truth, we can know and be confident that we are loved for who we are and not for what we've done or not done.

Whenever we get this order mixed up, we drift towards seeing God's love to be something we work for rather than the gift that is to be received. We can never earn God's love. We are simply loved by him and therefore, we trust and follow after him. So, pray with confidence that you belong to him, and he is well pleased with you today.

Pray

Pray with confidence that God hears you and wants to spend time with you.

***Father, I come to you in prayer today, thankful that I am your child.
I know I have fallen short, but you have forgiven me and accepted me as your own, and I am so grateful to call you my Father. Thank you for loving me as I am. I love you.
Amen.***

Day 3 – March 15

MATTHEW 6:25-34

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 3

So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

If you're like me, when you hear these words to not worry, maybe you find that your worries and anxieties actually increase. Here's the truth of the matter: we can avoid or ignore worries for a time but without real change, those worries never really go away. In fact, it only gets worse over time.

Jesus understood this better than anyone. Jesus isn't asking us to think our way out of worry as if we wish it away, that it'll somehow go away. Instead, Jesus invites us to redirect our devotion so that the worries and anxieties are right sized, in light of who God is.

PRAY

Father, I acknowledge that everything I need today will come from you. You made the heavens and the earth; You are more than capable of handling any situation I'm facing, so I give it to you completely.

(Make sure to talk to God about what is on your mind and heart right now and give it to him).

*I look to you to help me, sustain me, and give me your peace.
Thank you for leading me to a place of rest and replenishment.
Amen.*

Day 4 – March 16

Colossians 3:1-14

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

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 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.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

To say that our thought life is important, is an understatement. What we think can literally shape the quality and the direction of life. If our minds are consistently fed negative thoughts, we will eventually drift in that direction. On the other hand, if our thoughts are consumed with truth and life, we find ourselves drifting towards life. Paul understood the symbiotic relationship between one's thought life and the overall quality and direction of life, when he wrote the letter to the Colossians. In our passage, Paul encourages the believers to always remember and believe that their ultimate reality and truth is associated with what Christ has done for them.

Paul says if you want to truly live life to the full, the secret is in how you are able to set eternity in your heart and to direct your thoughts to things above, where God rules and reigns over us. He isn't promoting some alternate reality or encouraging us to just kinda live in the clouds. Instead, he is inviting us to see the most important truth about us and when that truth is based on who we are IN Christ, then we can live fully to the calling and the purpose God has for us.

In fact, Paul makes the case that those who are most heavenly minded are also the most earthly good. The more we know and internalize our identity with Christ, the more we are able to live in this uncommon compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We really are what we think. So, take captive your thoughts today to the truth of God's unconditional love for you!

Pray

Father God, thank you that your presence and approval is all I need. Nothing I've done and nothing I do can ever cause you to love me more or less. Your love is perfect. So, I come to you with confidence for your love is unconditional and unchanging. Amen.

Day 5 – March 17

2 Kings 6:11-19

This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?" "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him."

The report came back: "He is in Dothan." Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

Do you ever feel alone when you pray, like your prayers bounce off of the ceiling and head right back to you? In 2 Kings 6 11-19, there is a battle raging between the King of Aram and the King of Israel. Elisha is a prophet of Israel who continues to thwart the plans of the Aramean king by telling the king of Israel everything that the Arameans plan on doing. When we drop into the story, we find ourselves with the prophet Elisha and his servant. The king of Aram sent an army overnight to trap and kill Elisha. Can you imagine being the servant the next morning as he walked outside to see an army encircling his city? He's freaked out, and rightly so... On the surface, it looks like he and Elisha will be dead before breakfast.

But Elisha knows something about the power of God through prayer. He knows that there are battles happening in the spiritual realm that we can't see unless we engage with God in prayer, so he asks God to open the eyes of his servant. Lo and behold there's a heavenly army waiting to respond to Elisha's prayers.

As we continue our prayer journey, remember that prayer is powerful in unlocking the power of God in our lives and world. Sometimes we see the outward response to our prayers, and sometimes like Elisha and his servant, there is a battle being waged in the unseen world that can only be seen through prayer.

Pray

***As you pray today, what are the things that seem too big to ask for?
Spend time praying that the God who is powerful enough to have armies in the heavenly
realms would move powerfully through your prayers.***

Day 6 – March 20

Acts 1:8-9

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

There's something powerful about someone's last words. Whether it's the last words of the pastor as he presents the newly married Mr. and Mrs., the last words of a parent as they drop their child off at college, or the last words of a friend or family member before their passing, last words hold power and position in our hearts.

In Acts 1:8-9 we see Jesus' last words to his followers before he ascends to the heavens to be with his heavenly father. In Jesus' last words, his followers are given two promises that we can hold onto over 2,000 years later.

The first promise is that the very Spirit of God, which lives within us, will give us power in the spiritual and physical world.

The second promise is, that with this power comes the privilege and responsibility to share God's great love with the people in the places where we've been planted.

Pray

Yesterday we explored the reality that God is working in the spiritual realm and that there is great power in prayer as God opens our eyes to things that we might miss if we weren't seeking God in prayer.

Acts 1:8 shows us that one of the prayers that God loves to answer powerfully, is a prayer that all people would come to know God's saving love and leadership in their lives.

**Who do you know who doesn't yet have a relationship with God?
Pray a bold prayer for them every day this week.
Pray that God would work to make Himself known to your friend.**

Day 7 – March 21

Matthew 9:35-38

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus often used real-life examples to illustrate what God was up to in the world. Here we see Jesus talking about a field ready to be harvested. The problem is that there aren't enough farmers to harvest the field so the crop might go back. Jesus isn't talking about an actual harvest, but about the reality that people are ready to surrender their lives to the love and leadership of God. We live in a world where people are hungry for truth, love, forgiveness, and purpose. God offers these things freely to anyone who comes to him.

The problem in Jesus' words is that there aren't enough laborers sharing in his work of drawing people to God. One of the most powerful prayers that a follower of Jesus can pray is simply; *“here I am Lord, send me.”*

Yesterday we were invited to pray for our friends who don't yet have a relationship with God. Today, let's be the answer to Jesus' prayer by taking part in his mission to help people find and follow God. Maybe reach out to them and invite them to join you at church this Easter.

Pray

God, here I am, use me!

Please use me in the life of _____ to help them come to know you.

Amen.

Day 8 – March 22

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

If there's one thing that the Apostle Paul knows well in his life, it's difficulty and suffering for the sake of Christ. Throughout scripture we see trials and trouble following Paul wherever he went to proclaim the good news of Jesus. He did not let that stop or discourage him from persevering, instead he continually shared about the joy and comfort he received from God that allowed him to carry on, which he credits to the prayers of the church that supported him.

"God will never give you more than you can handle" is often said by well-meaning Christians to offer comfort during difficulty, but unfortunately, it's not Biblical or true. God does allow us to go through trials that are more than we can handle on our own. We read here that Paul was overwhelmed beyond his ability to endure until he learned to rely on God, rather than himself, and found God to be the source of all comfort during his suffering. Trust God to be the source of all comfort in your life through his presence and power. And, like Paul, be a source of comfort to others just as you have been comforted by God.

Pray

Spend time praying individually, by name, people you know that are going through a difficult time and need comfort.

Day 9 – March 23

Psalm 17

Hear me, Lord, my plea is just; listen to my cry. Hear my prayer— it does not rise from deceitful lips. Let my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil; my mouth has not transgressed. Though people tried to bribe me, I have kept myself from the ways of the violent through what your lips have commanded. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled.

I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who are out to destroy me, from my mortal enemies who surround me. They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance. They have tracked me down, they now surround me, with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground. They are like a lion hungry for prey, like a fierce lion crouching in cover. Rise up, Lord, confront them, bring them down; with your sword rescue me from the wicked. By your hand save me from such people, Lord, from those of this world whose reward is in this life. May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies; may their children gorge themselves on it, and may there be leftovers for their little ones. As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

Throughout the life of David, especially while he was younger and being pursued by King Saul, he faced and overcame many challenges. While we don't know the circumstances of this particular Psalm, we can tell that David is in the midst of a dangerous situation and is praying to God for rescue. Like David, one of the most frequent times that we go to God is when we're facing difficulties in life and finally turn to God after everything else we've tried hasn't worked.

One important aspect that we see in David's prayer as he faces difficulty is that he doesn't pray hoping God will hear and answer, but knowing that God will. We also see that David is trusting God with the response; he's faced lions and enemies before and overcame them, so he certainly has the ability and experience, but he trusts God to protect him and guide his steps.

How might your prayers change if you prayed knowing God hears and responds?

Pray

God, examine my heart and mind for anything offensive to you; forgive me of my sin.

I pray today knowing that you listen and respond.

I trust you to show up in the storms of life with your unfailing love and to protect me from those that would seek to harm me.

Amen.

Day 10 – March 24

Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.

As you read through the list of who Jesus says is blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven, did you find yourself wanting the blessing but not necessarily the circumstances? We want to be comforted but would rather not mourn. We want to receive mercy, but do we really have to extend mercy? Even to them? We should rejoice and be glad when we are mocked or persecuted for our Christian faith? Really, Jesus?

Jesus' answer: Yes.

Dallas Willard, a great Christian pastor and writer, remarked that, ***“being blessed refers to the highest form of well-being for human beings.”*** This is not simply happiness that Jesus says is available to us.

The promise of God's blessing is a deep sense of joy and favor. And this blessing is available to all who put God first in their lives, which will challenge you to hunger and thirst for justice, extend mercy, love better and be a peacemaker. It will also take humility, purity, and mourning.

Living in this way is what it means to be blessed in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Pray

Read the above passage again, slowly as a prayer, pausing and contemplating each blessing statement.

Day 11 – March 27

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

One of the hardest things for us to do is the first word in this verse, **Shema** (shuh-mah). Shema is Hebrew for “Hear” or “Listen,” and the Jewish people have said the Shema, which is the verse that we just read in Deuteronomy two times a day for centuries, morning and night reciting this as a prayer to God.

How hard is it for you to stop and listen? To Shema? In a world that is full of distractions, noises, responsibilities, and the latest release or podcast you just have to listen to how hard is it for you to stop and just listen... to hear God’s voice in the midst of the business?

What would it look like for you to stop and just listen or hear from God?

Pray

God, help me to listen to you, to not get so distracted and busy that I don’t take time to hear from you. It is easy for me to get so busy doing, that I don’t spend time listening to you. In my stillness would you speak to me and help me as I trust in you and desire to live in step with you Lord?

Amen.

Day 12 – March 28

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Yesterday we introduced a prayer called the Shema and we focused on listening and hearing from God as we recited this prayer that Jews have prayed for several hundreds of years morning and evening. This is the same prayer that Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for praying. Here is what struck me, Daniel had been praying that prayer for years, it was a consistent part of his life because he knew who his Lord was.

"Lord" simply defined means a person having power and authority over others, but this is not the **LORD** that we find in Deuteronomy nor the **LORD** that we find Daniel praying to. The name of God was considered so holy that it was not to be said out loud. So, Daniel continued to pray to the **LORD**, or in the original language, "**YAHWWEH**."

There is an old song that some of you might know called KING of Kings and LORD of Lords that I used to sing when I was a kid. It had an old world feel to it that was fun for me and friends to sing but I missed the profound meaning in it. This is the **YAHWEH** that Deuteronomy is referring to, **The LORD of all lords, KING of all kings**. Daniel, Jews, Jesus and Christ followers have all called God this name as a sign of honor and respect and supremacy. This song made me think of another verse found in Revelation 4:8 where it says that four creatures were repeating, "**Holy, holy, holy, LORD GOD Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!**" We see it again from the beginning of man's history to this letter by John that God is GOD. He is over all and therefore as we return to this prayer of Shema we rightly listen, trust and pray to the GOD over all Gods who was and is and is to come.

Pray

GOD... may we truly acknowledge you as Lord over all of our lives. Help us as we listen to you to trust that your ways are better than our ways and that you know what is best for our lives. We acknowledge you as Yahweh, Adonai, the one who was, who is, and who will always be.

Amen.

Day 13 – March 29

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Today we are talking about loving God with our heart. The heart at the time this text was written was understood differently than it is today. Wisdom was stored in the heart, there was an understanding that if you were to discern something that the heart was where that discernment would come from. The heart was where you not only felt emotions, but it was also where you thought and made sense of the world and finally it is where your desires come from.

This is why Proverbs 4:23 encourages you to guard your heart because your whole life flows from it. So whether you are praying for a clean heart, a repentant heart, or a heart of praise we are called to love God with all of our heart. This is why each day Christians are called to pray, to devote, to honor God with their hearts as reflected in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Pray

The heart is the center of much of what leads and drives us.

God, we realize that this can be a heart for you or for our own selfish desires.

God, help us to Love you in every area of our hearts today.

Amen.

Day 14 – March 30

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

When you think of your soul, what do you think of? For many of us we imagine a sort of ghost or spirit that resides in our body waiting to be released upon our death. In the bible the soul conveys as an idea of our personhood, the whole of our being. Who we are, what makes us up, a living breathing human being.

Psalm 42 refers to the deer panting for water so our soul longs after God. It represents the idea of the whole of a human being longing for refreshing from God. For some of you this experience is something that you are familiar with, for others this is a new idea. What would it be like if every part of your soul were to long for the Lord?

Pray

God, may we long for you as the deer pants for the water.

***May you satisfy our souls, every single part of us,
as a cool drink fully refreshes us on a hot day.***

Amen.

Day 15 – March 31

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

What do you think of when you think of loving the Lord with your strength? It could be ripping telephone books (what are those) in half or breaking handcuffs with your strength. But in the Shema that we have read each day this week, it refers more to an increase or 'strengthening' of every area of our life in devotion to God.

I don't know about you, but I could use an increase in patience, devotion, and many other areas of my life. What does it look like if I ask God to increase those areas by His strength? I am thankful for those areas that I see God working, the areas that I give to him, and act better than I might on my own. Following Jesus truly makes my life better and makes me better at life!

Pray

God, will you increase our love for you, today and every day?

Will you increase and strengthen our relationship and love for you?

Thank you for the strength, the increase that you give every aspect of our being!

We love you and worship you today!

Amen.

Day 16 – April 3

Mark 14:32-36

They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, “Sit here while I go and pray.” He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. “Abba, Father,” he cried out, “everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

This week, the week leading up to Easter is commonly referred to as “Holy Week.” So, this week we will be walking with Jesus through some of the scenes around the crucifixion. My prayer is that by reflecting on the moments around the crucifixion we will be better prepared to worship this coming Sunday morning as we celebrate the resurrection together!

We begin the week in Gethsemane a garden. Which is fitting because we’re headed to another garden on Easter Sunday where we find the empty tomb.

Here in Gethsemane, we see the humanity of Jesus pressed to the breaking point. Gethsemane is an Aramaic word that means “oil press”. It’s here in the garden of the oil press that the anointed Messiah is under such pressure that he says, ***“My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.”***

This kind of language from Jesus shocks us. In Gethsemane we don’t encounter a Jesus who is unflappable and impassible, but a Jesus who knows what it is to be under horrible pressure. In Gethsemane we see the two natures of Christ in one person – first a human nature pleading, ***“Please take this cup of suffering away from me.”*** But there is also a divine nature adding, ***“yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”***

In Gethsemane we witness as Jesus willingly empties himself of divine privilege in order to fully share in human suffering. The Apostle Paul describes this moment like this:
Philippians 2: 5-8 -Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Pray:

Lord Jesus, as we see you in the garden of Gethsemane, willing to drink the cup of suffering, we thank you for redeeming our humanity, by sharing our humanity.

Amen.
Day 17 – April 4

Mark 15:22

A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus).

Today's reading is only one verse, but it contains an enormous message – when Jesus came to the end of his strength, there was someone there to carry his cross for him. As Jesus faltered under the load of the cross, Simon of Cyrene was given the supreme honor of carrying it for him.

From the story of Simon of Cyrene, we are reminded that there are limits to what we can bear, but when we reach those limits God will send someone to help. Some days we can handle anything, some days it's all too much. That's when we need someone to help us. There was a cross that Jesus couldn't carry, but Simon of Cyrene was there to carry it for him.

This is the beauty of the body of Christ and why the church is so necessary. Following Jesus is not a solo project; we can't go it alone. Even Jesus couldn't do it by himself. And you can't do it by yourself.

Some days we have the honor of being Simon of Cyrene and helping a brother or sister carry their cross when it has become too much for them. Other days, we are the ones in need of a Simon of Cyrene. Whether we are helping or being helped, it's all the grace of God.

Pray

***Lord Jesus, send us a Simon of Cyrene when we've reached our limit;
and help us to be a Simon of Cyrene to those struggling around us.
Amen.***

Day 18 – April 5

John 19:25-27

Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son." And he said to this disciple, "Here is your mother." And from then on this disciple took her into his home.

At the foot of the cross, amongst the soldier, jeerers, mockers, and priests we also find family and friends of Jesus, and this provides us with one of the most tender moments in the life of Jesus. Even as Jesus is dying on the cross, his love and compassion reaches out to others as he commits his mother and John to a relationship of mutual care: "Here is your son. Here is your mother." Looking down upon them from the cross, Jesus draws Mary and John into a new mother-son relationship.

What we have in this scene with Jesus, Mary and John is a poignant picture of Jesus' vision for his church – a community of faith centered around our Lord and his cross, caring for one another. We really should see the church as our mother; and the church really should think of its members as beloved children. I know the experience of the church doesn't always live up to this vision, and I know it's easy to be critical of the church, but still, I hear Jesus say, "Here is your mother." So when I hear Jesus speaking from the cross, directing a disciple to care for his mother, I take it as a sacred plea from Christ to care lovingly for the church as our mother.

And so, my commitment to Jesus is in part expressed in my devotion to the church. Jesus is my Lord and Savior, but the church is my mother – a mother who both provides care and is to be cared for. I'm speaking of the church not as a cold (and sometimes cruel) institution, but as the kind of community where many people have their only real opportunity to find love, acceptance and dignity.

At its best, there's nothing like the church. A place where Matthew 25 is just a normal day – a place where the poor are fed and clothed, the sick are helped and healed, a place where the immigrant is welcomed, and the prisoner is given dignity. A place where everyone is a saint and a sinner. A place where we not only carry each other's burdens, but when necessary carry each other. Because, despite our differences in education and opportunity, opinions and politics, we are learning to love one another like Jesus loves us – unconditionally!
This is the church I believe in!

Pray

Lord Jesus, help us to behold the church as our mother.

And help us to care for our mother, the church, in such a way that she can provide motherly love and care for her sons and daughters.

Amen.

Day 19 – April 6

Mark 15:25, 33, 34

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

Luke 23:44-46

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

*Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”
When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

We arrive now at the death of Jesus, and we are truly treading on Holy Ground. As Jesus neared his death he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” What are we to make of this cry? Was Jesus actually forsaken by God? Had God turned his back on his Son? The correct theological answer is a clear and unequivocal, NO! But that does not diminish the existential experience of God-forsakenness that Jesus Christ fully entered into – an experience that is common to all of us at one time or another.

Those haunting words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” are the opening lines of Psalm 22, which we often refer to as the Psalm of the Cross (you should go read it, it’s worth your time).

This is the Psalm that is in the mind of Jesus as he is dying.

Jesus knows what it is to feel forsaken by God, and in his suffering Jesus uttered this bewildered cry. But in his death Jesus committed his spirit into the hands of the Father he knows will never forsake him.

Sometimes when we’ve done all we can do, there’s nothing more to be done than to put everything in the hands of the God who will never abandon us.

Pray

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have fully shared with us what it feels like to be utterly forsaken; but we thank you even more that you have promised that you will never leave nor forsake us.

Amen.

Day 20– April 7, Good Friday

Mark 15:22, 24, 26, 33, 34, 37, 39

And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means “Place of the Skull”). Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. A sign announced the charge against him. It read, “The King of the Jews.”

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. Then at three o’clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, “This man truly was the Son of God!”

On Good Friday we think about one thing: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is the epicenter of Christian faith. At the core of Christianity, we don’t find religion, meditation techniques, or a course in ethics – but a crucifixion. This is the enduring scandal and mystery of the gospel.

So today, above all days, we look unflinchingly at the cross. To enter deep into the mystery of the cross is to encounter the greatest revelation of who God is.

The cross is many things:

- It’s the pinnacle of God’s self-disclosure.
- It’s divine solidarity with all human suffering.
- It’s the shaming of principalities and powers.
- It’s the point from which the satan is driven out of the world.
- It’s the death by which Christ conquers Death.
- It’s the abolition of war and violence.
- It’s the supreme demonstration of the love of God.
- It’s the re-founding of the world around an axis of love.
- It’s the enduring model of co-suffering love we are to follow.
- It’s the eternal moment in which the sin of the world is forgiven.

The cross is not the appeasement of an angry God. The cross is not where Jesus saves us from God, but where Jesus reveals God as savior. The cross is not what God inflicts upon Jesus in order to forgive, but what God in Christ endures as he forgives.

The cross is both ugly and beautiful. It’s as ugly as human sin and as beautiful as divine love – but in the end love and beauty win!

Pray

Lord Jesus, as we look at you on the cross, with your arms outstretched in ready embrace, we pray, forgive us Lord! Forgive the ugliness of our sin and replace it with your beauty.

Amen.