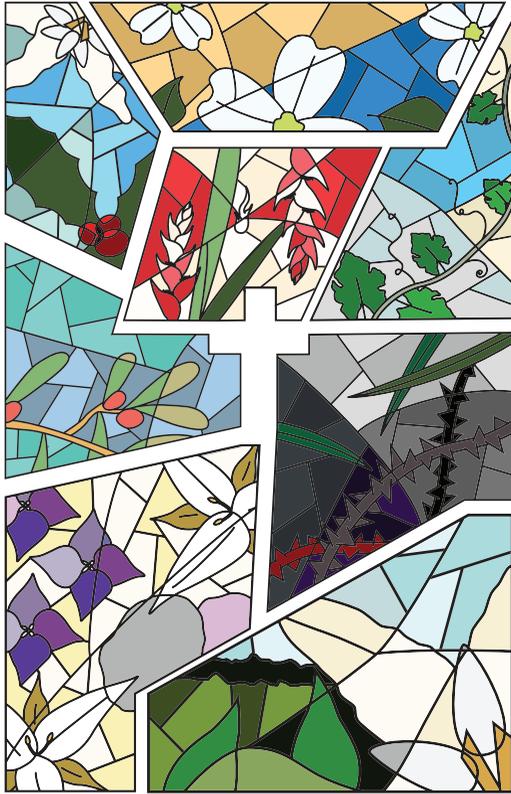
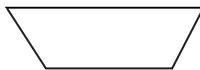
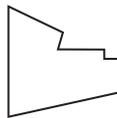
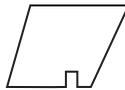
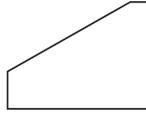


C L A R I T Y





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INTRODUCTION

We want to see Jesus clearly. As followers of Jesus, we want Him to be the central focus of our lives and our heartfelt, humble praise. In Psalm 27:4, David expressed a longing to experience unbroken, authentic fellowship with the Lord. Through Jesus we are able to experience that intimacy and see Him active in our lives, families, churches, communities, and world. The writer of Hebrews challenges us to fix “our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). With this singular sense of focus, we will see Jesus with ever-increasing clarity.

As we seek to experience that depth of relationship with God, we each need to spend consistent, intentional time with Him. We need to daily learn who Jesus is, what He has done, and how we are to live in light of what He has done for us. With a proper view of the cross and our sin, the appropriate response should be one of true worship. Our response to Jesus should be passionate and truly transform our lives. Seeing Jesus clearly should never lead to indifference and should fill our lives with purpose, hope, and excitement! As we seek to know Jesus more, we experience more of His power and beauty, and it just makes us want more of Him. How would your life look different if you engaged with Jesus every day?

As each of us commit to personally seek a clearer vision of Jesus, we want to experience the joy found in seeking Him together. The writer of Hebrews encourages us to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another...” (Hebrews 10:24-25a). How would the church look different if everyone was on the same journey, with the same mission, reading the same Scriptures, and talking about Jesus together? How different would families look if they had a clear and unified vision of God? How different would our community and the world look if we all truly committed to living our lives together for the sake of the gospel?

This is the vision we hope to accomplish this year. That we would commit to seeking Christ individually and collectively, having a unified vision of knowing and expressing the person of Jesus to Northwest Arkansas and the world.

As we begin this journey and enter a new decade together, may the words of this powerful hymn help inspire us to see Jesus with greater clarity.

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Not be all else to me, save that Thou art—
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son,
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

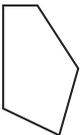
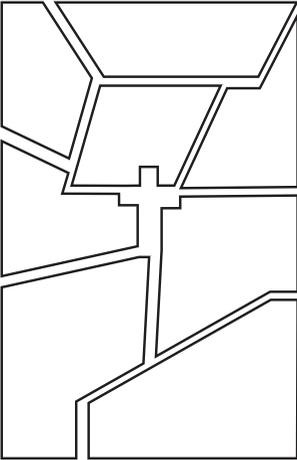
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, be first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

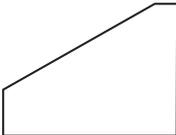
—“Be Thou My Vision,”
translated by Eleanor Hull

DESIGN

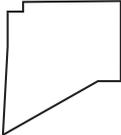
The design concept for Clarity is inspired by stained glass windows. Pulling elements and colors from each section, the artwork shows that only through light can you find the clarity of the image.



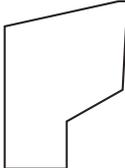
ADVENT



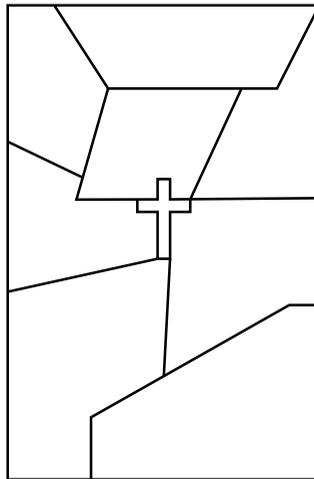
EPIPHANY



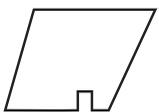
LENT



EASTER



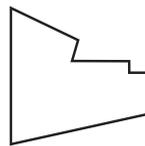
The font chosen is Proxima Nova, which plays with the line structure of the artwork within the letterforms. The goal is to show an old form of art such as the stained glass while representing a modern letter form.



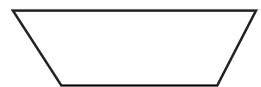
PENTECOST



CHURCH



THEOLOGY



GOSPEL

ABOUT

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is divided into several sections with weekly, daily, and seasonal ways to engage. Daily, there is a scripture reading plan. Weekly, you'll find a written devotional, reflection questions, a discussion question, and a prayer. Seasonally, there are section introductions providing historical context for each season as well as ideas for family discipleship.

Our hope is that this book will help us see Jesus clearly together as we pursue a consistent and deep connection with God and others in the church. Use this book in your personal time with Jesus, and bring it with you to weekly worship services. Take notes in the book! Refer to this book and your notes during community group. Walk through Clarity in a discipleship or mentor relationship. Process what you learn with your family, friends, and greater community.

DAILY READING

Throughout the year, there is a reading plan with passages for each day. Most days will have a passage from the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs, with the exception of Sundays, which will have a single passage along with a written devotional. At the end of the year, you'll have read all of Psalms, Proverbs, and most of the New Testament! These passages will track alongside the teachings from the worship services and be tied to the content from this book. Join us this year in committing to daily scripture reading alongside our entire church family.

DEVOTIONAL

Each week there is a written devotional thought based on that Sunday's passage from the reading plan. The verses used will be tied to the teachings in the worship services that weekend.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Spend time reflecting on Jesus, what He may be trying to teach you, and how you can apply His Word to your life. Clear away distractions and interact with God's Word deeply and honestly.

Challenge yourself to engage with things that are difficult. Use these questions as a guide to help you process God's Truth in your life. Be specific in your answers, and try to take action based upon what you are learning each week. You are encouraged to write in this book; this can help you feel accountable and gives you the ability to look back on what you have been processing.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

We encourage you to share what you are learning about Jesus with other people. This allows others to learn about Jesus and you to hear what other people are thinking.

The discussion questions are intended to be conversation starters that can lead to deeper, spiritual conversations. They are intentionally written so they can be answered by someone who follows Jesus or someone who does not. Ask these questions to people around you each week, and practice the art of truly listening. Try to develop the skill of having spiritual conversations, especially with people who don't know Jesus! Don't let the discussion remain at the surface level. Listen for open doors to share what you are learning and point people to Jesus!

These questions can also foster spiritual conversations within the church. Ask these questions as you encounter other people from church at a worship service, community group, or where you go throughout your day. You should also be ready for someone to ask you.

PRAYER

God is powerful, personal, caring, good, and sovereign over all things. He hears our prayers and wants us to talk to Him. We want to be unified in seeking God's will and God's heart in our lives and the world. Commit to praying with us this year. Pray through these weekly prayers, but also use them as prompts to pray as the Holy Spirit leads you. We believe that when we all actively pursue the Lord together, we will see Him work in ways we never could have expected or accomplished on our own.

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

One of the most difficult tasks in life for many people is the simple art of maintaining focus on the most important things. Life is filled with demands, pressures, distractions, crises, and victories. Keeping “the main thing the main thing” can be a real and daily battle, regardless of our backgrounds or convictions.

The same is true for those who follow Jesus; He is worthy of our highest allegiance, devotion, and love. Yet, in our fast-paced world, many experience constant distractions and shifting priorities. Amid the busyness of everyday life, consumerism, materialism, anxiety, idolatry... other things can take priority over Jesus. It dulls the ability to view Jesus with clarity. While we may profess the truths of the gospel and desire to live in light of those truths, we too often find ourselves living for and chasing after countless other things.

Over this next year, we want to refresh our hearts, minds, and lives with a true and proper vision of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our goal is to intentionally seek a clear picture of His grace expressed powerfully and beautifully through the gospel. The Church Calendar, also called the Liturgical Year, provides a means for this focus. It has guided the worship of many believers over the centuries and continues to do so today. This calendar helps us lift our gaze from daily routines, often overwhelmingly influenced by culture, and sets a clear path to experiencing Jesus in every season.

We invite you to join us in participating in the ancient Church Calendar—Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time—to expand and mature your view of Jesus through Scripture study, guided prayer, family devotionals, small group opportunities, and weekend worship gatherings.

THE SEASONS OVERVIEW

ADVENT

Advent means “coming” and is a season to remember and celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ. It is a time to reflect on the story of Jesus’ birth and His incarnation into the world. For Christians in particular, it is a time to remember that Jesus will come again to establish His eternal kingdom, where unending peace with God is promised to all who have placed their faith in Christ. It begins with a period of waiting and longing in hope. Advent candles are lit to signify that the hope of the Church is built on the coming light of Jesus. This season ends on Christmas Day with the lighting of the Christ candle.

EPIPHANY

Epiphany means “shine upon” and is a time to reflect on the divine way in which Jesus Christ made Himself known throughout His earthly life and ministry. Being fully God and fully man, the glory of God was on full display in and through the person of Jesus Christ—His birth, baptism, miracles, and transformational teachings. Epiphany is a time of renewal and recommitment to the person of Jesus, as the glory of God the Father is revealed to humanity in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ.

LENT

Lent means “spring” and is a 40-day season remembering the temptation and death of Jesus Christ. It is marked in the Christian calendar as a time of fasting and prayer and ends with Holy Week. It is inspired by the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert overcoming temptation from Satan through the powerful Word of God. A time of self-examination and repentance, many believers choose to observe Lent by denying themselves specific pleasures during the season as a personal sign of submission, honor, and devotion to Jesus.

EASTER

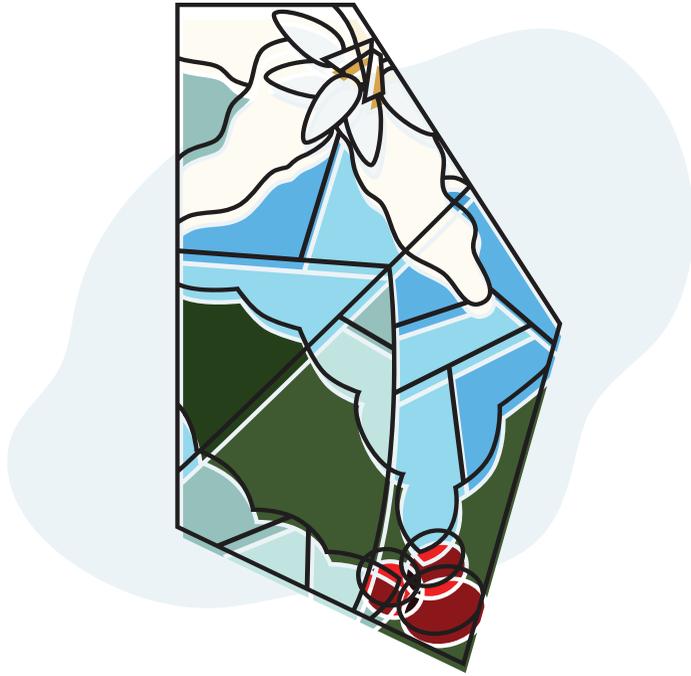
Easter is the principal celebration of the church year both as a day and a season. For the believer, it is undeniably about the resurrection of Jesus. It has been called the Christian Passover, and it celebrates the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. This is a season of joy as sin, Satan, and death have been conquered through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. We can celebrate that His victory is shared by every believer that places their hope in Him and His resurrecting power.

PENTECOST

Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth,” is a season focusing on the work of the Holy Spirit within God’s people, the Church. The day of Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Easter and commemorates the coming of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church. It is a season of unity and prayer, as well as a time to tell the story of the gospel through the power of the Spirit.

ORDINARY TIME

This season stretches from Pentecost Sunday to the start of Advent. It is a time for the Church to reflect on the teachings of the Scriptures, pray, worship together, join in community, and share the goodness and grace of Jesus with a watching world.



A D V E N T

INTRODUCTION

The season of Advent starts four weeks before Christmas and continues through Christmas Day. It is the first and perhaps most familiar of the Christian Calendar seasons. Over the years, people have celebrated Advent in many nostalgic ways, from pulling small, nightly chocolates from tiny doors, to singing festive hymns, to lighting candles that remind us of Emmanuel. Although familiar, it may be the season most easily influenced or even corrupted by our secular culture. In the busyness of Christmas shopping, parties, travel to visit family and friends, and breaks from school, the observance of Advent can often feel like just another “thing” within a frantic Christmas tradition. This is precisely why the Christian Calendar was created—to define seasons in the year to reflect on the power, wonder, goodness, and grace of God. By focusing on these things, we are more prepared to live out authentic expressions of Christ’s love within the frantic culture.

The word *Advent* is derived from the Latin word meaning “coming” or “arrival.” Before the first Christmas, when Jesus was born, the Israelites were looking forward to the promised Messiah. They waited for the coming arrival of a Savior who would set them free. They were trapped under foreign and hostile rulers, fearful of the darkness and distress that surrounded them in the waiting.

During Advent, we too remember our need for the King who sets us free from the hostile darkness surrounding us. Like the Israelites, we live in a world full of sin, darkness, and fear; we need God to save us. The story of Advent is that the Redeemer has come! Jesus has brought freedom and forgiveness to all who believe! The Light has crushed the darkness!

ENTER THE STORY

As we enter this story, we look afresh at the season and reclaim it for its intended purpose. We look past all the holiday buzz, busyness, and materialism. We reclaim this season to celebrate the Good News unleashed on this earth and in our lives. Indeed, a people wandering in darkness have seen a great light, and our Emmanuel (God with us) has come!

We invite you and your family to join us this Advent season as we remember the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. It is a time marked by gratitude, praise, and hope; may we be marked by the hope we have in Christ! When we speak of Christmas, may our faces light up! May our excitement for gifts under the tree and breaks from work or school be overshadowed by our passion to celebrate Jesus. May this be a season for you and your family to focus on the story of the Bible—light has conquered darkness and hope has conquered fear!

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

The origin of the season of Advent can be dated within Christianity to the sixth century AD. This likely makes it the last season of the Christian calendar to be developed. Originally, Advent centered on a 40-day period of preparation for Christ's coming and was eventually shortened to the four Sundays prior to Christmas.

One common form of celebration is through an Advent Calendar, incorporating individual "windows" that share the story of Jesus. Another common celebration is through the successive lighting of five candles symbolizing the truth that Jesus is the Light of the World who brings hope, peace, joy, and love. Each of the first four candles is lit on one of the Sundays leading up to Christmas; the final candle, the Christ candle, is lit on Christmas morning. Traditionally, in many churches, the Christ candle remains lit until Good Friday, when the Light of the World had His life snuffed out on the cross. It is a great resource for adults and children alike to remember that Jesus has come and is coming again.

POSTURES & SYMBOLS

Prayerful Posture: expectant, hopeful, celebratory, grateful

Colors: blue, gold, white

Symbols: wreaths, candles, trees

Flowers and Greenery: red and white poinsettias, evergreens, holly

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

John 3:16 — “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

DECOR

As you prepare your hearts for the birth of Jesus, consider how you can decorate your home to help your family focus on His birth. Which decorations direct your family to Jesus and which decorations distract you from Him? What decorations can you include that lead your hearts and minds to Jesus’ birth?

Nativity sets are an excellent way to help your family remember the story of His birth. Consider using elements of the nativity scene separately, such as sheep, stars, or angels.

You could also build anticipation for Christmas Day by moving from darkness to light through the season; simply add lights to the tree or around the house as Christmas Day approaches. Many families choose to celebrate this season with an Advent wreath. You can make a wreath with your children out of real or plastic evergreen branches. Then place five candle holders in the center of the wreath. Traditionally, three of the candles are purple, one is pink, and one is white. During the first week of Advent, light one of the purple candles to celebrate the hope we have in Christ. The following week, light another one of the purple candles to remember the peace with God that Jesus made possible for us through the gift of His life. The third week, light the pink candle of joy to celebrate how happy we are that Jesus came into our lives. On the fourth week, before Christmas Day, light the final purple candle to remember God’s incredible love for us. Light the white Christ candle on Christmas Day to remind your family that Christmas is all about Christ!

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, Your Son, Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us, a great sign of Your love. Guide us as we walk in that love together as a family this Advent. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, bring us closer to each other and to Your Son, Jesus. Give us the grace and strength we need every day. Help us to always trust in You. Come, Lord Jesus; lead all people closer to You. Come and remove the darkness of our world with the light of Your love. Amen.

PRACTICE — WORSHIP

Christmas Eve Worship. Plan on attending one of the Christmas Eve worship services together as a family. As you go, remind everyone who you are worshiping. After the service, ask each of your kids their thoughts on the experience. Ask them if they have any questions.

Hints and Clues. God gave His people many hints and clues about the birth of Jesus throughout the Old Testament. God was helping His people wait for their Savior. Take the opportunity to provide your family hints and clues about the ways you'll be celebrating Christmas: visits with family, gifts, traditions, activities, etc. Help each member experience the anticipation that comes from waiting. After you have participated in those activities, be sure and remind your children of how God fulfilled each of His prophecies in Jesus!

Secret Gift. Pick a student in your child's class at school to purchase a gift for. Work as a family to pick out something that will bless this student. Ask the teacher to deliver the gift without anyone knowing who gave it. Encourage each person in your family to contribute to the gift in some way.

Color the Names. Have everyone pick one of the names from Isaiah 9:6 (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace) and draw a picture that represents that name on a piece of paper; use craft supplies to color and decorate it. Encourage each child to be as creative as they can in decorating their picture. Display the finished pictures where you will see them each day. Use them as a reminder of who Jesus is.

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

Family Puzzle. Work on a Christmas puzzle and keep it on display in your home throughout the holiday season. When you finish the puzzle, write everyone's names and ages on the outside of the box to remember the year.

Journey to the Stable. Take the Mary, Joseph, and donkey figures from your nativity set and place them as far away from the stable as possible, while still keeping them inside your home. Each day, have one of the kids move them one step closer to the stable as you read the Advent verse for the day. On Christmas Eve, place the pieces in the stable, and read the story of Jesus' birth.

Christmas Movie Snuggle. Make a snack for everyone. Pick a Christmas movie for your family to watch together. Have everyone get in their pajamas, snuggle up, and watch it together.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

Advent Table Cards | Kids Read Truth | shopshereadstruth.com

Jotham's Journey: A Storybook for Advent by Arnold Ytreide

Prepare Him Room: Celebrating the Birth of Jesus Family Devotional by Marty Machowski

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Isaiah 53
Monday	Genesis 3:15; Psalm 1
Tuesday	Isaiah 7:14; Psalm 2
Wednesday	Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38; Psalm 3
Thursday	Matthew 1:18-25; Psalm 4
Friday	Luke 1:1-10; Psalm 5:1-4
Saturday	Luke 1:11-25; Psalm 5:5-12

Refer to page 8 to learn how to use this book.

DEVOTIONAL: READ ISAIAH 53

We want to see Jesus clearly. This year we want to live as one, unified church, seeking to see Jesus together with new clarity. As we begin this journey together through the season of Advent, may we look forward to Christmas expectantly, awaiting the celebration of Jesus' arrival on earth.

Several hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah saw Jesus clearly. The Savior he described was not one that the nation of Israel was expecting. Rather than a hero-warrior, Isaiah spoke of a suffering servant who would bear the sins of the world. He described the Savior by saying He was "despised and rejected by mankind," "crushed for our iniquities," and "bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Jesus was the most unexpected of heroes. He was the long-awaited Messiah that God spoke of as early as Genesis 3—a child from

the woman's lineage who would crush the evil serpent, though He, Himself, would be wounded.

Just as Isaiah looked forward to Christ's coming, we are able to look back on His arrival. He came and lived a sinless life so that He could be the perfect sacrifice, paying for our sin and suffering on our behalf. He was crucified, dead, and buried, but rose back to life three days later. He still lives today and promises the same eternal life to those who put their hope and trust in Him.

As we commit to seeking Jesus together this year, may we continue to see Him with more clarity. Let us see Him as the Savior described in the Bible, who came to be a sacrifice in our place and forgive us of our sins. May we see and know the true Christ and respond to Him in worship. This Advent season, let us celebrate together that Jesus has come!

REFLECTION

Have you fully acknowledged who Jesus is? Describe Jesus in your own words.

How are you working to see Jesus more clearly right now? How can you commit to engaging in the Clarity series over this next year? Make a specific plan and put it into practice this week.

How can you connect more intentionally with the church this year? Are you committed to worshiping God regularly with other believers? Make a plan and commit to discussing it with your family and friends.

DISCUSSION

What are you most looking forward to right now?

PRAYER

God, thank You that You are personal and knowable. Help me to see You for who You truly are. Reveal Yourself to me daily through Your scripture, Your church, Your creation, and Your work in my life. Help me to see You clearly, understand Your character, and know You personally. Show me what You have done for me, and move in me that I may respond in obedience, thankfulness, and joy!

Thank You for Your sacrificial love. Without Your sacrifice for my sins, I would have no hope and no life. Thank You for making a way for me to be with You. Help me to see Jesus clearly that I may express sacrificial love through my life.

Lord, help me to commit to You. Give me a passion for Your Word. I know You are committed to me and want to spend time specifically with me every day. Give me the vision and discipline to spend time daily with You.

Lord, bless Your church! Move through every believer and make us more like You. Help me to be committed to Your people and my community. Move me to love them as You love them. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	2 Samuel 7:12-13
Monday	Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Psalm 6
Tuesday	Micah 5:2-4; Psalm 7:1-7
Wednesday	Luke 1:26-33; Psalm 7:8-17
Thursday	Luke 1:34-38; Psalm 8:1-3
Friday	Luke 1:39-45; Psalm 8:4-9
Saturday	Luke 1:46-56; Psalm 9:1-7

DEVOTIONAL: READ 2 SAMUEL 7:12-13

Ancient Israel longed for a good king who would establish God's kingdom and reign on earth forever. They wanted a righteous king who would lead them in the ways of the Lord, and lead them to prosperity and victory. They waited for their perfect king to rule in a way that no man seemed able. The nation of Israel experienced a rocky start with King Saul, the glory days of King David's rule, and the even more glorious rule of King Solomon. However, this was followed immediately by civil war. The nation split in two under mostly evil rulers. They were taken captive and led into exile by Assyria and Babylon. After returning from exile, Israel was taken over and occupied by the forces of Rome. It seemed like Israel was destined to be ruled by evil men and pagan kings.

Yet, they trusted that God would fulfill His promise that one of David's descendants would reign over an everlasting kingdom. Though it seemed

like the family tree of David had been chopped down, a branch would emerge from the stump revealing a king from the line of David who would rule an everlasting kingdom across all the nations of the world. A King would come, ruling with perfect wisdom, justice, and generosity.

In our world, it seems that we are still looking for that good and perfect king. Looking for a leader we can trust, who won't fail, who will rule rightly where the best of humanity has fallen short.

Jesus is that perfect and promised King! We are able to trust in the promises that God has made through David because He is already fulfilling them in Jesus. We don't need to wait for a King, but are able to look to Jesus, who is establishing His rule in the hearts of all people. We have a King who we can follow, expectantly anticipating the fullness of His eternal kingdom!

REFLECTION

Who or what rules your life? How have you seen that person or thing let you down?

In what ways is Jesus the good, true, and perfect King?

How do you see Jesus establishing His kingdom today? Is He King of your life? How are you able to take part in His kingdom and live under His perfect rule?

DISCUSSION

What is the most meaningful part of the Christmas season for you?

PRAYER

Jesus, You are my King. You are the King the world has waited for. You are the King each of us is seeking, whether we acknowledge it or not. You created us to know and experience hope, peace, joy, and love as we submit to Your kindly rule.

Forgive me for the times I try to sit on Your throne. Only You are worthy to rule. Forgive me for trying to place other things in Your seat. Only You are worthy of my worship. Help me to willingly submit to Your Kingship in my life, this day and every day.

You are my King. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Leviticus 16:34
Monday	Luke 1:57-66; Psalm 9:8-20
Tuesday	Luke 1:67-80; Psalm 10:1-8
Wednesday	Luke 2:1-5; Psalm 10:9-18
Thursday	Luke 2:6-7; Psalm 11
Friday	Luke 2:8-14; Psalm 12
Saturday	Luke 2:15-18; Psalm 13

DEVOTIONAL: READ LEVITICUS 16:34

On Christmas Day, we celebrate the coming of Christ through His birth in a stable. In ancient Israel, they had holiday celebrations as well. Just as we might consider Christmas and Easter to be our holiest days, Israel's holiest day was the tenth day of the seventh month, known as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On this day the high priest would cleanse himself and the temple before offering sacrifices for sin on behalf of the nation.

In the word atonement, you can see the roots "at one." Atonement means the reconciliation of two parties who are at odds with one another. The Day of Atonement restored the relationship between Israel and God. The blood that was shed by the atoning sacrifice demonstrated how seriously God takes sin. Without the shedding of blood, there could be no forgiveness of sins. Sin leads to death, and every year Israel would be reminded that

they needed a priest, or a mediator, to stand between them and God in order for their relationship with God to be restored.

In the New Testament, we see that this sacrificial system was pointing ahead to the ultimate sacrifice that would be made once and for all by Jesus. Hebrews 9:11-14 tells us that it was not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood that Jesus secured eternal redemption for us. While the Day of Atonement sacrifice had to be performed annually, Christ's sacrifice was once and for all! During Advent, we celebrate that Jesus came both as our priest who stands between us and God, and as the sacrifice necessary to atone for our sins. Through Jesus, we, a sinful people, can be "at one" with our Holy God. Let us praise God and live as people who have been reconciled to Him!

REFLECTION

How do you feel when you picture the sacrifices of the Old Testament in your mind?
What does that picture tell you about your sin?

What does it mean for you personally that Jesus atoned for your sins on the cross?
How do you think we should respond to such a sacrifice made on our behalf?

This year, who could you invite to join you for the first time at a Christmas Eve service or to celebrate in another way with you or your family?

DISCUSSION

How will you and your family celebrate Christmas?

PRAYER

O Christ, our High Priest, thank You for Your atonement for my sin. Your sacrifice has made a way for me to know You. Thank You for this gracious gift.

Father, I know that I have sinned against You. Help me to recognize sin for what it really is. My sin is ugly, it comes between us, and only leads to death. Through Jesus who took on my sin and died the death that I should have died, my past and future sins are forgiven! Our relationship is reconciled and I can call You my Father, Savior, Lord, and Friend.

May I rest in Your finished work. There is nothing more that I can do to earn Your love! May I practice being in Your presence. May I pursue You in my daily life just as You pursued me while on the cross. May I worship and never forget that You alone are my joy; You are Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Isaiah 60:1-3
Monday	Luke 2:19; Psalm 14
Tuesday	Luke 2:20-21; Psalm 15
Wednesday	Luke 2:22-40; Psalm 16
Thursday	Matthew 2:1-12; Psalm 17:1-6
Friday	Matthew 2:13-23; Psalm 17:7-15
Saturday	Luke 2:41-52; Psalm 18:1-5

DEVOTIONAL: READ ISAIAH 60:1-3

The dictionary defines “advent” as the arrival of someone or something noteworthy. We might speak of the advent of the printing press. It was an invention that seemed to change everything. The advent of Christ, His birth in a stable, would change everything forever.

Before Jesus and throughout the Old Testament, we see the Bible revealing the concept of God’s glory. His glory reveals His supreme significance. Prior to the arrival of Jesus, mankind could not fully approach or perceive the glory of God; that glory was hidden from humanity because of the inability created by sin. However, when Jesus came as God in the flesh He brought the glory of God face-to-face with a limited and lost people.

Isaiah 60:1-3 frames the glory of God in the coming of His Messiah being like the sun rising to bring light to the earth. “Arise, shine, for your light has come,”

writes Isaiah (60:1). He is answering the question posed by King David in Psalm 24:10 some 300 years earlier: “Who is this King of glory?” (Psalm 24:10). David’s answer, “The Lord of hosts,” points to God in heaven in all of His glory.

Seven hundred years after Isaiah wrote those words, the Apostle John tells us that Jesus brought God’s glory to the earth. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The weight of God’s glory, long expected, long predicted, had come in the person of Jesus Christ! It was the advent of the glory of God on earth, and nothing would ever be the same. Let the light of God’s glory in the person of Jesus Christ shine upon your life and cast out darkness, forever changing you as Jesus has forever changed everything!

REFLECTION

Where do you see God's glory today? How do you recognize the glory of God when you see it?

Has the coming of God's glory in the person of Jesus changed your life? How has your life changed, and how do you see it continuing to change?

What are some things that compete with God for glory? How can we keep Christ at the center of our Christmas celebration and not allow our focus to go to anyone or anything else?

DISCUSSION

What is something in your life that changed everything?

PRAYER

God of all Glory, Your Name is above all names. At Your Name, every knee will bow and tongue confess that You alone are God. You have no equal. Nothing in all creation compares to the greatness and goodness of You, our Creator.

Father of Lights, we live in a dark world, and it is often difficult to see Your glory on display in our day-to-day lives. But Jesus, You declared that You are the Light of the World and that those who trust You would not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Don't let me live in darkness! Help me to live daily by the light that You bring and let others see Your light in me.

O God, help me to see You and know You, to behold Your glory, taste Your goodness. Please, show me Your glory! May Your will be done in my life as it is in heaven. Let me live for You today as I long for You to come again in Your glory! Amen.



E P I P H A N Y

INTRODUCTION

Epiphany is the second season of the traditional Christian calendar. After the anticipation of Jesus' arrival during Advent and the celebration of His birth on Christmas Day, the focus shifts to the way Jesus made Himself known here on earth. Throughout the gospel accounts of His ministry, the person of Jesus is revealed more and more.

The word *epiphany*, from the Greek *epiphaneia*, means "manifestation" or "appearance." A verb form of the word translates "to shine upon" or "to give light to." This season is about the light of Jesus being revealed to the world throughout His earthly ministry. However, Epiphany initially centered on three key events within Jesus' life when humanity received profound enlightenment as to His identity and mission. The first involves the Magi, or wise men, "from the east," whose knowledge of prophecy and astronomy led them on an epic journey (Matthew 2:1-12) culminating in a face-to-face encounter with the Son of the Living God. Through the Magi's invitation to experience the Christmas story, both Jews and non-Jews alike experienced the Light of the World. The second event celebrated during Epiphany is Jesus' baptism, when Jesus is declared to be the divine Son of God and the one true Messiah. The last event is the miracle of the wedding feast at Cana. This celebration foreshadows the joyous and long-anticipated Wedding Feast of God with His people, initiated through the coming of His Son into the world. These three stories were merged together in the ancient Latin song:

*Today the heavenly Bridegroom weds his Church,
Since Christ has washed away her sins in the Jordan;
The wise men hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding,
And the guests are made glad by the water turned to wine.*

As John's Gospel instructs, if you want to see the nature and character of God, look to the Son (John 1:18)!

ENTER THE STORY

We would like to invite you to join us in sharing in this beautiful season of Epiphany by taking a deeper look into the story of Jesus. Our hope is to get a clearer picture of who He is, how He lived among us, and His passion to bring salvation to the world. Even with a twenty-first-century perspective, it is staggering to consider how the impact of Jesus' life, lived out over 2,000 years ago on the other side of the world, continues to intersect and transform people's lives! May we see Jesus clearly and know Him personally in our lives today!

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

Epiphany originally served as a celebration of what we now know as Christmas, predating the development of Advent in the sixth century. Epiphany likely originated as a replacement for the pagan winter festival in Egypt as Christianity began to spread in that region. As Rome embraced Christianity as the official state religion under the rule of Constantine in the fourth century, December 25 was decided upon as the accepted traditional date of Jesus' birth. Following the twelve days of Christmas (December 25 - January 6), the Epiphany season began with a feast and celebration. For centuries, January 6 was one of the three most important feast days for Christians all over the world, the other two being Easter and Pentecost. The church would then reflect on and celebrate the life of Jesus, particularly His early ministry, until the season of Lent, beginning 40 days before Easter.

For many, Epiphany highlights that Gentiles—non-Jewish people—have also been brought into the beautiful story of redemption through Israel's Messiah. This is evident in the use of the crowns and star from the Magi's story to designate this season in the Christian Calendar.

POSTURES & SYMBOLS

Prayerful Posture: joyful, celebratory, festive, confident

Colors: gold, white, green

Symbols: star, crowns, candles

Flowers and Greenery: white poinsettias, evergreens, philodendron

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

John 8:12—"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

DECORATIONS

We have celebrated the coming of the Light into the world, and now we remember how Jesus, who is fully God, lived among us. As you put away the Advent and Christmas decorations and return to "normal" life, think of how you can remind yourself and your family of Jesus' life on earth.

One option is to make a poster with "Jesus" written in block letters and hang it in your home. As you hear a story or a phrase that reminds you that Jesus is God, write it on the poster.

You can decorate your home with the phrase "May Christ Bless This House." You can create a wreath or buy a wooden sign, and hang it on your front door, or write the phrase in chalk on your door frame. Also, encourage members of your family to draw and color the phrase on sheets of paper and hang them on your refrigerator. As you remember Jesus' life, use these decorations as a reminder that Jesus is not only welcome in your home but is also invited to use your home to share His love with others.

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

Lord God of Heaven and Earth, You revealed Your one and only Son to the Earth by the light of a star. Bless our home and all who enter here. May our home be a shelter of peace and health. Make our home a place of warmth and caring for all who visit us this year. Fill us with the light of Christ, that we may see You in our work and play. May the light of Christ shine through each member of our family this year. Amen.

PRACTICE — REFLECTION

More or Less. The beginning of the year is a good time to think back and evaluate the past year’s habits. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. Write “more” on one side and “less” on the other. Think together about the things that distract you from Jesus and write them in the less column. Then think about those things you need to do to help you love Jesus more and write them in the “more” column.

Listen in Silence. Sometimes, God speaks in silence. How often do you actually experience silence? Find a time your family can be still and quiet for ten minutes. Help each person find a place to be alone. Take time to sit and listen to what God wants to tell you. Begin with the question, “God, what do You want to tell me today?” After the ten minutes, come back together and share about your time listening to God.

Remember the Stories. One of the things that builds community and identity within a family is the stories that we tell. As you tell and retell family stories, your kids experience a deeper level of identification with your family. At dinner one night, begin telling family stories from last year. What were some of the funny things that happened to your family? What were some of the difficult things that happened? What did you see God do in your family last year?

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

New Year’s Eve. Celebrate the beginning of the new year with other families. Have a New Year’s Eve party at your house. Don’t feel like you have to stay up until midnight. Start a tradition of picking another place in the world in a different time zone and counting down the New Year with them.

Mini-Road Trip. Getting away from our normal locations and routines can foster increased connection. When you travel outside of your usual space, you can develop new memories together. Pick a place one and a half hours away from your house. Drive there and eat at a restaurant or visit a fun park. On the drive there, play fun car games together. Take turns coming up with “Would You Rather?” scenarios, play the Alphabet Game, or download and print Car Bingo sheets for everyone in your family.

What I Love About You. God’s Word tells us that “gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24). To become a family who encourages one another, you must begin to practice encouragement. At dinner have everyone take turns finishing the sentence, “One of the things I love about you is...” Make sure each person says one thing about every member of the family.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

Long Story Short: 10-Minute Devotions to Draw Your Family to God by Marty Machowski

Old Story New: New Testament by Marty Machowski

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 3:1-22
Monday	Matthew 3:1-17; Psalm 18:6-14; Proverbs 1:1-3
Tuesday	Matthew 4:1-25; Psalm 18:15-22; Proverbs 1:4-7
Wednesday	Matthew 5:1-26; Psalm 18:23-30; Proverbs 1:8-9
Thursday	Matthew 5:27-48; Psalm 18:31-41; Proverbs 1:10-12
Friday	Matthew 6:1-34; Psalm 18:42-50; Proverbs 1:13-15
Saturday	Matthew 7:1-29; Psalm 19; Proverbs 1:16-19

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 3:1-22

The season of Epiphany marks the time after Advent and Christmas in the ancient Christian calendar. It is associated with appearances of the divine and moments of deep insight. We might even say from time to time that we have had an epiphany when a sudden, helpful thought hits us and we experience clarity, a new perspective on our direction in life.

What a sight John the Baptist must have been! He cried out in the wilderness for repentance—that people would turn from dead religion and sinful ways. He would baptize those who repented as a symbol of the cleansing of sins. As people responded to John's call for repentance, deep questions probably formed in their hearts: Who can really right the wrongs? What can wash away the sins of the soul? Who can cleanse deep within the heart in the

way baptism symbolizes? John knew that his work was to point them to the One who could satisfy their deepest questions and forgive all their sins.

When John baptized Jesus, he identified Jesus as the only one who can fully cleanse the world and forgive sins! As we have looked forward to Christ's coming during Advent, we witness His arrival and ministry during Epiphany. He is the ultimate epiphany! He is the full appearance of the Divine bringing clarity into our world. Jesus is without sin and without the need of repentance. Christ's baptism is a mission statement of His redeeming work—all of which He shares with us if we will believe in Him and follow His footsteps. May we continue to see Christ clearly and have an epiphany of who He is and what He has done for us!

REFLECTION

Where do you see the purpose and influence of John's ministry in this passage? How does this encourage or challenge you?

How is the baptism of Jesus unique? How does it affirm that Jesus is the Messiah for whom John was preparing the way?

In what areas of your life do you need to repent from sin, turning toward Jesus? How can you call others to repentance and point people to Jesus?

DISCUSSION

Do you feel loved by God?

PRAYER

O God, You stepped down from heaven and made Yourself a man. You identify Yourself with me, yet remain holy. What a beautiful mystery. Your eternal presence with us was made undeniably evident in Your incarnation—"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

Lord, give Your people the strength to be obedient. Help me to repent from my sin. Let me turn from my selfish desires and run the other way, knowing that I am running toward You. Jesus, in humility, You obediently surrendered to the will of Your Father. Help me to become more like You.

Father, John the Baptist proclaimed that Jesus, Your only Son, was stepping into the world to save it from itself. Help me to also proclaim the greatness of Your Son in my life! Use me to prepare a way for others to know You.

Thank You, Jesus, for identifying with me. Thank You, Father, for the invitation to become a part of Your family. Holy Spirit, teach me to identify more and more with who I am in Christ. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 4:1-15
Monday	Matthew 8:1-34; Psalm 20; Proverbs 1:20-22
Tuesday	Matthew 9:1-26; Psalm 21:1-5; Proverbs 1:23-25
Wednesday	Matthew 9:27-10:15; Psalm 21:6-13; Proverbs 1:26-28
Thursday	Matthew 10:16-42; Psalm 22:1-5; Proverbs 1:29-31
Friday	Matthew 11:1-30; Psalm 22:6-13; Proverbs 1:32-33
Saturday	Matthew 12:1-32; Psalm 22:14-20; Proverbs 2:1-5

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 4:1-15

Jesus is victorious over sin and death! In taking the form of a man, Jesus experienced temptation beyond what any other man would have given in to and yet remained sinless. Only without sin could He be the perfect, atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Through His perfect life, death, and resurrection, He has defeated sin and death on our behalf.

Meeting Jesus as Savior enables us to follow His example. This is vitally important to realize and embrace. Otherwise, we can miss that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We are not saved by attempting to follow His example, but by Jesus Himself living the sinless life that we could never live. Christ's

victory over sin is not just an example for us to follow, but a necessity for our forgiveness.

Yet, when we believe in Jesus and the work He has done on our behalf, we are able to take part in His victory over sin! Not only does He forgive us, but through the Holy Spirit, He empowers us in our daily battles with sin. The only way we can practically defeat sin in our lives is to first believe that sin has been defeated by Jesus and learn to carry His victory with confidence as we go from battleground to battleground.

Where all have fallen, Christ alone stands victorious! Christ withstood the test of temptation, so He understands and is able to help us in our time of need.

REFLECTION

What do you admire about Jesus in this passage? What do you notice about how He engages the enemy in this spiritual battle?

Why does it matter that Jesus was without sin? How does trusting in Him as your Savior enable you to follow Him as your example?

How does Christ's victory over sin not only grant you forgiveness beyond death, but also give you victory over sin in your daily life? How can you live trusting in Christ's victory over sin?

DISCUSSION

Do you see Jesus as an example to follow? Why or why not?

PRAYER

Gracious and Almighty God, You are all-knowing, all-powerful, and abounding in steadfast love. Lord, lead me out of temptation and into Your lovingkindness. Holy Spirit, cleanse my mind, body, and soul, and lead me in the footsteps of Christ. Jesus, lead me in Your victory over sin and create in me a heart that desires to seek, know, love, worship, and follow You, even as sin continues to entice.

Forgive me of my sins as only You can. Lead me to have a greater faith in You, trusting that Your work on the cross is enough to atone for my sins and trusting that Your way is always better than mine.

Jesus, I pray according to Your mercy and faithfulness that You would create in me a deep desire for Your kingdom and, by the power of Your Spirit, allow me to live, both in private and public, a life that is pleasing and precious in Your eyes.

Father, create in me the desire to cling to what is true when sin seeks to lead me away from You. You alone will I worship, and You alone I will serve. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 4:16-30
Monday	Luke 4:31-44; Psalm 22:21-31; Proverbs 2:6-8
Tuesday	Matthew 12:33-13:9; Psalm 23; Proverbs 2:9-11
Wednesday	Matthew 13:10-33; Psalm 24:1-3; Proverbs 2:12-14
Thursday	Matthew 13:34-58; Psalm 24:4-10; Proverbs 2:15-18
Friday	Matthew 14:1-36; Psalm 25:1-9; Proverbs 2:19-22
Saturday	Luke 5:1-16; Psalm 25:10-22; Proverbs 3:1-3

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 4:16-30

Jesus was becoming a popular teacher in the synagogues of Galilee. When He came home to Nazareth, it made sense for them to ask Him to teach in their synagogue on the Sabbath. At first, things went well. Jesus read a passage from the scroll of Isaiah 61 that most Jews would have recognized as speaking of the Messiah. When He was done reading, Jesus sat down and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). At first, those who heard Him were pleased and spoke well of Jesus.

Then Jesus turned a corner in His teaching. He began telling Old Testament stories that emphasized God showing grace to Gentiles as well as the Israelites. His purpose—to reveal the darkness in the hearts of His audience. They were excited to receive the promises of blessing, but none of them wanted to hear the truth about the

darkness in their own hearts. Suddenly, they were all outside of town on a cliff ready to throw Jesus over. His "gracious words" had become offensive to them; and just as He predicted, they turned on Him and rejected Him. Miraculously, Jesus escaped.

Often, our tendency is to be like the people of Nazareth. When we hear a message of God's goodness and blessing, we are quick to embrace it. But when the Bible is challenging us or speaks about our sinfulness, we look for ways to discount it, or we reject it outright. When we reject the difficult parts of scripture, we are rejecting Jesus. The good news of the gospel is not that Jesus came to make good people better, but that He came to make sinners righteous. We can't experience the fullness of God's grace unless we are willing to accept the truth of our sin.

REFLECTION

Do you find it hard to personally accept all parts of Jesus' teaching? Why? What are some examples?

How does seeing the fullness of your sin cause you to have a greater view of God's grace?

What are the biggest internal obstacles that hinder you from applying scripture to your daily life? How might you overcome those? Where can you get help to overcome those obstacles? (Consider taking a class from Fellowship this semester. Visit register.fellowshipnwa.org to sign up.)

DISCUSSION

What are you learning about in your life right now?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for the reminder that You are intimately acquainted with rejection. You willingly and sacrificially lived a life marked with scorn, harsh judgment, and human misunderstanding. You, Lord, understand my heart better than anyone when I encounter the scorn and judgment of man. Thank You that I am not alone in the middle of it all.

Give me the wisdom to know Your will as You have revealed it in Your life-giving Word. Help me to trust You when Your way is difficult for me to accept. Give me the ability and strength to live as You want me to live.

Grant me the grace to walk through all situations and seasons empowered by Your Spirit. You are the One who has made me acceptable and lovable by Your grace alone. Help me to live my life praising You, unconcerned with receiving praise for myself. I no longer have to walk in fear of judgment because You were judged in my place. You were rejected that I could be brought into the family of God. Thank You that, regardless of the judgment of others, I am eternally accepted in Christ. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 5:17-26
Monday	Luke 5:27-39; Psalm 26:1-4; Proverbs 3:4-6
Tuesday	Matthew 15:1-28; Psalm 26:5-12; Proverbs 3:7-9
Wednesday	Matthew 15:29-16:12; Psalm 27:1-6; Proverbs 3:10-12
Thursday	Matthew 16:13-17:13; Psalm 27:7-14; Proverbs 3:13-15
Friday	Matthew 17:14-18:14; Psalm 28; Proverbs 3:16-18
Saturday	Matthew 18:15-35; Psalm 29:1-4; Proverbs 3:19-21

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 5:17-26

What goes through your mind when you read stories in the Bible about Jesus healing people? Do you think about what it would have been like to witness such things firsthand? Do you wonder if those kinds of things still happen today? Do you ever find yourself scratching your head at the folks who saw Jesus do these great works and still refused to believe?

When Jesus performed these miracles, it was not only an act of healing, but a sign of His identity as fully God and His mission to redeem sinners. When Jesus healed the paralyzed man in Luke 5, He very clearly and directly demonstrated why He had come by saying to the man “Your sins are forgiven.” His first and most important purpose for coming was not to heal the symptoms but to heal the disease. Everyone thought that what this man needed most was to be able to walk, but Jesus knew the

man’s deeper need was to have his sin problem cured. Jesus demonstrated His authority over both the physical world and His divine authority to forgive sins. The purpose of the healing was to authenticate the messenger—Jesus—and the message—the good news of forgiveness.

And those who saw this were filled with awe and glorified God!

Sometimes we read stories like this and think that Jesus’ primary purpose was to fix all our problems—heal our sickness, heal our marriages and families, heal our financial woes, heal our society. But those are all just symptoms of the real disease—sin. Jesus came to make it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins and to experience lasting healing in all areas of our lives affected by that sin. May we be filled with awe and glorify God as we look upon Jesus and the forgiveness He brings!

REFLECTION

What do you need to bring before Jesus to be healed? What spiritual brokenness can you ask Him to heal today?

How does knowing your sin is forgiven give you hope when your circumstances are difficult? How can you respond to Jesus in awe and worship, glorifying God for what He has done?

The friends of the paralyzed man went to great lengths to see their friend healed by Jesus. How can you pursue God on behalf of those around you? How are you bringing them before Jesus?

DISCUSSION

What is something you have been thankful for recently?

PRAYER

My prayer, O God, is that I fervently seek Your healing for myself and for those around me who are hurting. Build a stronger faith in me and impassion me to carry my brothers and sisters to Your feet for healing. Bless my prayers, Lord, and hear my cries for help on behalf of those who need Your peace. I proclaim the greatness of Your perfect name above any circumstances. Increase in my heart a steadfast endurance to stand in the gap for those who have not yet placed their trust in You.

All that I have in my life is Yours. Heal any brokenness and sickness in my life so that I may live for You and honor You in all things.

Thank You that Your healing goes beyond any physical ailment, addressing my ultimate sickness, sin. Your forgiveness is the healing I need. Heal me, Lord. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 6:1-11
Monday	Luke 6:12-49; Psalm 29:5-11; Proverbs 3:22-25
Tuesday	Luke 7:1-17; Psalm 30; Proverbs 3:26-29
Wednesday	Luke 7:18-50; Psalm 31:1-6; Proverbs 3:30-32
Thursday	Luke 8:1-25; Psalm 31:7-15; Proverbs 3:33-35
Friday	Luke 8:26-56; Psalm 31:16-24; Proverbs 4:1-3
Saturday	Luke 9:1-27; Psalm 32; Proverbs 4:4-6

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 6:1-11

The idea of the Sabbath day has existed from the beginning of creation. In Genesis 2, God completed His work of creation and rested on the seventh day, setting it apart as a day for rest. Notably, resting on the Sabbath is also one of the Ten Commandments Moses was given in Exodus 20. In today's quick-paced lifestyle of constant activity, we often lose sight of the God-given value of rest, reflection, and connection with God.

During the time of Jesus, the Sabbath had become a day full of religious rules. They had lost sight of God's purpose and focused on the appearance of doing the right thing. When the religious elite accused Jesus of violating their rules, Jesus brought clarity to the purpose of the Sabbath, responding, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). He reminded everyone that Sabbath was made for us. It's a day

to delight, worship, play, and rest with our family, friends, and community. The Sabbath protects us from our worry and obsession with work, allowing us to trust the Lord to rule over all our days. It's not just about obeying another rule, but about being free from a constant need for busyness and self-reliance. Sabbath is not about disconnecting but about engaging our souls and others that we might point to our Healer.

The Pharisees had taken something meant to protect and give life and made it into a lifeless, religious checkbox. It had become about them and not about worshiping the Lord. No amount of religious activity or constant busyness can add to Christ's sufficient work. In our practice of Sabbath rest, let us commit to joining the Body of Christ in weekly worship. May we seek to engage with Jesus fully throughout all of our days, including in our rest. May we set aside our own agendas and receive His gift of rest, trusting in His sufficient work!

REFLECTION

Do you trust that God has your best in mind by commanding you to rest? How can you practice trusting in God's plan and provision?

How consistently have you engaged in worship with other believers at church? How can you and your family commit to consistently engage in worship services?

Have any spiritual practices in your life gotten out of sync with God's heart (extra rules that you have placed on yourself, things you do to be seen, commands you ignore, etc.)? Be specific and seek counsel on how to balance these things.

DISCUSSION

What do you do to rest, relax, or recharge?

PRAYER

Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, teach me to love as freely and beautifully as You did. Release me from the death-grip of lifeless religion, and help me to live my life for You, moment to moment. Guide me to live in obedience to Your Word, remembering Your commands and counsel. Always lead me to love You and others more. Give me wisdom and humility to follow You out of love and not for the praise of others.

Lord, grant me rest. Lead me away from distraction and busyness. Teach me to live wholly dependent on Your grace. Help me to rest in You and Your work, free from self-focused work, pride, greed, and self-justification.

Give me a love for Your Church and a commitment to Your people. Use the believers around me to encourage my soul and stir my heart for communal worship. Use me to serve, encourage, and build up the body of believers around me.

In all things teach me to submit to Your leading. Spirit, remind me of Your promised provision, stamp out the judgmental spirit of self-justification, free me from self-centered striving, and empower me to love. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 9:28-36
Monday	Luke 9:37-62; Psalm 33:1-6; Proverbs 4:7-9
Tuesday	Matthew 19:1-30; Psalm 33:7-13; Proverbs 4:10-12
Wednesday	Matthew 20:1-34; Psalm 33:14-22; Proverbs 4:13-15
Thursday	Matthew 21:1-27; Psalm 34:1-5; Proverbs 4:16-19
Friday	Luke 10:1-24; Psalm 34:6-14; Proverbs 4:20-23
Saturday	Luke 10:25-37; Psalm 34:15-22; Proverbs 4:24-27

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 9:28-36

In Luke 9, some of Jesus' closest disciples shared in the significant, miraculous, and glorious experience of seeing Jesus transfigured on a mountaintop. As they were with Him praying, Jesus' appearance began to change, and His clothes became a radiant white. Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus about what He was about to do in Jerusalem.

In the few verses just before this, Jesus had explained to His disciples that He would be rejected by the religious authorities, killed, and resurrected. He told them that they too would die for His cause. While Jesus' message was also one of hope, the disciples were in need of encouragement after such a heavy revelation.

What better encouragement could there be than seeing a manifestation of Jesus' glory on a mountaintop! They saw the prophets they had heard about their whole lives appear. They heard

God say that Jesus is His Son and to listen to Him!

Peter, in particular, had an incredible spiritual experience and didn't want to leave. Yet, the moment ended, and they went back down the mountain.

Like Peter, we often want to stay in our spiritual mountaintop experiences forever. Yet those moments pass, and we are sent back out into the world. Don't be discouraged when feelings from a spiritual experience are fleeting. Be thankful for what you are able to experience and be motivated by it. When we experience Jesus being glorified, may we be encouraged to live for His mission in our daily lives. Like the disciples, we will face hardship as we follow Christ. Like the disciples, we should listen to Jesus, God's Son. May we see Jesus glorified and be encouraged to go out into the world for Him!

REFLECTION

Have you ever had a spiritual “mountaintop experience”? How did that experience (those experiences) make you feel?

What keeps you spiritually motivated in your daily life?

Who could you encourage this week in their spiritual life? Have you seen evidence of Jesus working in someone’s life recently? Find a way to encourage them this week.

DISCUSSION

What has encouraged you lately?

PRAYER

Jesus, the image of God invisible, the Word made flesh, I long to see You as You are. Open my eyes to see You. I want to see Your beauty and be moved by Your sacrifice. Help me to see Your glory made manifest in Your life, death, and resurrection. Help me to see Your glory as You move in my life and the world.

Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, I long to hear You speak. Open my ears to hear You. Help me to listen to Your voice. Help me to abide by Your instruction. Remind me by Your Spirit of everything You have taught. Speak to me through Your Scriptures.

Jesus, first-born over all creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, open my heart to wonder. I want to meditate on Your power and Your awesome work. Help me to ponder Your work in stillness and quiet. Fill me with awe for everything You have made and how You have redeemed Your people.

Fill me with Your Spirit every day and encourage me with Your presence. Use me to reveal Yourself to others, that Your glory would be known in all the earth. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 10:38-42
Monday	Luke 11:1-13; Psalm 35:1-8; Proverbs 5:1-2
Tuesday	Luke 11:14-54; Psalm 35:9-17; Proverbs 5:3-5
Wednesday	Luke 12:1-48; Psalm 35:18-28; Proverbs 5:6-8
Thursday	Luke 12:49-13:17; Psalm 36; Proverbs 5:9-11
Friday	Luke 13:18-14:24; Psalm 37:1-3; Proverbs 5:12-14
Saturday	Luke 14:25-15:10; Psalm 37:4-9; Proverbs 5:15-17

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 10:38-42

In Luke 10, the story of Mary and Martha contrasts two women—their roles and their hearts. At the home of these women, Jesus and His disciples gather for a meal. Martha, the organized, disciplined, and sensible sister, busies herself preparing the meal. Her sister Mary seems to have no concern for the amount of work being done as she sits at the feet of Jesus, listening. Martha grows frustrated and approaches Jesus to address the problem of Mary. Mary has chosen to be near Jesus. She is neither distracted nor concerned with all of the preparations and cooking; she is just being with Jesus.

Jesus lovingly and gently reminds Martha that being with Him is better. Jesus rebukes her worry and distractions, not her hospitality. Nothing about preparing a meal or being hospitable was wrong. It was her worry

and distractions that were turning her focus away from the Lord. Martha needed to be reminded that being present with Jesus matters above all distractions.

Mary shows us the appropriate posture of being with Jesus. She is not distracted by what she can offer or bring; she is content in her personal connection with Jesus by being present and listening. Mary chose the thing that can never be taken away from her. Often we let our plans, busyness, distractions, and worry take precedence over spending time with Jesus. We find it difficult to be present and to listen to Him. Being with Jesus and learning from Him has eternal significance for us. It is the good and better thing. May we learn to release our worry and spend time with our loving Savior who delights in spending time with us!

REFLECTION

Do you find it appealing to just be with Jesus? Why or why not?

Do you actually believe that spending time with Jesus is the better option for your life? What does it look like today to consistently spend time with Jesus?

What competes most with you spending time with Jesus? What practical changes can you make today so you can focus on the importance of being with Jesus? Make a list of things you can begin to change to increase opportunities to be with Jesus and listen to Him.

DISCUSSION

How do you keep your life balanced in the busy seasons?

PRAYER

Lord God, help me choose each day to seek what can never be taken from me: time in Your presence, getting to know You, learning from You, and resting in You. Help me set aside the distractions of this world, the racing of my thoughts, and the worries that can so easily consume me. Forgive me when I worry and doubt that You are enough for me. Help me to know that You are in control.

Thank You that You want to spend time with me. How incredible it is that You know every part of me and want to invite me in closer still. Show me more of who You are and help me to trust You.

Let the desire of my life be to love You with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength, and with all my mind. You alone are worthy of my attention and my devotion. There is nothing in this world that compares with You. May all my days be spent in pursuit of knowing You better and praising You with all my heart, now and forevermore. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 15:11-32
Monday	Luke 16; Psalm 37:10-15; Proverbs 5:18-21
Tuesday	Luke 17:1-19; Psalm 37:16-24; Proverbs 5:22-23
Wednesday	Luke 17:20-37; Psalm 37:25-32; Proverbs 6:1-4
Thursday	Luke 18:1-17; Psalm 37:33-40; Proverbs 6:5-7
Friday	Luke 18:18-43; Psalm 38:1-10; Proverbs 6:8-10
Saturday	Luke 19:1-10; Psalm 38:11-15; Proverbs 6:11-13

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 15:11-32

The story of the Prodigal Son is the third parable in a series of “lost-and-found” stories that Jesus tells to illustrate an important truth—He seeks the lost and rejoices when they are found.

At first glance, it may seem to be a story about the sinfulness of a son (or two), but it is really about a father’s love. The younger brother lives selfishly, chasing personal pleasure. He rejects the father and only wants what the father has to give him. The older brother desires approval by living a seemingly moral life. He desires what the father has because he thinks that he has earned it.

Both have missed a true relationship with their father and what their father truly desires for them. One brother separated himself by pursuing evil things; the other separated himself by focusing on his own good deeds. In both situations, the father shows forgiveness, love, mercy, and grace.

While enduring the pain and shame of the wandering son, the father waits and hopes for that son’s return, desiring restoration. The father seeks out his resentful son and reassures him that all he has already belongs to the son and is more than enough.

Jesus told this parable to deal with the Pharisees’ attitude. They thought they had earned God’s favor and were upset about sinners being welcomed in. God is the loving Father who is running toward us, waiting to restore us from our sins of rebellion and pride. He lovingly corrects us when we think we can earn His favor. His grace is freely given and enough for all! We need only to return, accept the forgiveness, and embrace the celebration. May we return to Him no matter how far off we are! May we join Him in celebrating all who come to know Him, His forgiveness, and His love!

REFLECTION

Which brother do you identify with the most? What is it about his behavior/response that resonates with you?

Is there anything in your life that you need to repent from, and return home to the loving embrace of the waiting Father? What ways have you tried to earn God's love? Take some time to acknowledge those and confess them to Him. Be specific.

How are you welcoming those who are lost so that they can know the love of the Father?

DISCUSSION

How do you see the church embracing and welcoming those who seemed to have lost their way?

PRAYER

Father, I thank You that You are patient, always watching, and willing to forgive me when I run to You. Thank You that You graciously accept all who acknowledge Jesus as Savior into Your family. I confess that I have strayed from You many times, choosing my own sinful desires over the abundant life found in You. In Your faithfulness, You willingly forgive me and open Your arms to me when I turn from my selfishness and return home.

Lord, by Your Spirit, help me be a reflection of the unconditional love and forgiveness that You have shown me. Help me express it to those in my life, even when they don't ask for or deserve it. I desire to see people as You see them—worth searching for. Keep me watchful for those who need to experience the freedom of Your forgiveness and the joy of being a part of Your family. Use my life to lead people to You, to be restored by the unending love and grace that makes wherever You are home. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 19:11-27
Monday	Matthew 21:28-22:14; Psalm 38:16-22; Proverbs 6:14-16
Tuesday	Matthew 22:15-46; Psalm 39; Proverbs 6:17-19
Wednesday	Matthew 23:1-39; Psalm 40:1-7; Proverbs 6:20-23
Thursday	Matthew 24:1-14; Psalm 40:8-17; Proverbs 6:24-27
Friday	Matthew 24:15-35; Psalm 41:1-5; Proverbs 6:28-30
Saturday	Matthew 24:36-25:13; Psalm 41:6-13; Proverbs 6:31-33

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 19:11-27

Right before Jesus entered Jerusalem, He told a parable to His followers because “they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (Luke 19:11 ESV). In this parable, a master is going away to receive his kingship, and while he is gone, he entrusts his servants with ten minas each and instructs them to put the money to work. The servants who were faithful to use what they were given produced fruitful results and were rewarded in abundance upon the master’s return. The one servant who hid his money away received nothing, and what he had was taken away from him. The focus of this parable is not on this servant’s failure to earn anything for the master, but on his unwillingness to even try.

Like the master, God expects us to invest the gifts that He has given us for His eternal glory while waiting for His return. We are like the unfaithful servant when we disregard those investment opportunities because we are fearful, unwilling to try, or maybe just too lazy or selfish. For everything good we have is by His grace, and by His grace we will be rewarded for our faithfulness.

If you know Jesus as your personal Savior, you have been given the incredible gift of new life in Him! He has also given you the ability to join Him in the joy of investing in those around you and being a part of God’s growing Kingdom here on earth. May we all willingly invest those gifts to the fullest!

REFLECTION

How are you investing spiritually in the lives of others?

What are some specific gifts or opportunities God has given you? Are you using those to benefit God's Kingdom or keeping them to yourself? How can you start today or who can you talk to about finding a way to use your gifts?

What obstacles (fear, selfishness, not feeling qualified, etc.) are hindering your ability to invest in God's Kingdom? What steps can you take today to overcome them?

Read the introduction to the season of Lent that starts this week (Wednesday, February 26). Make a plan for you and your family to engage with Lent.

DISCUSSION

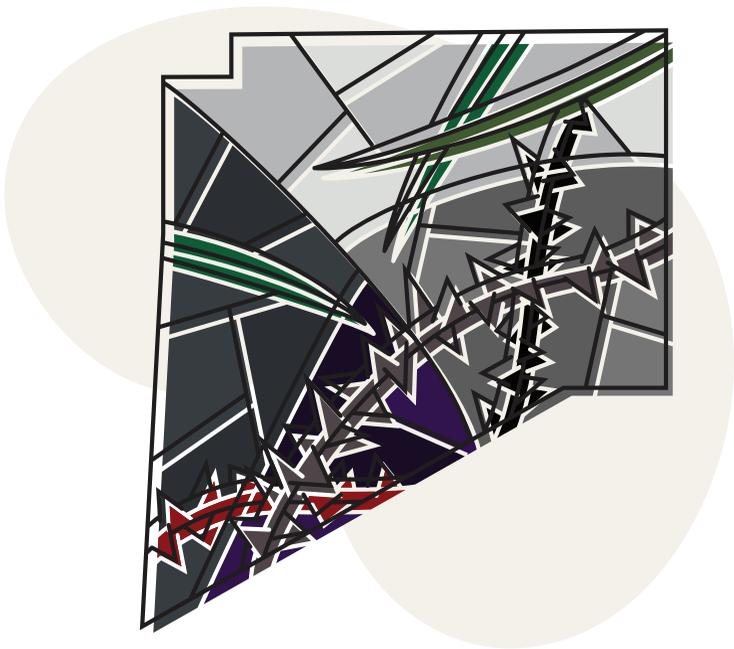
How have you seen someone use their gifts for the benefit of others?

PRAYER

O God, I seek Your kingdom. I long for Your return. When I am tempted to be unfaithful, keep me faithful. Help me believe that obedience is worth it. Help me trust that You know best. Help me run the good race and keep the faith—for Your glory and my good.

As I wait for Your return, help me to invest all that I have in Your kingdom. Thank You for the gifts and abundance that You have given me. Open my eyes to opportunities to boldly use my gifts and my life for You. Lead me in wisdom, generosity, and sacrifice to see others come to know and love You. Use me to help others see the way that You love them.

Lord, all that I am and all I have is Yours. Use me for Your glory. As I wait for the fullness of Your kingdom, may it grow in power on earth as it is in heaven. May Your presence fill my life, my work, my family, my community, and my church. King Jesus, I joyfully look forward to and long for the day You return, just as You promised You would. Amen.



L E N T

INTRODUCTION

The season of Lent is the 40 days before Easter. It is commonly associated with self-denial. To people in our culture today, the tradition might seem to be outdated and strange. Even some believers may associate it with hypocrisy and legalism. However, when viewed in the broader context of Jesus' life and ministry, Lent can be a beautiful reminder of His work in the world on our behalf.

The word *Lent* is derived from ancient Dutch and simply means "spring season." It begins on Ash Wednesday, 40 days prior to the Saturday before Easter. It is a time of fasting and prayer in remembrance of Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness after His baptism. The final week of Lent is Holy Week, beginning on Palm Sunday (marking Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem), moving to Maundy Thursday (remembering Jesus' Last Supper) and culminates with Good Friday (the day Jesus was crucified). The season officially ends at sundown on Saturday night before Easter, when the observance of Passover begins.

This season is marked by repentance and hope, calling Christians to recommit themselves to the Lord and reject sin through the power of the Spirit at work in His people. We symbolically follow Jesus out into the wilderness, and through fasting and prayer, we deny ourselves so that Jesus might be made strong in our weakness and be found sufficient in our need.

ENTER THE STORY

We invite you to participate in the joyous, yet reflective season of Lent. In a world dominated by hedonism, individualism, materialism, selfishness, and greed, Lent reminds us that we have all we need in Jesus. May we embrace John the Baptist's heart conveyed in John 3:30—that we (and all our worldly wants) would be lesser, and Jesus would be greater! As a church family we want to reject self-gratification and embrace self-denial. We want to follow Jesus' example in using God's Word to combat sin and resist temptation by the power of the Holy Spirit. May we live holy lives that are not conformed to the pattern of this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds.

We invite you to take part in the personal practice of fasting for the season of Lent. Choose something that will be challenging for you. Let it be something that will turn your focus from yourself and the things of this world to Jesus—His suffering for you, His provision for you, and His love for you. Let every craving be a reminder to turn your gaze to Jesus. You could fast by giving up food or drink, as people often do. This could be only eating one meal a day, giving up specific foods, giving up caffeine, giving up sugar, etc. Other ideas could be to give up social media, TV, makeup, or anything else that occupies your time and thoughts. Take the time you gain back and commit it to devotion to the Lord.

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

Lent has always been influenced by the following celebration of Easter. In the early church, Lent was used as a 40-day preparation period for those wishing to be initiated into the Church through baptism. In the very early church, initiation into the Church was a three-year process of preparation and training. This was due to the persecution of believers in the early Church and the possibility of spies infiltrating their local assemblies. As the three-year process came to a close, the one professing faith in Jesus entered the Lent period. The local church leadership examined their life and understanding of the gospel, and extensive training was done. This culminated in the baptism of the Christian on Easter Sunday.

Traditionally, Lent is symbolically depicted through ever-decreasing light as Christ made His way toward His crucifixion. On Tenebrae Sunday (Palm Sunday), the Church darkens the candles lit at Advent, and the Christ Candle is snuffed out on Good Friday, reminding the Church that the Light of the World was slain for the sins of the world.

POSTURES & SYMBOLS

Prayerful Posture: repentant, sorrowful, contemplative, joyous
(on Palm Sunday)

Colors: purple, black, red

Symbols: ash, sackcloth, candles, palm branches, bread, wine,
nails, cross, thorns

Flowers and Greenery: none, palms on Palm Sunday only

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

Zephaniah 3:17—“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”

DECORATIONS

Lent is a season of preparing our hearts for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In preparation for the hope and joy of Easter, Lent reminds us that the resurrection came only after the crucifixion. The focus on the cross brings a greater contrast to the joy found in the resurrection.

There is not a typical, universal symbol for the season of Lent (like the wreath for Advent). However, with the focus of the season being the cross of Jesus, many families form a cross with seven, small tea lights. Just as Advent includes ever-increasing light the closer you get to Christmas, Lent is a season of ever-decreasing light as you near Easter. The darkness reminds us of the sacrifice made by the Light of the World. At the beginning of Lent, light all seven candles and then read God’s Word together. Each night when you read scripture together, light the candles. Each week, light one less candle until on Good Friday, it is completely dark.

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

God of mercy, we recognize that You gave Your Son as a sacrifice so we could have eternal life. Jesus, we believe that You came to seek and save the lost. Spirit, we ask that You reveal our sins to us. We recognize that salvation is impossible without You. Jesus, fill us with the life that only You can give. As we remember Your life and death, keep our hearts focused on Your holiness and grace. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

PRACTICE — FASTING

Experience Sacrifice for the Good of Another. Sacrifice is a spiritual discipline that helps us understand God a little bit better because of the sacrifice He made on our behalf. Find a way you can experience voluntary sacrifice. Buy someone else's meal at a restaurant or give away something you love to bring joy to someone else. This can be spontaneous or you can plan together as a family how you will sacrifice for someone else.

Fasting Together. Fasting is a way in which you can deepen your understanding of your dependence on Jesus. As you fast, you can remember that Jesus is better than anything this world has to offer. Decide together as a family what you will give up during this season. You can all give up the same thing, or each person can choose something different. Work to encourage each other to make it until Easter. Many people choose to fast from food. You can either fast on a certain day of the week or pick a certain food (meat, coffee, or sweets) to refrain from during the season. Some people choose to fast from screens and media. Instead of watching a family movie together, take the time to read God's Word and reflect on how it changes each person. As a family, whenever you are craving what you are fasting from, say a quick prayer like, "Lord, thank You for Your death, burial, and resurrection!" The prayer can help you remember what you are celebrating by fasting.

Prayer Eggs. Place strips of paper with different prayer topics inside plastic Easter eggs. The week leading up to Easter, make enough eggs for each family member to open one egg per day. Topics could include prayers of gratitude, prayers for your family, and prayers for local ministries (Potter's House, Lifesource, Laundry Love, Salvation Army, Community Kids Closet, etc.). Take time each day to have everyone open an egg and share about the prayer topic that day.

Holy Week Devotionals. During Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter, a family devotional is available each day beginning on page 158 to help your family remember Jesus' journey to the cross.

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

No Complaining Day. Declare a "No Complaining Day." Decide as a family what each of you must do if you complain. You could do ten pushups, put a quarter in a jar, or add another chore to your chore list.

Family Bike Ride. Go for an adventure and take a family bike ride on the Razorback Greenway. You could bring a picnic lunch and stop along the way to eat, or you could ride to a restaurant close to the bike route.

Visit a Zoo. Many animals have their babies in the spring. Take a day to visit a zoo (Gentry Safari, Tulsa Zoo, or Little Rock Zoo) or an aquarium (Jenks Aquarium) and see how many baby animals you can find.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

Amon's Adventure by Arnold Ytreeide

"Lenten Lights" | desiringgod.org/articles/lenten-lights

"Sacrifice & Atonement" | thebibleproject.com/explore/sacrifice-atonement/

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 19:28-40
Monday	Matthew 21:1-10; Psalm 42; Proverbs 6:34-35
Tuesday	Mark 11:1-10; Psalm 43; Proverbs 7:1-4
Wednesday	John 12:12-19; Psalm 44:1-6; Proverbs 7:5-7
Thursday	Isaiah 53:1-12; Psalm 44:7-16; Proverbs 7:8-10
Friday	Zechariah 9:9-13; Psalm 44:17-26; Proverbs 7:11-13
Saturday	Hebrews 12:1-11; Psalm 45:1-7; Proverbs 7:14-17

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 19:28-40

When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, it looked much different than how a king would normally make his appearance. Typically, a king would arrive with military power and a fancy chariot, showing his greatness to all. Yet, Jesus chose to ride on a donkey. The Jewish people expected a mighty warrior-king. However, Jesus chose to humble Himself.

Even at this time, Jesus was fulfilling prophecy from hundreds of years before: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey... He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9-10).

Until now, Jesus had mostly referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," and had kept His title as "King" and "Messiah" guarded, revealing it only to a few. If

Jesus had previously told everyone publicly that He was the Messiah, the one that Israel had awaited for centuries, the political implications would have made it difficult for His intended ministry of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom.

Finally, in this passage, we see Jesus openly reveal that He is the Messiah! He was not riding on a warhorse surrounded by angels, but on a donkey with a large band of disciples loudly shouting, "Blessed is the King!" This was the beginning of Jesus' final week and the height of Jesus' earthly ministry before darkness began to close around Him, leading to His crucifixion. All of Israel's history had pointed toward this single, spectacular event when the Messiah publicly presented Himself to the nation. Jesus was not crucified for His good works; He was killed for His claim to kingship. Rejoice greatly and shout; our righteous King has come!

REFLECTION

Why did Jesus wait until the last week of His life to be so open about being the Messiah? Why, at that time, was His claim to kingship so important?

Is Jesus king of your life? How will you respond to the King of kings today?

How are you walking in humility and committing to Jesus in this season of Lent?

DISCUSSION

If you were to use one word to describe Jesus, what would that be?

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, You are my triumphant King, my worthy Lord, my greatest Prize. Everything good in my life has come from You, for You are the Giver of all grace. I bow down in humble praise and worship to You. Yet, even in my prostrate posture, I remember that it was You who so willingly stooped down to us, modeling the highest standard of service.

Jesus, You are the humble Servant who is worthy of all praise. You came in all humility to live sinless as a man and to die on the cross on my behalf. Help me to glorify You as the one true King by living each day for Your Kingdom.

Jesus, all I have is Yours. All I am is Yours. All I want is You. Jesus, help me see You for who You are. Your worth is profound; help me to understand it. Your glory is magnificent; help me to behold it. Your hand is humble; help me to know it. Reveal Yourself more to me every day and lead me to respond in worship. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 19:41-48
Monday	Luke 20:1-26; Psalm 45:8-17; Proverbs 7:18-21
Tuesday	Luke 20:27-21:4; Psalm 46:1-4; Proverbs 7:22-24
Wednesday	Luke 21:5-38; Psalm 46:5-11; Proverbs 7:25-27
Thursday	Luke 22:1-13; Psalm 47; Proverbs 8:1-3
Friday	Matthew 26:14-20; Psalm 48:1-5; Proverbs 8:4-7
Saturday	Mark 14:1-17; Psalm 48:6-14; Proverbs 8:8-10

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 19:41-48

Just after Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, He approached the city and wept over the spiritual blindness of the people. He entered as the present Prince of Peace, able to take away the sins of the world, but He knew that they had already missed that reality. He knew their hearts and knew what destruction was coming for them. Jesus, the incarnate Christ and kind King, the one whose voice quieted storms and whose hands healed disease, stood on a hill looking over Jerusalem, knowing their chosen fate, declaring, "I am your Prince of Peace."

Arriving at the temple, Jesus' sorrow grew. The temple was to be a place where people could pray and worship the Lord. Yet, it had become more about the financial profiting of men than worship of God. As Jesus continued

to bring teaching and healing, those in power sought to bring death and destruction to Jesus and His ministry.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, as shared by Jesus Himself, was simple: "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). It is to see Jesus for who He really is and respond to Him. Jesus brings forgiveness. Jesus brings salvation. Jesus brings love, light, rest, and peace.

Let us not be blind to our blindness! May we recognize if we have made our religious practice about ourselves. May we see our sin and weep over it as Jesus did. May we repent of our sin and turn to Him. May we see Jesus and know the peace He brings.

REFLECTION

Ask the Lord to reveal a specific area of blindness in your life. In what areas are you not accurately seeing Jesus or yourself?

What patterns in your life reflect a desire for selfish gain rather than humble submission?

How are you serving weekly to help create a healthy environment for others to engage in worship and prayer together? Where do you see God working in and through the ministry of the local church? If you are not currently serving in the church, who can you talk to about making that kind of investment?

DISCUSSION

What place do you feel the most at peace?

PRAYER

“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” (Psalm 51:1-2).

Help me to see where I have put myself before You, God. Help me to turn from my selfishness. For I have been so preoccupied with the things of this world, I have become immune to the reality of having You nearer than the next breath.

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:10-11).

Let me become more aware, more enthralled, and more satisfied by Your presence. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 22:14-23
Monday	Matthew 26:21-25; Psalm 49:1-8; Proverbs 8:11-13
Tuesday	Mark 14:18-31; Psalm 49:9-20; Proverbs 8:14-16
Wednesday	John 13:1-20; Psalm 50:1-6; Proverbs 8:17-20
Thursday	John 13:21-30; Psalm 50:7-13; Proverbs 8:21-24
Friday	Exodus 24:1-8; Psalm 50:14-23; Proverbs 8:25-27
Saturday	Luke 22:24-38; Psalm 51:1-8; Proverbs 8:28-30

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 22:14-23

The night before Jesus was to be crucified, He sat down for the Passover meal with His disciples. This traditional meal, full of Jewish symbolism, was something they would have all been familiar with, but that night, Jesus took an ancient tradition and brought new meaning to it. We now commonly call the practice of remembering Jesus, through the taking of bread and juice (or wine), “communion.” He knew that this final message, this final meal, was going to leave an imprint that He did not want them to forget.

He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Jesus craved this unique time with those closest to Him. It was a meal of closure. It was a message

of meaning. It was designed to make a point and to be celebrated forever.

Though they would not understand the full implications until later, the disciples must have been amazed to see how this practice that they had taken part in for centuries had always pointed to Jesus. He instructed them to continue the practice together in remembrance of Him.

As Jesus’ disciples, we still remember Him in this way today. Jesus is the One who saves us and gives us life. It was His body that was broken and His blood that was shed on the cross for us! Every time we share the bread and cup, it’s an opportunity to remember and celebrate the finished work of Christ.

REFLECTION

In your own words, what does the practice of communion help us remember?

What are other things in life or creation that help you remember Jesus?

How are you making it a consistent practice to remember with other believers? Who can you invite this week to join you in remembering Jesus?

DISCUSSION

What is a day in your life that you will always remember?

PRAYER

Loving Father, it is staggering to ponder the incarnation—that You sent Your only Son to take on human flesh and bear my sin in death, so that I may be forgiven and have life. Jesus, I am amazed that You willingly gave Your body to be broken that I may be healed; Your blood was spilled out so I could have life eternal. Thank You for Your sacrifice, Jesus. May my life be marked by thanksgiving and praise in response.

Thank You for inviting me to Your table. You call me out to receive the bread of life and drink from the fountain that won't run dry. You call me out of darkness, hiddenness, and doubt. You beckon me to repent in light of the beauty of Your gospel. May my life be marked by repentance and faith, and may I learn to love the way You do. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 22:39-53
Monday	Matthew 26:36-46; Psalm 51:9-19; Proverbs 8:31-33
Tuesday	Matthew 26:47-56; Psalm 52:1-3; Proverbs 8:34-36
Wednesday	Mark 14:32-42; Psalm 52:4-9; Proverbs 9:1-3
Thursday	Mark 14:43-52; Psalm 53; Proverbs 9:4-6
Friday	John 18:1-12; Psalm 54; Proverbs 9:7-9
Saturday	Luke 22:54-65; Psalm 55:1-6; Proverbs 9:10-12

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 22:39-53

All four writers of the Gospels go into great detail recounting the last moments Jesus spent with His disciples before His death. His last example, His last message, His last teaching. He told His disciples to pray. He told them twice to stay awake and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. Then Jesus went by Himself to pray. When time was growing short, and the enemy seemed to be closing in, Jesus took time to be with the Father.

Prayer is bigger than the start of a meal or the close of a ceremony; it is our lifeblood. It does more than help; it actually changes things.

Jesus knew what was coming for Him. He knew He was about to be betrayed by one of His closest friends. He knew that He would be arrested and taken to His death, even though He was without sin. Yet, Jesus prayed selflessly for

the will of the Father to be done, and He was strengthened. He was able to show unbelievable compassion, even toward those who came to capture Him. As He heals the ear of one of His captors, we catch a glimpse of what He meant when He commanded His followers to love their enemy (Matthew 5:44). Jesus was perfectly obedient to every command the Father gave Him on the path to giving up His life in love for all humanity.

Jesus bore our penalty as He went to die and take on the sins of the world. He began it all by praying for the will of the Father to be done. May we listen to Jesus' command to His disciples and stay vigilant, praying that we may not enter into temptation! May we follow Jesus' example and passionately seek God's will in all things, especially when it is difficult. May our prayer life lead us to love as Jesus loves.

REFLECTION

How have you viewed prayer in your life? Do you think that it matters? How do you picture God when you pray to Him?

How are you seeking God and His will in your life? What adjustments do you need to make to follow His will? Pray that He would lead you today and that He would strengthen you to follow His will.

How can you be more intentional and vigilant in your prayer life? What practical steps can you take this week to see that happen?

DISCUSSION

How can I pray for you this week?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You surrendered to Your Father's will and bore my sins on the cross. Entirely blameless and holy, You willingly took on the weight of my guilt and shame. You loved humanity to the very end, Your last breath was the ultimate expression of Your steadfast love toward all that call upon Your Name.

Father, not my will but Yours be done. Give me the wisdom and strength to live by Your will at all times, especially when it is difficult. Help me to know when I am trying to live contrary to what You want for me. Keep me from temptation and be glorified through my life.

Spirit, teach me how to pray. Prompt my spirit and my mind often of the ways You want to work in my life and in the lives of those around me. Make the church passionate to seek Your will and pray continually. Grow my desire to spend time with You, and give me the words to say. Make my will closer and closer to being the same as the will of the Father. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 22:66-23:25
Monday	Matthew 26:57-75; Psalm 55:7-13; Proverbs 9:13-15
Tuesday	Matthew 27:1-31; Psalm 55:14-23; Proverbs 9:16-18
Wednesday	Mark 14:53-72; Psalm 56:1-5; Proverbs 10:1-3
Thursday	Mark 15:1-20; Psalm 56:6-13; Proverbs 10:4-7
Friday	John 18:13-32; Psalm 57; Proverbs 10:8-10
Saturday	John 18:33-19:15; Psalm 58; Proverbs 10:11-13

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 22:66-23:25

Courtroom trials are supposed to reveal guilt and innocence. On the Friday morning following Jesus' arrest, He was rushed through three separate trials in a matter of hours. How could the wheels of justice turn so quickly? Because justice wasn't the purpose of these trials.

Speed was necessary to get the predetermined verdict that the Jewish leaders wanted. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling religious council, had already condemned Jesus, but they needed a civil trial to get the death penalty. For that, they needed Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate passed the problem on to Herod, the Jewish puppet-king. Herod was eager to see Jesus perform a miracle, but sent Him back to Pilate when Jesus did not perform on command.

Pilate was trapped. Three times he tried to release Jesus. Three times the people shouted, "Crucify Him!" Pilate found no fault in Jesus, but tried

to make a peace offering. He said he would allow either Jesus or Barabbas, a notorious murderer, to go free. The crowds continued to cry for Jesus to be crucified and Barabbas to be released.

Yes, trials reveal guilt and innocence. In this trial, Herod's desire for a shallow, religious experience was exposed. Pilate's desire for expedient peace was exposed. And the Sanhedrin's evil plot was transparent to all. But the Good Friday trials also revealed an innocent Savior who was "delivered over" in place of the guilty.

This is not just the story of Jesus' trials; this is the story of salvation. Jesus came in humility, lived a sinless life, and was found without fault. His perfect character was revealed by God, our perfect Judge. Yet, He took our place. In this particular courtroom, the innocent took the place of the guilty and the guilty were set free. Jesus offers that same freedom today to all who will believe in Him.

REFLECTION

Who do you say that Jesus is? Write out a description in your own words.

What specific struggle with sin has Jesus released you from? Think specifically and acknowledge both your guilt and your forgiveness.

(This is what it means to confess.)

Write out a prayer and praise to Jesus. Think specifically about the holiness of Jesus and respond to Him in gratitude for who He is and what He has done.

(This is what it means to worship.)

DISCUSSION

Who do you think Jesus is?

PRAYER

Jesus, help me to truly know You. Reveal Yourself to me every time I read Your Word. Reveal Yourself daily to me in and beyond the routine of my life. Reveal Yourself to me through Your church and the people around me. Remove any lies I believe about You from my heart and mind. Help me believe more every day that You truly are the Savior of the World. Help me see You as You are—as the highly exalted King of kings and Lord of lords, conquering Savior, Lion of Judah, Prince of Peace, Son of God.

Lord, I have sinned against You, and if I were to go on trial, You would be just in declaring me guilty. Yet You took my place and bore the punishment for my sins. In Your innocence, You were declared guilty that I may be freed from the punishment for my sins.

I surrender to Your will, Your truth, Your person. To whom else could I go? No one else under heaven can save me. Help me lean in close and know that You are always with me. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 23:26-43
Monday	Luke 23:44-49; Psalm 59:1-5; Proverbs 10:14-16
Tuesday	Luke 23:50-56; Psalm 59:6-10; Proverbs 10:17-20
Wednesday	Matthew 27:32-61; Psalm 59:11-17; Proverbs 10:21-24
Thursday	Mark 15:21-47; Psalm 60; Proverbs 10:25-27
Friday	John 19:16-42; Psalm 61; Proverbs 10:28-30
Saturday	Psalm 22:14-18; Psalm 62; Proverbs 10:31-32

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 23:26-43

It seemed to be the darkest moment in all of human history. Jesus, who came to save all of mankind from sin and death, was being crucified. A crowd formed around Jesus' cross. Simon of Cyrene had helped Jesus carry the cross. His friends and followers mourned His crucifixion. Two criminals were executed with Him. Soldiers and leaders mocked Him as He hung there. Onlookers gathered around the horror.

Yet in this crowded cast of characters, an unlikely friendship was formed and there was new hope. In between gasps for breath, Jesus and two criminals talked. Their conversation was short, but destiny-altering. The first criminal mocked Jesus. The second criminal rebuked the first and pleaded with Jesus. This criminal recognized his guilt and Jesus' innocence, and an eternal destiny hinged upon this.

The second criminal's words revealed what he believed about Jesus. He believed Jesus was innocent (we call

that righteousness), that the criminals were guilty (we call that sin), and that Jesus was God's promised King who had the authority to forgive sins (we call that salvation). Even though Jesus would soon die, the second criminal believed Jesus would somehow conquer death and establish His Kingdom (we call this faith). This criminal's response of faith in Jesus changed his eternal destiny. Jesus answered him, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). What eternal hope and light in the midst of a time that seems like complete darkness!

Salvation is the gift of God, purchased by Jesus' death and resurrection. Salvation is experienced personally when we believe in Jesus and His work on the cross. As the apostles teach, salvation is only a work of God's grace, and we receive it only through our faith. This is an incredible gift of hope; we can have the same promise as the criminal, to be with Jesus in paradise, so long as we trust in Him!

REFLECTION

Read through Luke's account of the crucifixion (Luke 23:26-56) and consider the weight of your sin. How do they relate? How does this make you feel?

How can you have the same hope as the second criminal of being with Jesus in paradise? Walk through the second criminal's observations of Jesus in your own life: recognize Jesus' righteousness, acknowledge your sin, and trust that Jesus has conquered death.

Who can you invite to celebrate Easter with you this year, encouraging them to start a relationship with Jesus? Consider bringing someone new to the Easter service or inviting them into your family's celebration.

During Holy Week, beginning the Sunday before Easter, a family devotional is available each day (page 158) to help your family remember Jesus' journey to the cross.

DISCUSSION

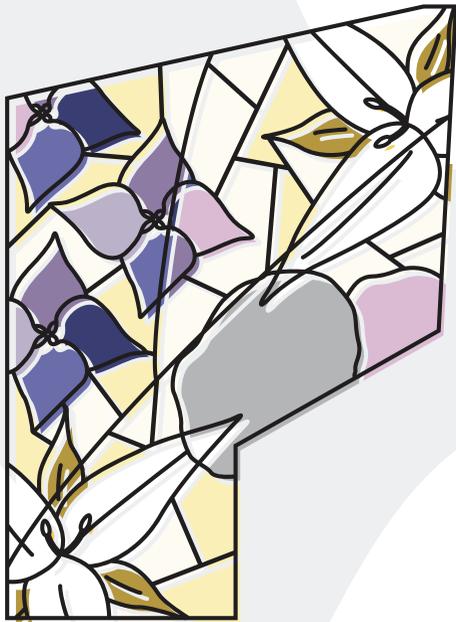
How will you and your family celebrate Easter?

PRAYER

Lord, You are the ruler of the universe. You are holy, good, and righteous. Sin can be found nowhere in You. You are just, true, and full of grace. Only You have the ability to forgive sins.

Yet, knowing Your goodness, I have sinned against You. I have turned away from Your glory and chosen to live my own way rather than clinging to Your presence. I know that because of my sin I should be condemned to be eternally separated from You. Yet, You have made a way! Jesus, You are blameless and died so that I may have life in You. Thank You, Jesus, that You have opened my eyes to my sin. Thank You that if I trust in You and call on Your name for my forgiveness, I can have an eternal hope in You!

"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6). Amen.



E A S T E R

INTRODUCTION

Easter is the pinnacle of the Christian story, celebrating the work of Jesus and His victory over sin, Satan, and death. Everything in this universe has changed because Christ has risen from the dead—the tomb is empty! Although Easter is often associated with buying new spring outfits, hunting eggs, fluffy bunnies, pastel colors, and Sunday brunch, the story of Jesus' triumph has remained the central, resounding focus throughout the centuries. This Easter, we have the opportunity as a family of faith to reclaim this day, and not just the day itself, but the life of victory and joy that flows from it. Jesus has risen from the grave!

Easter Sunday is not the traditional end of the Easter season. Throughout history, Easter Sunday was followed by a seven-week period known as Eastertide. It is a time characterized by joy and celebration. For believers, our old self has been crucified with Christ and our new self now lives in victory over sin and spiritual death. Our old ways of shame no longer define us, and our adoption into God's family is secure. We have the power by God's Spirit to overcome our ways of selfishness and sin, and we can live with eternal purpose due to the hope within us. Our old experience of fear and anxiety over pain, sickness, and death gives way to a new hope that all things will be made new. Hope has come!

ENTER THE STORY

In a world of cynicism, pessimism, hostility, and discord, we root our hope in the power of the empty tomb! The power of Jesus has been unleashed in this world through His resurrection. The King has indeed taken His place at the right hand of God in Heaven. As a church, we invite you this Easter season to live in light of the empty tomb, to live knowing that the King reigns, and to praise Him in anticipation of His return! May we joyfully and confidently tell the world the story of this hope that is in us.

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

The celebration of the Easter season dates back to the earliest days of the Church. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday that follows the 14th day of the Jewish month, Nisan (the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox). Easter has a different date each year, typically somewhere between late March through April.

Traditionally, the Easter Vigil service began Saturday night at sundown and lasted until Sunday night at sundown, and centered on the Old Testament promise of deliverance. Just as the Israelites found freedom from their bondage in Egypt through the miraculous work of God on their behalf, Christians find freedom from sin and death in the finished work of Jesus—His death, burial, and resurrection. For many throughout history, the Easter Vigil began in the darkness of Good Friday, and culminated at the sun's rise on Easter morning. Death was swallowed up in victory as the Light of the World, who was slain on our behalf, rose to life again.

The season that follows is known as Eastertide—seven weeks focused on reminding Christians of their identity in Christ. As such, historically they did not kneel for prayer during this period, but stood in recognition of their new identity found in the risen and exalted Christ. Christians also did not fast during this period, for they enjoyed a foretaste of the heavenly banquet promised through Christ, their Bridegroom.

POSTURES & SYMBOLS

Prayerful Posture: celebratory, joyous, hopeful

Colors: white, purple, gold

Symbols: empty tomb, sunrise, lilies, flowering cross

Flowers and Greenery: white lilies, hydrangeas

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

Matthew 28:18-20—“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving us new life. We are new creations. Our old ways of living are gone. You have made us new. You have brought us back to You through Christ’s death on the cross. We praise You because You no longer hold our sins against us. May You use us to bring this message to others in this world. May our lives show Your desire to bring people back to You. Thank You, Jesus, for taking on our sin so we can be made right in the Father’s eyes. Amen.

PRACTICE — READING THE WORD

Read John 1:1-5 together. Ask, “What are some things that have life?” Go outside and see how many things you can find that have life. Who gives all things life? Pray together thanking Jesus that He gives life.

Lectio Divina. As an ancient practice, Lectio Divina (Latin for “divine reading”) is a devotional way of reading the Bible. In this practice, you are encouraged to think about God’s Word and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through it. This practice allows God’s Word to go deep into our hearts. There are four steps to practicing Lectio Divina: read, meditate/reflect, pray, and contemplate/rest. Before you begin, you should take a moment to sit in quiet and ask God to help you hear Him. Do not be in a hurry as you walk through each step.

Read – Pick a passage of scripture and read it several times. Do not rush as you read through it. Take note of any word or phrase that stands out to you.

Meditate – Go back to the word or phrase that God brought to mind as you read the passage. Re-read that verse several times, asking God to speak to your heart as you read it. Think about what each of the words mean. Think about the phrase over and over in your mind.

Pray – Ask God why this phrase stood out to you. Ask Him what He wants to say to you. Talk with God about what you are feeling or hearing. Take time to stop and listen.

Rest – Now, simply spend a few minutes resting in the presence of God. You are not trying to figure anything out. Do not worry about the next steps. Simply sit and rest in His presence. Allow our Father to love you.

Question Box. Get a box and decorate it with a giant question mark. Explain to your kids that this is the faith question box. Place a pile of index cards and pens beside the box. Encourage your kids to write questions on the cards and place them in the box. Once or twice a week, take a few minutes to pull out a card and discuss the question as a family. Don't worry about having all of the answers to all the questions. This is an activity in growing together. If there is a question that you don't know the answer to, you can set the card aside and take time to research what God's Word says about it. Don't hesitate to reach out to someone else if you feel stuck. Then, when you come back together next time, pick up that card and answer the question. Encourage your kids to research God's Word along with you!

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

Life in Nature. Romans 1:20 tells us that God's eternal power and divine nature can be seen in His creation. Take time during this season to set down technology and spend time in His creation. Find a hiking trail nearby (alltrails.com is a great resource to find trails). As you hike, look for signs of new life (spring flowers, buds on the trees, baby animals, etc.) and point out the things that remind you of Jesus' presence with you.

Planting New Life. We get to see God's provision of new life each spring as the flowers grow and trees bud. Help your family take part in this new life by planting flowers from seeds. Buy a pot and some potting soil, and have your kids pick out a packet of flower seeds they like. Spend time planting the seeds together as a family. Let your kids decorate the pots. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 as you plant the seeds and talk about how planting seeds is like this verse.

Cookie Decorating Contest. Great memories come from shared experiences. One thing that most people enjoy is a good cookie! Make a batch of sugar cookies. You can buy fun cookie cutters and make the cookies into those shapes. Buy decorating supplies and decorate the cookies together. Have prizes for the neatest cookie, the most colorful cookie, the most unique cookie, etc.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

The Biggest Story: How the Snake Crusher Brings Us Back to the Garden by Kevin DeYoung

The Story for Children: A Storybook Bible by Max Lucado, Randy Frazee, and Karen Davis Hill

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 24:1-12
Monday	Matthew 27:62-28:10; Psalm 63; Proverbs 11:1-4
Tuesday	Mark 16:1-8; Psalm 64; Proverbs 11:5-7
Wednesday	John 20:1-10; Psalm 65:1-5; Proverbs 11:8-10
Thursday	John 11:17-27; Psalm 65:6-13; Proverbs 11:11-13
Friday	I Corinthians 15:1-11; Psalm 66:1-4; Proverbs 11:14-17
Saturday	Romans 6:1-14; Psalm 66:5-12; Proverbs 11:18-21

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 24:1-12

After Jesus had been crucified, it must have seemed to Jesus' followers, friends, and family that everything they had hoped for was no longer possible. We know that Jesus defeated death and brings new life to those who trust in Him, but those experiencing the events as they were happening had forgotten to trust what Jesus said He would do.

In Luke 24, a group of women came to the tomb where they believed Jesus' body to be laid. They were caught in a moment of crisis and disbelief as they found an empty tomb. They stood perplexed when two angels appeared to them. The women were frightened, but the angels lead them to remember what Jesus had told them. "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember

how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" (Luke 24:5b-7). The women heard this and remembered His words. They ran to tell the disciples what they had found.

So often we can forget the promises of God. We fail to trust that He will do what He says, or even fail to trust that He has done what He has already done. God always does what He says He will do! This Easter let us be reminded that Jesus has defeated death. He has given new life to those who believe in Him. He is coming back, and we have a future with Him. He has risen from the dead, just as He said He would!

REFLECTION

What are the promises that God has made? Thank Him that He has kept, and will keep, each of these promises.

Specifically, how does the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead impact your daily life now? How does it impact your future?

As soon as the women “remembered” the words of Jesus, they went and told the rest of the disciples that the tomb was empty. Who do you know that needs to hear these encouraging words about Jesus? Reach out this week and remind them of Jesus’ faithfulness.

DISCUSSION

What is one of the biggest turning points in your life?

PRAYER

Jesus, all my hope is in You. Every joy on this earth is empty if there is no resurrection; every pain is lethal if You did not defeat death. But You did conquer the grave. You are risen. I believe! Help my unbelief.

I believe You bore the sin of the world on the cross. Forgive me for trying to hide my sin, pretending to have it all together. I believe You buried the shame of the world in that grave. Teach me to leave mine there. I believe You were raised to life again. Help me trust I will be raised with You. I believe, Lord! Help my unbelief.

Thank You for saving me, Jesus. Thank You for disarming the power of sin, removing the sting of death, and releasing the hold of shame. Thank You for giving me real, abundant, eternal life!

You are risen! You are risen indeed! Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	John 20:19-29
Monday	Mark 1:1-11; Psalm 66:13-20; Proverbs 11:22-24
Tuesday	Mark 1:12-28; Psalm 67; Proverbs 11:25-27
Wednesday	Mark 1:29-46; Psalm 68:1-7; Proverbs 11:28-31
Thursday	Mark 2:1-17; Psalm 68:8-13; Proverbs 12:1-3
Friday	Mark 2:18-28; Psalm 68:14-22; Proverbs 12:4-6
Saturday	Mark 3:1-21; Psalm 68:23-35; Proverbs 12:7-9

DEVOTIONAL: READ JOHN 20:19-29

On the evening of Jesus' resurrection day, the disciples were hiding in a locked room, afraid of the Jews. As they were hiding in fear, Jesus surprised them by appearing in the room. This is the first time they had seen the risen Jesus. Having likely experienced every emotion over the past couple of days, they continued to have many reactions as they transitioned from fear and shock to gladness and rejoicing.

Thomas was not present at that time with the other disciples. When he heard of the resurrection, he responded in doubt; he needed proof. When Thomas rejoined the disciples eight days later and Jesus revealed Himself to them again, Thomas responded in worship, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

How would Jesus have us respond to His resurrection? How should we respond when He reveals Himself in other ways today? Through this story, we see many responses from the disciples. From the words of Jesus, we see three desired responses: that we experience peace; (He said "peace be with you" three times—John 20:19, 21, 26); that we believe (John 20:29); and that we are sent out on mission as He was sent (John 20:21). Which response most resonates with you today? Have you been missing the peace that comes from knowing that the resurrection makes eternal life a reality? Is today the day when you finally believe that His death and resurrection is for you personally? Are you living as one sent out to share the good news with a world that needs hope?

REFLECTION

Do you actually believe that Jesus rose from the dead? What part of the resurrection story do you struggle believing the most? Who can you process that with this week?

How does your life reflect your belief in Jesus' resurrection?

Where are the places and who are the people God is sending you to throughout your week?

DISCUSSION

In your opinion, how does someone become a Christian?

PRAYER

Jesus, in light of all that You are, I bring the entirety of my life before You. You are well acquainted with my fears, doubts, insecurities, distractions, and struggles. You know my innermost thoughts and all that motivates my every action—from pure to deplorable. Fully aware of my tendency toward rebellion and sin, You made a way for me to have true, lasting peace with God. You offered Your life as the ultimate expression of Your Father's love, so that I could be set free from the power of sin over my life. You offer abundant living for today and an eternity of joy in Your presence for all who believe.

Help me with my unbelief. Help me cling to Your Spirit when I am weak. Help me fix my eyes on You and Your life-giving Word, studying Your every move. Teach me how to live, love, lead, serve, and sacrifice the way You modeled. Through the strength that Your Spirit gives, help me walk in this day believing You are enough. May Your love be my life's motivation and Your message of grace be my mission. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Luke 24:13-35
Monday	Luke 24:36-53; Psalm 69:1-4; Proverbs 12:10-12
Tuesday	Mark 3:22-35; Psalm 69:5-12; Proverbs 12:13-16
Wednesday	Mark 4:1-34; Psalm 69:13-19; Proverbs 12:17-20
Thursday	Mark 4:35-5:20; Psalm 69:20-28; Proverbs 12:21-23
Friday	Mark 5:21-43; Psalm 69:29-36; Proverbs 12:24-26
Saturday	Mark 6:1-29; Psalm 70; Proverbs 12:27-28

DEVOTIONAL: READ LUKE 24:13-35

Disappointment. Broken dreams. Failure. As two men walk down the road to Emmaus a few days after Jesus had been crucified, you can feel the sorrow in their hearts. The risen Jesus approached them but kept His identity hidden from them. When He encountered them, they stood still, looking sad. Jesus could have revealed Himself at that moment to their joy and amazement, but He had a different approach. Jesus spoke to them about all the prophets and explained what had been prophesied about Himself. When they were disillusioned and depressed, Jesus pointed them to God's Word as recorded in the Scriptures. The reports of the resurrection, which they perhaps wanted to believe but couldn't, might have become more and more plausible as they heard the Old Testament prophecies explained. There was something about this stranger, this spontaneous traveling companion, that compelled them to invite Him to stay with them.

Once they sat down to eat, Jesus broke bread, and suddenly they realized who He was. He vanished, and they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he... opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Once they realized that they had seen the living Christ, they realized their journey for the day wasn't over. In their joy, they returned the entire seven miles they had just walked so they could share the good news of the resurrection. Their sadness was now joy, their disappointment replaced by hope. The Lord had risen indeed!

What a familiar picture this should be for us! Jesus, walking with His despondent followers, encouraging them with God's truth from the Scriptures, revealing Himself through the breaking of bread, all to encourage their faith. Just as on the road to Emmaus, Jesus is alive today, and is still revealing Himself to those who seek Him through His Word and through the breaking of bread.

REFLECTION

When was a time Jesus revealed Himself to you when you may not have expected it?

How has Jesus revealed Himself to you through His Word? Through the breaking of bread in community? How are you engaging with Jesus in this way now?

If you were taking a walk with Jesus, what would you want to ask Him? What would you talk about? Consider praying to Him right now about the things you want to discuss with Him.

How is the joy that comes from knowing Jesus has risen evident in your life? How are you declaring this to others?

DISCUSSION

Do you ever talk to God? Do you feel He listens?

PRAYER

O Christ, I am so thankful to know You! Open my eyes, and reveal Yourself to me as my Risen Savior. You are alive, and I want You to be evident in my life every day. May I not be blind to the presence of Your power nor to the power of Your presence. Help me to walk with You humbly and follow Your lead.

May my heart burn within me as I meditate on Your Word. Help me to seek You in scripture and reveal Yourself to me through every word.

Reveal Yourself to me through those who know You. Surround me with people who love You and help me to love them as You love them. As we break bread, sweeten our fellowship, and remind us of Your sacrifice. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	John 21:1-25
Monday	Mark 6:30-56; Psalm 71:1-14; Proverbs 13:1-4
Tuesday	Mark 7:1-23; Psalm 71:15-18; Proverbs 13:5-7
Wednesday	Mark 7:24-37; Psalm 71:19-24; Proverbs 13:8-10
Thursday	Mark 8:1-10; Psalm 72:1-8; Proverbs 13:11-13
Friday	Mark 8:11-26; Psalm 72:9-20; Proverbs 13:14-17
Saturday	Mark 8:27-9:1; Psalm 73:1-9; Proverbs 13:18-21

DEVOTIONAL: READ JOHN 21:1-25

When Jesus was put on trial and crucified, the disciples all had different responses in the midst of the chaos and accusations. In Luke 22, Peter was confronted about being a follower of Jesus three times and denied association with Jesus before each accuser. Realizing what he had done, Peter wept bitterly. Was this failure the end of Peter's ministry and relationship with Christ?

So often when we are overcome with fear, we forget who we are and compromise in an attempt to save ourselves. We hide from God. We turn our faces away from Jesus and tell ourselves we are not worthy. How could He love someone like us? We find ourselves feeling like we are back to where we were before He entered our lives. So often we see our failure as a disqualification from the call of a Christian.

For Peter, he went back to fishing and doing what he knew before. When Jesus reappeared to him after the resurrection, Peter jumped off of his

boat and swam to shore to be at the feet of Jesus. Peter abandoned all of the fish he had just caught and rushed to Jesus who was waiting for him. Jesus then asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" echoing the three times Peter denied Jesus. Three times Peter responded, "Yes, Lord," and Jesus called Peter to shepherd His sheep.

Through Jesus' resurrection, their relationship was restored and Peter was able to run back to Jesus. Then Jesus called Peter to follow Him and care for the church, bringing others to know Him. Peter was not disqualified from ministry but became a foundational leader in the church.

Like Peter, our hearts are prone to wander away from truth because of fear, insecurity, selfishness... sin. We are able to have our relationship with Jesus restored through His resurrection. Through trusting in Him, our mistakes are forgiven. We are able to declare our love for Him and show our love by feeding His sheep.

REFLECTION

What does this passage teach you about Jesus' character based on His response to Peter's actions?

What sin are you scared to bring to the feet of Jesus?

When Peter said he loved Jesus, why did Jesus say "Feed my sheep"? What could this look like in your life?

DISCUSSION

When someone or something challenges your values, what helps you stay true to your convictions?

PRAYER

Gracious Lord, forgive me for declaring my love for You one moment and then denying You the next. You have always been faithful, and have loved me, even when I deny You—either by my words or my actions. Your forgiveness heals and grants me a hope, a new calling, and a future. I desire to know You more deeply and to make You known. Renew in me each day a desire to seek You first. Make it my joy to declare Your glorious character to my own soul and to every beloved soul that You place in my path.

I give You thanks, for through Your merciful sacrifice on the cross, You have forgiven my offenses and restored sweet fellowship with me. Now I live to proclaim Your love and share Your life, so that the world may know You and that I may abide more fully in Your presence. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	John 20:11-18
Monday	Mark 16:9-20; Psalm 73:10-17; Proverbs 13:22-25
Tuesday	Mark 9:2-29; Psalm 73:18-28; Proverbs 14:1-2
Wednesday	Mark 9:30-50; Psalm 74:1-6; Proverbs 14:3-5
Thursday	Mark 10:1-31; Psalm 74:7-13; Proverbs 14:6-9
Friday	Mark 10:32-52; Psalm 74:14-23; Proverbs 14:10-12
Saturday	Mark 11:1-26; Psalm 75; Proverbs 14:13-15

DEVOTIONAL: READ JOHN 20:11-18

Mary Magdalene had just witnessed one of the most horrible acts in history at the crucifixion of Jesus. Her emotions and grief must have been unimaginable as she mourned her loss. Yet, in the despair of Jesus' death and the confusion of finding His tomb empty, she was about to be a part of one of the most epic events in history. As she wept by the tomb, Mary became the first person recorded to see the risen Jesus!

She could not see it. She stood in the presence of the risen Jesus and two angels but mistook them for guards and a gardener. She saw the greatest news in history play out in person and yet, for a second, she thought someone had stolen the body rather than realizing the Savior had risen from the grave.

When Jesus revealed Himself to her and she saw Him for who He was, she

clung tightly to Him. Her unimaginable grief and despair had turned to hope and joy! He called her by name and everything changed.

Jesus continues to reveal Himself to us today. While it may look different than the physical appearance to Mary Magdalene, He continues to call us by name and turn our sorrows into joy. Yet, like Mary, we sometimes mistake Jesus and His work for something else. We may see Jesus moving in our lives every single day and choose to attribute His blessings to other sources. Other times, we are so consumed by our circumstances that we completely miss Jesus in the situation. Do not mistake Jesus for a gardener! Seek Jesus and recognize His voice! Like Mary, may we hear Him call our names, cling to Him, and rejoice with others for what Jesus has done.

REFLECTION

How does the fact that Jesus rose from the dead change everything?

How have you seen Jesus move in your life? Be specific and give thanks to God.

How can you help others see how God is working in their lives? Who can you encourage this week?

DISCUSSION

What is something you are excited about in life right now?

PRAYER

Lord, without confidence in the resurrection, I would be left to cry out in grief, ever searching for hope and significance in this broken world. But You have defeated death! Jesus, You actually did rise from the grave and I believe in Your power to give life.

Father, You have seen me in my need, and You have called me by name. By Your great mercy and power, You sent Your Son to conquer sin and death on my behalf and therefore united me with Yourself. In light of the reality of the resurrection, I live in this hope.

Lord, You have turned my grief to joy. Help me to remember that and to live in the joy of knowing You every day. Lead me to celebrate with others that You are my hope and my shield. In You my heart rejoices, for I trust in Your holy name. Let Your unfailing love surround me, for my hope is in You alone. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Hebrews 1:1-4
Monday	Mark 11:27-12:12; Psalm 76; Proverbs 14:16-18
Tuesday	Mark 12:13-34; Psalm 77:1-5; Proverbs 14:19-22
Wednesday	Mark 12:35-13:2; Psalm 77:6-11; Proverbs 14:23-26
Thursday	Mark 13:3-31; Psalm 77:12-20; Proverbs 14:27-29
Friday	John 1:1-28; Psalm 78:1-5; Proverbs 14:30-32
Saturday	John 1:29-51; Psalm 78:6-14; Proverbs 14:33-35

DEVOTIONAL: READ HEBREWS 1:1-4

The story of Jesus does not end at His crucifixion, or even at His resurrection. After 40 days of post-resurrection appearances, Jesus ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of the Father. Before He ascended, He gathered the disciples together, gave them some final instructions (Matthew 28:16-20), and then was lifted up out of their sight (Acts 1:9). The disciples stood and stared in shocked amazement at what they had just witnessed! Where did He go? What was He doing? How would they go on without Jesus there to lead them?

The writer of Hebrews addresses these questions at the beginning of his letter: "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:3c). There Jesus is interceding for us (Romans 8:34), effectively intervening

on our behalf. Now, "He upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3bESV). Jesus went to the right hand of God and poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33) so that we could be His witnesses all over the world (Acts 1:8).

How thankful we should be that Jesus has ascended from His place on earth into heaven! Sometimes we get so excited about the resurrection that we forget about His ascension. We forget that He is still working on our behalf. We can be certain that His story of redeeming the world from sin continues now as He sits at the right hand of the Father, upholding the universe. As the angels reminded the shocked disciples on the day of His ascension, "someday He will return from heaven in the same way you saw Him go!" (Acts 1:11 NLT).

REFLECTION

Why is it important that Jesus ascended into heaven?

Do you ever live as if Jesus is not actively working on your behalf? If so, how does that affect the way you live your life?

Knowing that Jesus is in the very throne room of heaven, what are you asking God to do in Jesus' name that only God can do?

DISCUSSION

Is there anything that I can pray for you this week?

PRAYER

King Jesus, You stand victorious over the grave! Having conquered sin and death, You ascended to the Father. Yet, You are still alive and always with me. You are holding all things together. Your blood covers my sin and You have paid the penalty for my sin. You continue working in my life, even now, to remove the effects of sin and its power over my life. Your resurrection raises us to eternal life in You, our Christ.

For all of this, I stand amazed. As modern psalmists declare, You truly are “worthy of every song we could ever sing” and “all the praise we could ever bring.” May my soul be enraptured by Your power and beauty. Thank You that You are with me every day and that I can look forward to the day You come again to make all things new. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Romans 8:30-39
Monday	John 2:1-25; Psalm 78:15-22; Proverbs 15:1-3
Tuesday	John 3:1-36; Psalm 78:23-30; Proverbs 15:4-6
Wednesday	John 4:1-45; Psalm 78:31-41; Proverbs 15:7-9
Thursday	John 4:46-5:17; Psalm 78:42-47; Proverbs 15:10-12
Friday	John 5:18-47; Psalm 78:48-55; Proverbs 15:13-16
Saturday	John 6:1-21; Psalm 78:56-62; Proverbs 15:17-20

DEVOTIONAL: READ ROMANS 8:30-39

For Paul, the reality of the ascension provided unparalleled confidence in the love of God. As long as Jesus is on the throne, then nothing on the face of the earth, nothing in the heights of heaven, nor anything in the depths of hell, stands a chance at separating us from God's love.

Jesus' work did not end when He took our place on the cross. We could be tempted to see the ascension of Jesus as a retreat into heaven until the second coming or to think that He is not currently doing anything. Scripture teaches us that Jesus is actively ruling His kingdom from heaven, constantly interceding for us to the Father, and eagerly preparing for His great

return. The ascension was not Jesus abandoning us until a later date. In fact, the ascension ought to give us great encouragement.

The ascension of Jesus means that we have an advocate before the Father securing our salvation forever. Jesus in heaven with the Father means that one day we will be in heaven with the Father. May the security found in knowing God's love for us make us humble, grateful, joyful, and confident. And may Jesus' relentless love and intercession for us, motivate us to love and pray for others. As Jesus does for us, may we persistently intercede for our friends and family who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus.

REFLECTION

Have you ever felt like Jesus was absent from your life and not paying attention? Confess that to Him and ask for more awareness of His work for you.

What in life is making you feel distant from the love of God? How is His love more powerful than that?

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus is actively interceding for you before the Father and that nothing can separate you from His love?

DISCUSSION

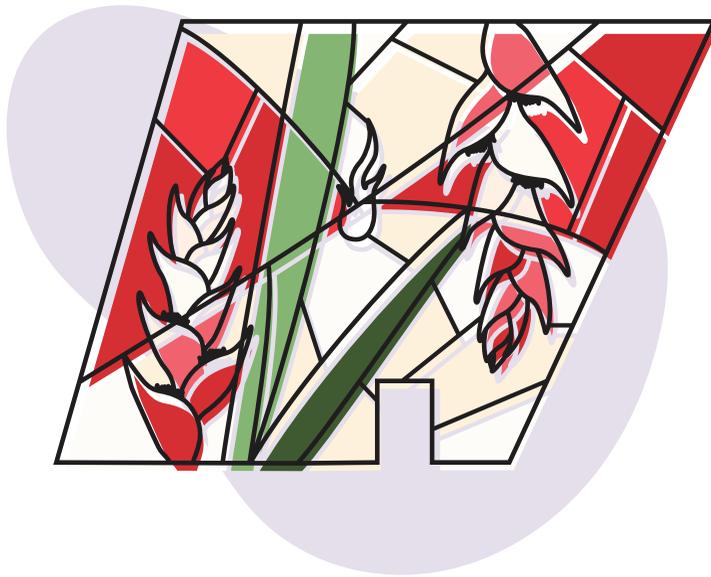
What have you been thankful for recently?

PRAYER

Risen Christ, I am overwhelmed. How can I respond to all that You are and all You have done? You are gracious and merciful, faithful and loving, patient and forgiving, true and beyond description! You have taken my shame and guilt, my treason and hate, my angst and resentment, my deceit and oppression to the grave and overcome it with Your everlasting life! Your glory eclipses my sin now and forever.

Even as I pray, I know that You are praying for me with the Holy Spirit to Your Heavenly Father and mine, perfectly and persistently. I have nothing to offer, but my ever-present need for You.

You are here. You are with me and never far from me. Thank You, Jesus, for not only pulling me out of my sinful state, not only cleansing me completely, but caring for me, giving me strength, and giving me a mission. You are with me, and I am eternally safe and secure. Amen.



P E N T E C O S T

INTRODUCTION

Pentecost is the day Christians remember the arrival of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit in the lives of early believers recorded in Acts 2. Today, it is a time to celebrate God being with us. The promise that God would one day come to dwell with His people was made permanent through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit testifies to the risen Jesus in our hearts and lives. Jesus has taken His rightful place as king, and has established His people, the Church, to be His ambassadors. Pentecost brings the Church into the story in a profound and beautiful way. The Church now carries the message of hope to the world as it brings the peace, the power, and the presence of God to all nations. Pentecost Sunday reminds the Church of its mission and purpose in Christ.

ENTER THE STORY

We invite you to respond to the calling to share Jesus with the world. It is a time to demonstrate joy, knowing that the King of Heaven indwells His people and that Jesus is always with us. In a culture that is without hope or meaning apart from Jesus, we have a better and more powerful story! May we as a church family be inspired by the empowering Spirit of God to live out God's mission in the world.

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

Pentecost means “fiftieth” and has its origins in the Old Testament festival known as the Feast of Weeks, which was celebrated 50 days after Passover. This festival was meant to remind the nation of Israel that their crops and their food were a blessing from the Lord and it was a time to give back to the Lord the “first fruits” of their harvest. This feast was integrated into the Church through the events of Acts 2, where on the day of Pentecost in AD 33, the Holy Spirit descended on the early Church gathering in Jerusalem. The day of Pentecost is a time to reflect on the new realities that are found in the Church, where the dividing wall between races, genders, classes, and people groups has been brought down and a new community has been formed. This community is empowered by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, built on the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, to the glory of God the Father.

POSTURES & SYMBOLS

Prayerful Posture: joyful, evangelistic, missional, intentional,

Colors: red, white, green

Symbols: fire, wind, doves

Flowers and Greenery: ginger, heliconia

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 2:1-4
Monday	John 6:22-59; Psalm 78:63-72; Proverbs 15:21-23
Tuesday	John 6:60-7:24; Psalm 79:1-5; Proverbs 15:24-26
Wednesday	John 7:25-52; Psalm 79:6-13; Proverbs 15:27-29
Thursday	John 7:53-8:38; Psalm 80:1-10; Proverbs 15:30-33
Friday	John 8:39-59; Psalm 80:11-19; Proverbs 16:1-3
Saturday	John 9:1-41; Psalm 81; Proverbs 16:4-6

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 2:1-4

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He made it clear that His mission was to see disciples made in all nations of the world. With this strategic goal in mind, why would He leave? He conquered death! What could possibly have stopped Him had He stayed to oversee the mission Himself?

Yet, Jesus said it would be better for Him to go. He intended for His followers to continue His life-giving mission, but He wouldn't leave them alone. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come to dwell in them, guide them into truth, and remind them of what Jesus said, comforting and empowering them for good works.

Just ten days after Jesus ascended, we see the full arrival of the Holy Spirit. We might not regularly experience the rushing winds and flames of fire that the

followers of Jesus experienced when the Spirit first came, but if we have any hope of carrying out the mission of Jesus, we must learn to recognize that the Spirit of God is active in every believer.

Whenever we find the Scriptures speaking into our lives, the courage to speak to an outsider and invite them in, or the conviction to tell the truth at the expense of comfort, these small moments of heart transformation are evidence of the Spirit of God working. Let us pray He continues to transform us bit by bit into the likeness of Jesus.

If the same Spirit that powerfully raised Jesus from the dead dwells inside of us, then what could possibly stop us as we continue the mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth? He is with us. May we live like we believe it.

REFLECTION

Do you believe that the Spirit of God actually lives inside of you? How are you able to know if He does? What evidence or lack of evidence do you see?

How have you seen the Holy Spirit work in other people? How can you encourage someone this week regarding the Spirit's work in his or her life?

How can you remind yourself that the Holy Spirit is present in you and open yourself to His influence? Are there any distractions in your life that might be impairing your connection with Him?

DISCUSSION

How has your view on religion changed over your life?

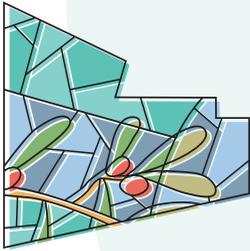
PRAYER

God, from the first time I called upon Jesus as my Savior, Your Spirit has been living within me and working in my life. I am so thankful for Your Spirit of Truth that abides in me and teaches me all things. Lord, I need You. Reveal Yourself to me more every day. Fill me with Your Spirit and lead me. Convict me of my sin. Help me set my heart on You today. Remove every distraction. You have my full attention.

Holy Spirit, guide Your Church. Let us be a people marked by our faith and love. Help us to be unified in our vision and our mission. Lord, give me the wisdom, grace, patience, and love to reconcile with others.

I want to hear Your voice and experience Your powerful presence every day of my life. Move mightily in and through me as You guide me in all truth. I fully submit to Your leading in my life. Amen.

ORDINARY TIME



THEOLOGY



CHURCH



GOSPEL

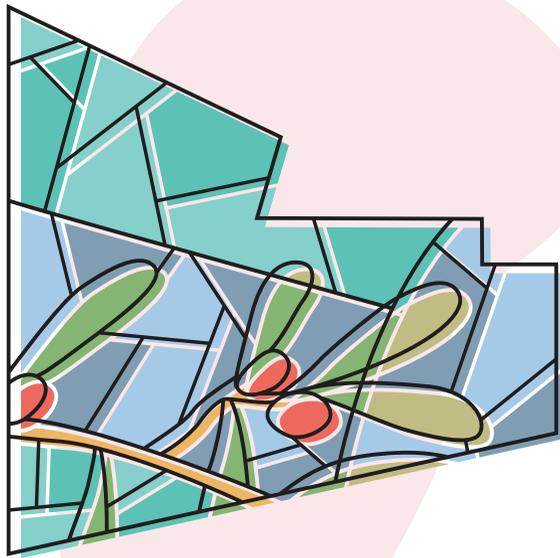
ORDINARY TIME: INTRODUCTION

The time in the Christian calendar between the day of Pentecost and the beginning of Advent is called Ordinary Time. It is a time where the Church gathers to devote themselves to the apostles' teaching, to prayer, to the work of ministry in their local context, and to the ultimate glory of God. It is also meant to reflect where Christians are today in the redemption plan of God for this world. We find ourselves living in the time following Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit descended on the Church, awaiting Christ's return—His Second Advent. As such, we have a mission to live, a Savior to love, an abiding presence to empower us, and a community to serve in "the waiting."

During this season, we want to devote ourselves to three different seasons of study, and we invite you to join us personally and collectively as a church. Over the summer, we will walk through a theological picture of the person of Jesus Christ, articulated through the pages of the Scriptures. We want to have a clear vision of who Jesus is and what He accomplished. Then, we will look at case studies from the Book of Acts hoping to gain a better understanding of what happens when the local church has a clear vision for Jesus in their city. During the fall, we will be studying Paul's letters to the church in first-century Thessalonica, Greece. We hope to see what living radically for Jesus looks like today in the lives of believers within the Church. As the fall season comes to a close, we will once again celebrate the Advent season and be reminded that our Hope has come, that light has broken through, and that salvation is made available to all who place their faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

ENTER THE STORY

We invite you to make coming to church a priority throughout this season. Protect the worship service times in your schedule through the summer and fall. Come ready to take notes, dive in with questions, surrender to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit, and refresh your vision of Jesus as an individual, as a family, and as a part of the church family.



T H E O L O G Y

INTRODUCTION

The word *theology* simply means the study of God. The way that we study and know God determines what we believe and how we will interact with Him and the world. It influences and changes the way we live. We want to see God clearly and have an accurate picture so that our lives are a proper response to who He is.

In one of the most iconic stories about Jesus, a raging storm threatened His life and the lives of His followers. When Jesus' friends cried out to Him for help, He calmly stood, spoke, and quieted the storm. Nature turned on its heels in response to His voice. The disciples reacted to this show of power in a poignant and still relevant way. "The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this?'" (Matthew 8:27a). That question is relevant to anyone who has had a true encounter with Jesus. What kind of man is this? This is the question of theology.

Theology is a word that strikes either fear or boredom into the hearts of many. However, pursuing theology is the most relevant thing a Christian can do. When the disciples asked "What kind of man is this?" they were doing theology. The Son of God revealed His power and authority over creation, and the disciples wanted to know its relevance in their lives. Theologian John Frame defines theology as "the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life." Anytime we ask how scripture applies to our lives, we are doing the work of theology.

HISTORY & TRADITIONS

After Jesus' ministry on earth, the early church had to wrestle with what the life of Jesus meant for them. What did the life of Jesus mean for how they knew God? What did Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection mean for their reading and understanding of scripture? Who was Jesus really? Was He indeed God or just an extraordinary man? Why did He die? How did His death save them? What did His resurrection from the grave mean for their future? How as a church should they relate to Him? How would His kingdom come now that He had ascended to heaven?

A personal pursuit of sound theology will lead us to wrestle with these same and other big questions today. We will join a long heritage of Jesus-followers who have done so. A few hundred years after the life of Jesus on earth, believers wrote the following about Jesus:

We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

–Nicene Creed, revised at Constantinople, AD 381

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

I Peter 3:15—“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

Apostles' Creed:

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day, He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, in Your holy universal Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.”

PRACTICE — LISTENING

Listening Hike. Our lives tend to be filled with distractions that keep us from hearing the voice of God. Our area is filled with opportunities to disconnect from those distractions. Find a trail nearby where your family can go hiking. Explain to your family that a portion of the hike will be a listening hike. At some point, ask everyone to walk in silence. Encourage everyone to be still and listen to the sounds around them. After a few minutes of silent listening, talk about what everyone heard. Ask which sounds you would not have heard if it had been noisy. Read Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” As a family, discuss things in your lives that might keep you from hearing from God.

Instagram Stories. Pick a story from the book of Acts to act out together. Gather props and costumes so you can stage a scene from the story. As you are acting it out, have everyone freeze and take a picture. Let each member of your family pick a story to act out.

Family Catechism. A catechism is a summary of the principles of the Christian religion in the form of questions and answers. It is a great way to teach your family theology. To help you teach your children theology, you can pick up a copy of a family catechism from Fellowship’s Children’s Ministry or download the “New City Catechism” app and refer to the “children’s mode” setting. (There is also a “New City Catechism” book you can order.) Ask your kids the questions during dinner, in the car, or when they get up in the morning. Make a game out of the questions. The purpose of the question and answer is to help our kids memorize theology.

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

Local Events. The summer is a great time to find things to do in our community. Visit the Farmers' Market, head to Gulley Park for the Thursday night summer concert series, or visit the local library website to see a list of events happening there all summer long. Use these events as a fun way to engage with your community.

Summer Bucket List. Before school ends, gather your family and come up with a bucket list for this summer. Determine how many items you would like on your list. Ask each member of the family to come up with a few things to add to the list. Write them on a large poster board and hang it where everyone can see it. You can place a sticker or a check mark next to an item when you complete it. Ideas could include: buying fruit from a roadside fruit stand, making a fort in the living room, watching a movie outside, making s'mores, or catching fireflies. The items don't have to be grand. The goal is to create a list that allows you to make family memories!

\$2 Christmas in July. We want to help our families learn to focus on bringing joy to others by celebrating Christmas in July. Give each person two strips of paper. Instruct them to write their name on each piece of paper. Put the pieces of paper in a bowl or hat and have each person draw two names that aren't their own. Explain that you are going to have Christmas in July and you will be buying gifts for the people you chose. Each person will receive \$2.25 with which to buy gifts. Go to a local dollar store and send each person in to buy gifts for the people on their papers. Encourage them to think about what would bring joy to the other person. Make sure they keep the gifts hidden in the bag so no one sees them. You may have to help younger kids in buying their gifts. Return home and give each person an opportunity to give their gifts and explain why they chose the gifts. This activity can also help us learn to be grateful when someone gives us a gift, even if it's not exactly what we would have picked!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

Big Truths for Young Hearts by Bruce A. Ware

Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers by Joey Allen

The Ology by Marty Machowski

New City Catechism by Sam Shammas and Timothy J. Keller

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	John 1:1-14
Monday	Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Psalm 82; Proverbs 16:7-9
Tuesday	John 10:1-21; Psalm 83:1-5; Proverbs 16:10-13
Wednesday	John 10:22-42; Psalm 83:6-18; Proverbs 16:14-17
Thursday	John 11:1-27; Psalm 84:1-4; Proverbs 16:18-20
Friday	John 11:28-57; Psalm 84:5-12; Proverbs 16:21-23
Saturday	John 12:1-19; Psalm 85:1-5; Proverbs 16:24-26

DEVOTIONAL: READ JOHN 1:1-14

Author A. W. Tozer famously said, “What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” What we truly believe about God will define who we are and how we live our lives. It is vitally important that we think of God accurately. We call the study of God “theology.” Sound theology is the study of the nature and person of God through the lens of the authoritative Scriptures.

The Bible is God’s Word and is authoritative in the way it portrays God and instructs our lives. It is one of the primary ways He has revealed Himself to the world. He also revealed Himself through the living person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is described as the “Word made flesh.” John 1:1-2 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with

God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” In this description, “the Word” is capitalized because it is both a name and a title. Jesus is the Word further portrayed in verse 14 of the same chapter.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Word became flesh. The Creator of the universe came and dwelt among us to be the living revelation of God. The grace and truth of God walked on this earth and showed us the glory of God. To know Jesus is to know God! May we strive to see Him clearly and know Him personally, having a right understanding of the God of the universe.

REFLECTION

Why would it be true that the way you think about God is the most important thing about you? Do you believe this?

What do you believe about Jesus? Write out the things that you know to be true about Him.

How can you know Jesus more? What specifically can you do this week to know Him more?

DISCUSSION

Do you ever read the Bible? What do you think about it?

PRAYER

God, thank You that You have revealed Yourself to the world. Thank You that You are knowable and personable. You are the creator of the universe, over and above all things, yet You are right here with me. You are holy and Ruler of all, yet You want to be known personally and to know me personally.

Thank You that You have revealed Yourself through Your Word! Speak to me through Your scripture. Make scripture the foundation of my reality and the lens through which I see everything.

Father, thank You for revealing Yourself through Jesus. In knowing Jesus, I am able to know You—Your character, Your will, and Your mission. Help me to see Jesus clearly and grow in my knowledge of You each day. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Hebrews 1:3
Monday	John 12:20-50; Psalm 85:6-13; Proverbs 16:27-29
Tuesday	John 13:1-30; Psalm 86:1-6; Proverbs 16:30-33
Wednesday	John 13:31-14:14; Psalm 86:7-17; Proverbs 17:1-2
Thursday	John 14:15-15:17; Psalm 87; Proverbs 17:3-5
Friday	John 15:18-16:15; Psalm 88:1-7; Proverbs 17:6-9
Saturday	John 16:16-33; Psalm 88:8-18; Proverbs 17:10-12

DEVOTIONAL: READ HEBREWS 1:3

In order to see Jesus clearly, we must think rightly about Him theologically. Jesus exists as a member of the Trinity. The word Trinity is the word we use to describe that there is only one true God, existing as a single being, yet comprised of three persons who are equal in every way. They are distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity. The three persons of the Trinity are God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The teaching of the Trinity can be broken down into three statements: God is three persons; each person is fully God; there is one God.

This attribute of God is mysterious, and different than any other thing in the known world. While the word “Trinity” isn’t in our Bible, there are implications of it throughout the Scriptures. The Trinity is unique, profound, and difficult to explain. Yet, it is necessary to

understand for sound doctrine. One theologian said it this way, “Try to explain the Trinity and you will lose your mind; but try to deny it and you will lose your soul.”

It is absolutely critical to see Jesus as divine through the lens of this doctrine. Only a divine being is capable of supernatural signs and wonders. Only a divine being is capable of living a perfectly sinless life. Only a divine being could bear the full wrath of our sin. Only a divine being is worthy of our trust, faith, worship, and prayer.

Jesus, the Son of God, is fully divine! He is equal to the Father in His being, yet Jesus is distinct from the Father in His role. Hebrews 1:3 says, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”

REFLECTION

Why is the doctrine of the Trinity difficult to fully grasp or explain? How would you explain it to someone?

How would you explain the different roles of each member of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Why is it critical to believe that Jesus is fully divine and not just another human?

DISCUSSION

Have you had any conversations about Jesus lately?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, You are the true and exact expression of His nature. We believe that You sustain everything by Your powerful Word.

Lord, You are beyond comprehension! Being divinely distinct from Your creation, no comparison can be fully adequate. You are the One, true God. Lord, give me understanding, a love for You, and faith to trust in You.

Thank You, Jesus, for meeting us here on earth. Thank You, Jesus, for dwelling among us so that we may see the true and right way to live. Thank You, Jesus, for dying, bearing our sin so that we might be free.

Jesus, we acknowledge that You are the rightful ruler and authority in our lives. Jesus, teach us to trust and follow You in all things. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Hebrews 2:17-18
Monday	Philippians 2:1-11; Psalm 89:1-4; Proverbs 17:13-15
Tuesday	John 17:1-26; Psalm 89:5-11; Proverbs 17:16-18
Wednesday	Romans 1:1-7; Psalm 89:12-17; Proverbs 17:19-21
Thursday	Romans 1:8-15; Psalm 89:18-26; Proverbs 17:22-24
Friday	Romans 1:16-32; Psalm 89:27-33; Proverbs 17:25-28
Saturday	Romans 2:1-11; Psalm 89:34-41; Proverbs 18:1-3

DEVOTIONAL: READ HEBREWS 2:17-18

When Jesus came to earth, He became a man just like us. While still being fully God as part of the Trinity, He also became fully man. He didn't just appear human but experienced human life fully. Because of this, we can trust that Jesus is able to understand and fully empathize with us.

In Hebrews, it says that He became our merciful High Priest. A priest was someone who stood between God and humans. The priest represented God's purposes to the people and the needs of the people to God. However, like so many human leaders, the priests of Israel failed. Human priests were themselves in need of saving. There was no one who could adequately speak for fallen people. No one understood the pain of their brokenness.

Then came Jesus. Because He is perfect and without our fallen nature, He can serve God without corruption.

He deserves to be our priest and can perfectly represent God to us.

Yet, because He was human, He understands. He knows what it's like to be you. Have you been betrayed? He understands. Have you felt shame? He understands. Have you been condemned? Have you been abused? Have you been disappointed? Have you been scared, lonely, tired, angry, or overwhelmed? He understands.

He experienced all the pain and consequences of our fallen world without ever giving into any of its temptations. We could never reach God on our own. So God came to us. He sat with us. He walked among us. And to this day, we can come close to a God who understands. Nothing we share will ever shock or embarrass Him. He knows. He knows what it's like to be you. He understands.

REFLECTION

Why is it important that God became fully human?

Does Jesus seem approachable to you? Does He seem like someone you could be vulnerable with? Why or why not? What shapes how you see Him?

What is something you are dealing with that seems particularly difficult right now? Jesus understands! Confess that to Him and invite Him to help you. Consider bringing someone else to walk alongside you.

DISCUSSION

Who are people in your life you can talk about anything with?

PRAYER

Jesus, I want to look more like You. Too often, following the system of this world, I try to promote myself. I try to get more, be better, rise through the ranks, and find my worth in myself and what others think of me.

But You, humble King, did not consider equality with God something to use to Your own advantage. You chose to step into this world to seek out the hurting, the hiding, the lost... people, like me. You extended a hand of empathy toward broken sinners living without hope. People, like me. You understand everything I experience and what it means to live in a broken world. I know that I can trust You and bring my feelings, thoughts, fears, and brokenness to You. You understand.

I cannot comprehend this compassion. I cannot imagine giving up the glory of heaven to live among sinners like me in this fallen world. But You are the definition of love, and You are relentless in Your pursuit of those in need. Break my heart for the hurting around me, mend it again in Your love, and fill it with Your compassion for the brokenness around me. Help me look more like You. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Isaiah 53
Monday	Daniel 3:26-30; Psalm 89:42-52; Proverbs 18:4-6
Tuesday	Romans 2:12-3:8; Psalm 90:1-7; Proverbs 18:7-10
Wednesday	Romans 3:9-31; Psalm 90:8-17; Proverbs 18:11-13
Thursday	Romans 4:1-12; Psalm 91; Proverbs 18:14-16
Friday	Romans 4:13-25; Psalm 92:1-6; Proverbs 18:17-19
Saturday	Romans 5:1-21; Psalm 92:7-15; Proverbs 18:20-22

DEVOTIONAL: READ ISAIAH 53

To see Jesus clearly, we must not only look at the New Testament (when He walked on earth as a man) but the Old Testament as well. From Genesis onward there are moments that point clearly to Jesus coming to redeem the world.

Sometimes it seems the entire Old Testament is filled with a strangely contradictory message. At times it paints a beautifully optimistic and redemptive picture about what God would do in the world through His people. Other times, the Scriptures scream out in despair concerning the human condition and God's plan to judge humanity. It is a growing tension between the hope of restoration and the promise of judgment.

This tension builds near the end of the book of Isaiah with a series of songs about the Servant of God. In Isaiah 53, this perfect Servant is rejected by all people and suffers humiliation. As He experienced extreme pain, Israel

concluded He was being judged by God for His sin. However, He was not being punished for His own sin but for theirs. He was pierced, stricken, afflicted, crushed, and punished in our place. His suffering would bring healing to God's people. Somehow, this was God's plan. The Servant would die in our place and for our salvation, and then after suffering death, He would live again.

This song is a sobering account of what the Servant would endure, yet it was written over 600 years before Jesus was born! God promised to redeem all of humanity through the line of Israel, but they were stubborn and rebellious. There was only one way for God to execute His rescue plan through Israel: God had to become an Israelite. The perfect Israelite. The ideal Servant. The two themes of restoration and judgment collide in the Suffering Servant of Israel, Jesus our Lord. And by His wounds, we are healed!

REFLECTION

How is Jesus the hero of the Old Testament?

Have you ever struggled to connect the Old Testament stories to the New Testament faith in Jesus? How does seeing Jesus as the culmination of the story help to connect the dots?

How would it change the way you lived this week if you saw Jesus as the hero of your story and yourself as a supporting character in His story? How would you tell your story with Jesus as the main character?

DISCUSSION

Did you grow up hearing stories from the Bible? What's your favorite?

PRAYER

Father, You have had a plan since the beginning of time to redeem the world You have created! You are loving and sovereign over this world.

Thank You for bearing my sin and shame on the cross. Thank You for taking my punishment. I am sorry when I fail to remember what You accomplished for me. It is not because of anything I have done; it is because You freely gave Yourself in obedience to the Father and in love for those who rejected You.

Conform me to Your image, gracious Master. Teach me to be familiar with suffering, and help me consider it a joy to suffer on Your behalf. Teach me to not complain and help me trust that You, the Suffering Servant, will guide me to joy eternal. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Romans 3:21-26
Monday	John 1:29-34; Psalm 93; Proverbs 18:23-24
Tuesday	Romans 6:1-14; Psalm 94:1-9; Proverbs 19:1-4
Wednesday	Romans 6:15-7:6; Psalm 94:10-23; Proverbs 19:5-7
Thursday	Romans 7:7-8:11; Psalm 95:1-4; Proverbs 19:8-11
Friday	Romans 8:12-30; Psalm 95:5-11; Proverbs 19:12-15
Saturday	Romans 8:31-39; Psalm 96:1-5; Proverbs 19:16-18

DEVOTIONAL: READ ROMANS 3:21-26

The saving work of Jesus is the central message of the Bible from its beginning to its end. In Genesis 22, the ram provided for sacrifice illustrates that God would one day send His only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. In Revelation, it is Jesus who announces His intention to take the world back from the power of Satan. Paul tells us in Romans 3:21-22 that righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other! He alone is the hero who can save.

This saving work of God's grace, made possible by the shedding of Christ's blood, is available to all. God tells us plainly that our sin has caused us to fall short of God's standard of righteousness. Our ability to do good things is never enough to earn or deserve forgiveness for our sin. We fall

woefully short. But thanks be to God; He made a way!

Just as our sin left us wholly unworthy of forgiveness, God demonstrated His righteousness by presenting Christ as our atoning sacrifice. Our sins that stand between us and God are erased from our account when we place our trust in Him. Our minds have difficulty grasping such a gift, but God did this to demonstrate His righteousness and the absolute necessity of faith in Jesus to reconcile our standing with Him.

When we err to think "the story" is about us, it is important to remember that God's focus is not our sin but His righteousness. Jesus is the hero and main character. By His work on the cross we are saved and able to enter into His redemptive story.

REFLECTION

What is God's standard for redemption? How do you measure up?

How does it make you feel that Jesus died in your place, making peace with God possible? Was Jesus' decision to offer His life for you a result of anything that you did?

How are you able to play a role in God's redemptive plan for all of the world? What are you doing to take part in that plan this week?

DISCUSSION

Who is someone in your life that needs prayer?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for being so good to me that You would want to free me of my sin. Thank You, Jesus, for experiencing my punishment once and for all so that I could be counted righteous. Help me to live the new life that You made possible through your death—free and victorious.

I want my life to be about You and Your glory. Only You can save anyone from the punishment of their sin. Use me as a part of Your redemptive plan for my friends, family, neighbors, community, and the world. Give me opportunities to talk about You, wisdom to see those opportunities, and boldness to share the gospel.

Thank You that through Jesus, I can be called a child of God. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Ephesians 2:1-10
Monday	I John 5:6-12; Psalm 96:6-13; Proverbs 19:19-22
Tuesday	Romans 9:1-29; Psalm 97; Proverbs 19:23-25
Wednesday	Romans 9:30-10:21; Psalm 98; Proverbs 19:26-29
Thursday	Romans 11:1-10; Psalm 99; Proverbs 20:1-3
Friday	Romans 11:11-36; Psalm 100; Proverbs 20:4-6
Saturday	Romans 12:1-8; Psalm 101; Proverbs 20:7-9

DEVOTIONAL: READ EPHESIANS 2:1-10

There are many passages throughout the Bible that give a clear picture of the gospel: Jesus came to this earth and died for sinners so that we may have eternal life in Him. One great example is Paul's writing in Ephesians 2. Paul tells us that at one time everyone was dead in their transgressions and sins. We were still wandering about—breathing, laughing, and playing—following “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), but we were dead to God. While we were all once this way, those who have not yet called on the name of Jesus are still living this way, never looking up to acknowledge the reality of God. For those who live life in this manner, there is no hope beyond what this world has to offer and they live in the shadow of God's wrath. The ruler of the kingdom of the air continues to be at work to

distract them from the abundant life that God offers.

Paul then makes a destiny-altering transition in Ephesians 2:4-5: “But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...” Those who believe in Christ have been made alive! God is not stingy with His mercy. Mercy overflows and is available for all who will receive it through His equally abundant grace. Mercy is when we don't get what we truly deserve—punishment for our sin. Grace is when we get what we don't deserve—eternal life with Him.

Twice in these ten verses Paul reiterates that it is “by grace you have been saved.” Grace excludes any contribution on our behalf. It is simply a gift of God that is made available for us to receive.

REFLECTION

Do you recall what it felt like to be spiritually dead, thinking you were alive? What has changed since that time? Or if you have not yet accepted Christ's invitation of grace and mercy, what is hindering you from receiving this gift?

In light of God's free gift of grace, how do you express gratitude to God?

In Ephesians 2:10 it says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." What do you think are those good works you are intended to do, and how are you living that out?

DISCUSSION

What is something you hope for in your future?

PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for being so rich in mercy that You gave Your only Son, Jesus, that I might have life. When I was lost in darkness, You brought eternal light. When I was trapped in dead-end ways of life, You provided an escape. Though my spirit was dead, You breathed life into me. Your love made a way.

Jesus, thank You for becoming the way, the truth, and the life. Moved with compassion and motivated by mercy, You sacrificed Your life to bring us into relationship with God. Your life, death, and resurrection have become my salvation.

Until You come to finish the good work You've begun in me, I ask that You continue saving me this day, Lord. Save me from my wanderings. Save me from my pride. Save me from jealousy, greed, lust, and every kind of evil. I need You today. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Ephesians 1:22-23
Monday	Colossians 1:15-23; Psalm 102:1-4; Proverbs 20:10-12
Tuesday	Romans 12:9-13:7; Psalm 102:5-12; Proverbs 20:13-16
Wednesday	Romans 13:8-14; Psalm 102:13-19; Proverbs 20:17-19
Thursday	Romans 14:1-12; Psalm 102:20-28; Proverbs 20:20-22
Friday	Romans 14:13-15:7; Psalm 103:1-5; Proverbs 20:23-25
Saturday	Romans 15:8-13; Psalm 103:6-12; Proverbs 20:26-28

DEVOTIONAL: READ EPHESIANS 1:22-23

When we think of Christ, we often look at His death and resurrection as His saving work on our behalf but fail to see His ongoing work on our behalf after the stories of the Gospels end. Christ came to reclaim that which had been lost; where sin entered and disrupted, Christ stood to restore order and authority. His sacrificial act of love and obedience made peace with God possible for us; His resurrection from the dead and supreme victory over death proved that He is the Lord over everything and that lordship continues today.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul is clearly establishing the authority of Christ, not only over the whole of creation, but more specifically, His authority over the Church as we know it today. As the Lord of creation and the Head of the Church, His blessings go

beyond the grave, extending from this moment on into eternity. Every day, He is making all things new and bringing us one day closer to His return, where He will fully restore all that sin has tried to ruin.

Christ is still active as Head of the Church today. This means that Christ rules over the Church by His Word and by His Spirit. The Church cannot exist without Christ and we cannot hope for future restoration without recognizing Him as Lord of all. As we live between His resurrection and His return, may we daily submit to Jesus just as He submitted to His Father and live in the freedom He brings today. We must recognize Him as not only the Christ of the cross, and the Christ of the Second Coming, but also the Christ that stands as Head today.

REFLECTION

What does it mean for Christ to be Head of the Church today? What does it mean for Christ to be “Lord of all” in your life specifically?

In what ways have you limited the role of Christ in your life?

If Christ is Head of the Church, why is it important that we are committed to the local church? How can you be more committed to your church?

DISCUSSION

What do you find most attractive about Christianity/the Person of Christ? What do you find least attractive about Christianity/the Person of Christ?

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, You are over all things, including me. I pray that Your Spirit would rule over my life, that everything I do would be honoring to You. Lead me in my work. Lead my family. Lead me in how I spend my time and my money. Lead me in the way I serve, love other people, and interact with the church.

God, You are Head of the Church. We are humble servants to You and Your mission; please let nothing get in the way of that. Remove our pride and anything that makes the church become about our agenda rather than Yours. Remove any disunity among Your children, and help us to love one another in a way that points people to You. Remove any barriers between our church and those who don't know You. Lead us by Your Spirit as we seek to follow You.

Help me to be committed to You, committed to my brothers and sisters in Christ, and committed to seeing the family of believers grow continually. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Mark 13:32-37
Monday	I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Psalm 103:13-22; Proverbs 20:29-30
Tuesday	Romans 15:14-33; Psalm 104:1-7; Proverbs 21:1-4
Wednesday	Romans 16:1-23; Psalm 104:8-17; Proverbs 21:5-7
Thursday	Romans 16:24-27; Psalm 104:18-25; Proverbs 21:8-11
Friday	Acts 1:1-26; Psalm 104:26-35; Proverbs 21:12-14
Saturday	Acts 2:1-41; Psalm 105:1-10; Proverbs 21:15-17

DEVOTIONAL: READ MARK 13:32-37

The Bible says that Jesus will return, although nobody knows when He will come back. Explaining this to His disciples, Jesus told a story about a master who left on a journey and gave two things to his workers: a promise that he would return one day and responsibility over his work. Each servant had their own specific task to accomplish. They alone had ownership over what the master had given them. He warned the workers to keep watch because the master could come back at any time. They would not want the master to arrive finding that they had done nothing with their tasks, or worse, for him to find them sleeping.

Anticipating His departure from this earth, Jesus uses this story to reiterate the disciples' need to be alert and ready. In His absence they should be actively working to see their His mission

accomplished as if He were to return at any moment.

Today, we are given the same charge to be alert and ready for Jesus to return at any time. Nobody knows the day or time that He will return. Until He does, we are able to live out His mission as if He were coming back today. As followers of Jesus, we each have a specific responsibility in the work of knowing Jesus and making Him known to a world in desperate need of Him. Do you know the work Jesus has given you? If you do, are you following it? Because the truth is this: our Master is coming back. Will we be working to complete His mission of restoring all things under His good and just reign, or will we be asleep when He comes? May we be people who are working for the coming kingdom as we look forward to our Master's return!

REFLECTION

Do you think that Jesus has specific work that He wants you to do? What do you think it is (or how can you process this if you aren't sure)? How are you seeking to see this accomplished every day?

Scripture promises Jesus is returning. How does that truth impact the way you live your life now?

Jesus calls His disciples to be "on guard" and to "stay awake." Is there a conversation with a friend or loved one about the gospel that you have been putting off? What steps can you take this week to begin that conversation?

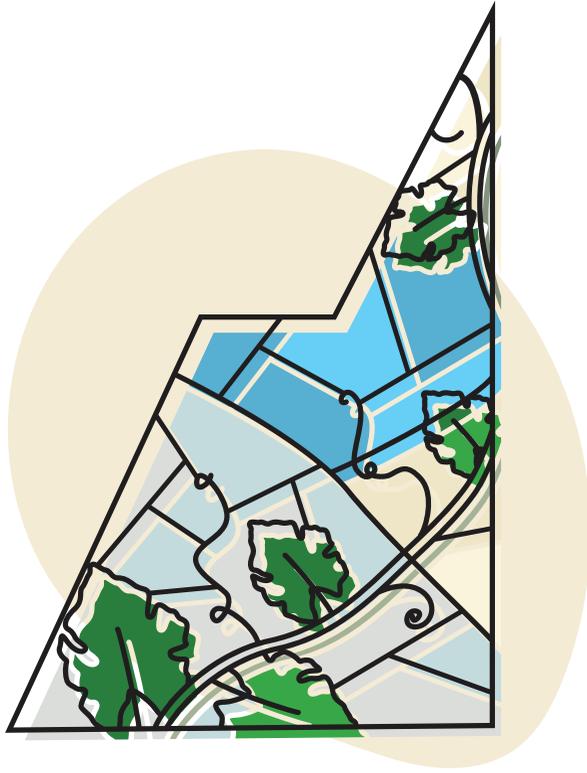
DISCUSSION

What do you think gives meaning to someone's life?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to not lose focus. Let me not grow lazy. Thank You for the opportunities that You have given me to be a part of Your ministry in the world. Don't let me overlook, ignore, or delay any opportunities You have given me to glorify You. Help me make the most of my life for Your name and Your kingdom. I know the time will come when You will return and make all things new. Until that day give me strength and perseverance that I might remain faithful.

Help me keep in step with Your Spirit so that I will not grow weary in doing good. Protect me from the temptations of this world as I long for the greatest good and deepest satisfaction of Your kingdom to come. May You be the center of my life, Lord. Guard me in Your presence. Make me aware of Your presence in my daily life while keeping me watchful and expectant of Your final coming, when You will make all things new. Amen.



C H U R C H

INTRODUCTION

At Fellowship, our vision is “to change the heart and soul of Northwest Arkansas and the world.” Our mission statement for how we intend to accomplish our vision is “to produce and release spiritual leaders who know and express the authentic Christ to Northwest Arkansas and the world.” We want to see people come to know Jesus and live out their mission of making disciples here and throughout all nations. Although we have crafted the words of our mission statement in a very intentional way, the idea isn’t anything new. We want to do what Jesus commissioned His followers to do before He ascended into heaven. We look to the Scriptures to be our guide and model for how the church is to be present in the world today.

As we consider our calling as a church, we will study the first-century Church with a key question in mind: What does it look like to see Jesus change lives, communities, cities, and the world? To answer this, we will investigate the stories of the early Church, recorded for us in the Book of Acts. Each week we will look at a specific church in a specific city.

It is our desire to be a church actively seeing the gospel spread in our day. We pray that God would tear down the idols of sex, power, money, and greed in our city and reconcile people to Himself. Join us in praying the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-21, that God would do immeasurably more in our cities in our own day than we could ever ask or think. As we enter the fall, it is our hope to pray bigger, dream bigger, and hope bigger than we ever have before that Jesus can and will, through the power of the Holy Spirit, make Himself known through the lives of His people, the Church.

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

Acts 1:8—"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."

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

Blessing prayers are prayers in which we ask God to be present in someone's life. Pray a blessing prayer over each of your children every night as you put them to bed. A good example is found in Numbers 6:24-26, "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." Amen.

PRACTICE — WORSHIP

Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This activity is designed to help you as parents understand your role in family discipleship. Read through this passage of scripture. What is the first command that Moses gives? Who must first love God? What follows that command? Write down the four times Moses instructs the children of Israel to discuss their faith with their children. Brainstorm ideas for discussing your faith with your children during each of those times.

Sit in Your House. Study after study has shown the importance of dinner time in the life of a family. From increasing vocabulary to lower rates of drug use, the benefits of dinner time are expansive. It is an excellent opportunity to discuss the core beliefs and values your family holds. You can also discuss your highs and lows from the day, and you can talk about how you saw God work in your life or what God taught you that day.

Walk Along the Way. Many of us spend large amounts of time in the car. You can use this time to prepare your kids' hearts and minds for wherever you are going. If you are headed to a sporting event, encourage them to ask God to help them display the Fruit of the Spirit as they play. If you are driving to school, ask God to help them be a light to the kids in their class that day. Also, you can download some episodes of "Adventures in Odyssey" from Focus on the Family. These radio dramas provide great topics for conversation, and they are fun to listen to!

When You Lie Down. As kids are settling down for bed, often their hearts are more tender than at other times of the day. Bedtime is a great opportunity for you to ask how you can pray for them. You may need to be prepared with some pointed questions, such as, "Has anything difficult happened at school lately?" or "What is one thing you are worried about?" Use this time to draw close to them and assure them you are here to help them in life. This is not the time to instruct them but a time to connect with their heart.

When You Rise. In the morning, things can become hectic as we work to get everyone ready for the day. You can redeem this time by memorizing a verse together. Have each person take a turn at saying the memory verse. You can also have calm worship music playing to help focus your hearts and minds on God. Before you rush out the door to get in the car, have everyone gather by the front door and ask God to bless the day ahead.

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

Root Beer Float Day. Celebrating random holidays can be a fun family tradition. August 6 is National Root Beer Float Day. Celebrate with your family by making root beer floats after dinner. You could even go to the dollar store and buy fun glasses or silly straws to help you enjoy your floats!

Visit the Amazeum. Take your family to the Amazeum Children's Museum in Bentonville. Most Wednesdays are "Priceless Nights" where guests can attend for free or a small donation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

"Shema/Listen" | thebibleproject.com/explore/shema-listen/

"Family Dinner Games & Discussion Questions" | thefamilydinnerproject.org

Exploring Grace Together: 40 Devotionals for the Family by Jessica Thompson

"Know God: A 28-Day Devotional Experience for Kids" | store.thinkorange.com

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 2:42-47
Monday	Acts 3:1-26; Psalm 105:11-17; Proverbs 21:18-20
Tuesday	Acts 4:1-22; Psalm 105:18-26; Proverbs 21:21-24
Wednesday	Acts 4:23-31; Psalm 105:27-34; Proverbs 21:25-27
Thursday	Acts 4:32-37; Psalm 105:35-45; Proverbs 21:28-31
Friday	Acts 5:1-11; Psalm 106:1-6; Proverbs 22:1-3
Saturday	Acts 5:12-16; Psalm 106:7-14; Proverbs 22:4-6

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 2:42-47

At the beginning of Acts, everything is new. Jesus had ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit had arrived, and the church had begun. This was a new way of living for a new people having been given new life! In Acts 2, Peter preached his Holy Spirit empowered sermon and 3,000 people came to know the Lord. The Jerusalem church was born. Acts 2:42-47 gives us a picture of the early church and key insights into the activities of the earliest followers of Jesus.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They were hungry to learn about the Messiah. They heard teachings of how Jesus completely fulfilled the Messianic promises of the Old Testament.

Beyond just learning, they had fellowship. They were together. They enjoyed having companions in their new faith-walk with Jesus. They prayed together and observed communion, referred to as the breaking of bread.

They served each other sacrificially. They gathered at the temple for worship and teaching, and then they went into their homes to share a meal. They were glad to share and grateful to receive, as each contributed what they could. Day by day, more and more people wanted to be a part of this new way of life.

Still today, Christians gather to hear God's Word, the Bible, taught and explained. Believers still break bread together and remember what Jesus has done. We still share with those in need and try to care for those in our community of faith. We still gather in homes and share meals together, generously offering what God has given us and gratefully receiving what others bring. The church still makes a positive contribution to neighborhoods and communities, and God is still adding to the numbers of those who know Him. May we be characterized this same way in our churches, communities, and personal lives today!

REFLECTION

How is the Jerusalem church, experienced in Acts 2:42-47, similar to your church experience? How is it different? What could you personally do to make your church more like that one?

Why do you think the early Christians met in the temple (large group) and in homes (small group)? What are some things that can only be accomplished in a large group, and what are some things you can only do in small groups?

What areas do you see practiced in the early church that you could engage in more? What steps can you take this week to pursue that?

DISCUSSION

What has your experience with church been like?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for giving Your Church a mission and giving my life a purpose. My King, give me a fire for Your kingdom. Give me an urgency to see Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Lead me to obey the tug of Your Spirit on my heart, following the example of early believers.

Lead me to place the needs of others above my own for Your glory. Lead me away from distractions and desires that are not Yours. Don't let my heart become selfish or materialistic, but show me how to be generous with the blessings You have given me. Give me an undivided heart, passionate to pursue Your will.

Your will is to build Your kingdom through broken people who humbly surrender their lives to You. Lead me to love You and others according to Your will, not mine! Please create in me a heart that simply desires You, Lord. Continue to establish and grow Your Church throughout the entire world. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 5:17-32
Monday	Acts 5:33-6:7; Psalm 106:15-21; Proverbs 22:7-10
Tuesday	Acts 6:8-7:60; Psalm 106:22-29; Proverbs 22:11-13
Wednesday	Acts 8:1-40; Psalm 106:30-39; Proverbs 22:14-16
Thursday	Acts 9:1-43; Psalm 106:40-48; Proverbs 22:17-19
Friday	Acts 10:1-43; Psalm 107:1-6; Proverbs 22:20-22
Saturday	Acts 10:44-11:18; Psalm 107:7-13; Proverbs 22:23-25

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 5:17-32

The earliest days of the Jerusalem church were tumultuous times. The excitement of seeing 3,000 people come to Christ (Acts 2:41) was quickly followed by the arrest of the church's leadership (Acts 5:18). The night they were imprisoned, an angel of the Lord released them and they were back in the temple courts proclaiming the name of Jesus the next morning. When the high priest rebuked them for returning to the activity that got them imprisoned, Peter gave the memorable reply, "We must obey God rather than human beings" (Acts 5:29).

Peter then gives a bold proclamation of the gospel. He tells them of the death of Christ, His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and His rightful place as "Leader and Savior." The message that had caused this uproar was the same

message that Peter delivered to the people of Israel: Jesus died and was resurrected for the forgiveness of sins. The apostles were bearing witness just as Jesus had commissioned them (Acts 1:8). Along with their witness was the witness of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).

Today, followers of Jesus have that same Holy Spirit. We have that same commitment to tell people what Jesus has done. We are called to obey God rather than men as we boldly share the good news that Jesus Christ died to set us free from our sins. Later in the passage, the apostles rejoiced because "they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus]" (Acts 5:41). May we value Jesus and His message of grace more than we value our own comfort, safety, and freedom.

REFLECTION

Where do you see yourself having to choose between obeying God and obeying people? Why is that sometimes a difficult decision to make?

What fears do you have of proclaiming the gospel boldly? Is it worth overcoming those fears for others to know about Jesus? What can you do now to overcome those fears? (Consider taking a class with Fellowship this semester. You can visit register.fellowshipnwa.org to sign up.)

Is the gospel controversial today? Why or why not? Who tries to silence the message of Jesus in your world?

DISCUSSION

How do you see Christianity as unique in the world today?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Your will is perfect. There is nothing that could be added or taken away to improve upon Your plan. In the name of King Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I surrender my will to Yours. Make my desires like Your desires. I want to love what You love and hate what You hate.

O God Almighty, Who sees and knows all, help me to discern where my true allegiance lies! Any side apart from You is doomed to fail, no matter how strong the opposition seems and how oppressed Your people feel at times. Don't let me choose the ways of the world over Your way. I want to please You above anyone else.

Seeking You is worth far more than anything this world can offer. Give me the strength and grace to endure suffering, mockery, or ridicule because of following You. My identity is secure in being a child of God, redeemed from sin through the work of Jesus Christ. Help me to live in that identity every day, knowing that is where true and lasting joy, peace, love, and fulfillment can be found. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 11:19-30
Monday	Acts 12:1-25; Psalm 107:14-21; Proverbs 22:26-29
Tuesday	Acts 13:1-12; Psalm 107:22-32; Proverbs 23:1-3
Wednesday	Acts 13:13-52; Psalm 107:33-36; Proverbs 23:4-6
Thursday	Acts 14:1-28; Psalm 107:37-43; Proverbs 23:7-10
Friday	Acts 15:1-35; Psalm 108; Proverbs 23:11-13
Saturday	Acts 15:36-16:10; Psalm 109:1-7; Proverbs 23:14-16

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 11:19-30

When the early church was being persecuted and undergoing great pressure, they reacted in many ways. Some chose to preach only to the Jews and not much is said about them. However, some of the believers chose to preach the Lord Jesus in the toughest places. The result? “The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

The church at Antioch began to grow in astounding numbers. Barnabas and Saul taught “a great many people” for a whole year, and the name of Jesus was made great. What started this movement? It wasn't a charismatic teacher, a gifted worship leader, or even a community group full of healthy marriages and families. It was a few

faithful followers who stepped out of comfort for a greater purpose.

They were dangerous for the Lord. They were passionate for the Lord. These believers were willing to suffer at any cost for the sake of Jesus. It's only appropriate that this is the place that followers of Jesus were first called Christians. This wasn't a self-ascribed title. It was given to them.

A simple, yet often unstated fact about following Jesus is that we will constantly be pushed beyond our limits. We will all face moments when we must ask ourselves, “Am I willing to face the consequences of following Jesus?” When we choose to say “yes,” some of the greatest movements for the gospel happen.

REFLECTION

Why do Christians not have to live in fear?

Would others describe you as someone intentionally living out your faith in Jesus?
What does that say about your walk with Jesus?

What do you feel God may be asking you to do that you find difficult? Why would it be worth the cost of what it might take? What steps can you take to be a part of God's plans this week? Who can you invite to come alongside you?

DISCUSSION

When was a time you have had to step out of your comfort zone and take part in something challenging to you?

PRAYER

God, You have promised to be with me in times of trouble, times of hardship, and even times of persecution. I know that I can trust You. You are faithful to keep Your promises. You understand what it feels like to be persecuted, mocked, and to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Don't let me idolize my comfort. Never let me put my comfort above You and Your mission.

Give me grace to cling only to You. Give me a clear mind and heart, so that when brothers and sisters around me endure trying times, I may provide encouragement, support, and love, through the grace and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lord, use me and my church to reach the unreached near and far, that people from every nation would know You.

Don't let me live in fear and shame, Lord. You see me, love me, and have invited me into Your mission. You have given me all that I need to live for You, so please lead me by Your Spirit. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 16:11-40
Monday	Philippians 1:1-18; Psalm 109:8-18; Proverbs 23:17-19
Tuesday	Philippians 1:19-2:11; Psalm 109:19-23; Proverbs 23:20-23
Wednesday	Philippians 2:12-30; Psalm 109:24-31; Proverbs 23:24-26
Thursday	Philippians 3:1-4:1; Psalm 110; Proverbs 23:27-29
Friday	Philippians 4:2-23; Psalm 111; Proverbs 23:30-32
Saturday	Acts 17:1-15; Psalm 112; Proverbs 23:33-35

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 16:11-40

Throughout their ministry, Paul and Silas knew that following Jesus was counter-cultural, but they were seeing the Lord work. Arriving in Philippi, they saw a woman and her family trust in Jesus. Then they cast a demon out of a young slave girl. However, the slave girl's masters had been profiting from her demonic oppression so they had Paul and Silas thrown in jail.

Unclothed, bruised, and humiliated, Paul and Silas' reactions at this time were counter-cultural: they prayed and sang hymns to God. They had gratitude in the midst of pain, and the Lord wasn't finished with them. A great earthquake shook the prison to the point of releasing the locks on their doors and shackles.

Paul and Silas did not see their new freedom as an opportunity to escape unjust imprisonment. Instead, they saw

it as a chance to share the love of Jesus with those around them. They showed grace to their own jailer, and the result of their counter-cultural reaction was the conversion of a whole family into the family of God.

While counter-cultural decisions may lead to persecution, they are also the catalysts for changing lives. The people of this world see godly character and they crave righteousness. However, that desire will often not move to action until they see it in action elsewhere. Followers of Christ have the opportunity and responsibility to model integrity, character, and a life that contrasts the ways of this world. As Jesus says in Matthew 5, we are "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." This light cannot be contained. Its source is the true Light—Jesus. Our counter-cultural lives reflect the Creator in a world that desperately needs Him.

REFLECTION

Why is it worth being counter-cultural to follow Jesus?

What are the values of our culture today? What are the values of the Bible? How are they the same and how are they different?

In what areas of your life do you find yourself compromising your walk with the Lord in order to fit in with the world?

DISCUSSION

What are the things you want to be known for?

PRAYER

Jesus, Your love knows no limits. There are no boundaries to Your compassion. Help me see people the way You see them. Help me remember that underneath layers of hate, judgment, and indifference, everyone is created in Your image. Everyone wants to be known and wants to be loved.

Give me the courage to love those who seem far from You. Remove my bias and preconceived notions that cause me to distance myself from others. Remind me that hurting people need You and that I need You. Show me again how irresistible Your love is by softening and changing my heart. Increase my empathy, compassion, and love. Make me more like You. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 17:16-34
Monday	Acts 18:1-17; Psalm 113; Proverbs 24:1-5
Tuesday	Acts 18:18-38; Psalm 114; Proverbs 24:6-8
Wednesday	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12; Psalm 115:1-8; Proverbs 24:9-11
Thursday	2 Thessalonians 2:1-17; Psalm 115:9-18; Proverbs 24:12-14
Friday	2 Thessalonians 3:1-18; Psalm 116:1-8; Proverbs 24:15-17
Saturday	Acts 19:1-22; Psalm 116:9-19; Proverbs 24:18-19

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 17:16-34

The city of Athens was renowned as the center of culture and philosophy in the Greek world, but Paul looked around and saw a city obsessed with idol worship. There was a place of worship for everything because the Athenians wanted to make sure they didn't offend anyone or any gods.

Paul was dealing with similar thoughts that we may encounter today: "All paths lead to God" or "What's right for you may not be right for me." Paul was distressed that the Athenians were so misguided, so he reasoned with them to show them the truth. He approached them in a way that they would understand, but never wavered in teaching the truth.

Scripture states that the two groups debating with him were the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans were selfish and believed that pleasure

was the highest aspiration, happiness was most important, the gods weren't interested in human affairs, and there was nothing after death. The Stoics were prideful and stressed self-sufficiency and rational thought. They believed God was in everything and they could do everything by themselves.

So, Paul shared the truth of salvation through Christ in a loving and uncompromising way. He taught that God is Creator (v. 24), Provider (v. 25), Ruler (vv. 26-29), and Savior (vv. 30-34). Not all who listened had a positive response to the gospel. Some rejected, some procrastinated, but others became followers and believed; the church in Athens was born. May we strive to share the truth of Christ in a loving and gentle way, so that through God's grace, some may repent and believe.

REFLECTION

What do most people in our culture believe about God and mankind?

Do you find it difficult to engage in spiritual conversations? Why or why not? What can you do to practice this skill this week?

How can you discuss truth with someone you disagree with in a graceful and loving way? Why is this important?

DISCUSSION

How would the world look different without the church? How would Northwest Arkansas look different?

PRAYER

O God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, You are completely sovereign and self-sufficient, and You don't need a single thing from me. As David confesses in Psalm 8:3-4, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

Yet, You care in ways that are so far beyond my comprehension. You give everyone life, breath, everything. In You, we live and have a significance that no one can take away from us. How dreadful it is when I place other things above You; You deserve to be at the center of my life. Please forgive me when I choose lesser things. Forgive me when I defile my heart with idols that promise temporary pleasure. Salvation is found in no one else but You. My purpose is found entirely in You. By Your Spirit, may I live out of that purpose acknowledging You alone as Lord. Help me adjust my life to Your plan, knowing that in us, You see something worth saving. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	Acts 19:23-41
Monday	Ephesians 1:1-14; Psalm 117; Proverbs 24:20-22
Tuesday	Ephesians 1:15-2:10; Psalm 118:1-8; Proverbs 24:23-26
Wednesday	Ephesians 2:11-3:21; Psalm 118:9-19; Proverbs 24:27-30
Thursday	Ephesians 4:1-32; Psalm 118:20-23; Proverbs 24:31-34
Friday	Ephesians 5:1-6:4; Psalm 118:24-29; Proverbs 25:1-2
Saturday	Ephesians 6:5-24; Psalm 119:1-8; Proverbs 25:3-5

DEVOTIONAL: READ ACTS 19:23-41

As the gospel continued to spread in the early church and more people put their trust in Jesus, everyday life was being disrupted. People were hearing about Jesus and their lives were being transformed. Cultural practices, business pursuits, and religious beliefs were being challenged by the Word of God.

Some people saw the gospel's influence as negative. The city of Ephesus was a center of commerce and well known for its temple of worship for the goddess Artemis. Many people made their living through the worship of Artemis, including the making and selling of idols. As people began to worship Jesus, the idol-makers were losing money and the gospel preacher, Paul, was the instigator.

The transformational power of Jesus gave Paul the courage to challenge

cultural influences and beliefs. Paul stood firm because he had personally experienced what Jesus had done in his life and was still doing in the lives of others throughout the region.

Believing in Jesus changes everything! It changes how we think, what we do, and the way we love ourselves and others. Just like in Ephesus, following Jesus is still counter-cultural and flows against secular beliefs and ungodly practices. Yet, just like it did with the Ephesians, the gospel continues to change people's lives, even in the midst of suffering.

Jesus offers us the same peace He gave Paul. A peace that transcends culture, circumstances, or feelings. A peace found only in Jesus Christ. Just as it did in Ephesus, this power continues to transform lives, churches, and cities today!

REFLECTION

Have you experienced God's transformational power in your life? What is a way that you have seen your life or someone else's life changed by knowing Jesus?

How has the gospel affected the way that you work, parent, study, or engage with others daily?

What about Jesus do you cling to when life becomes difficult? Be specific and thank God for these attributes.

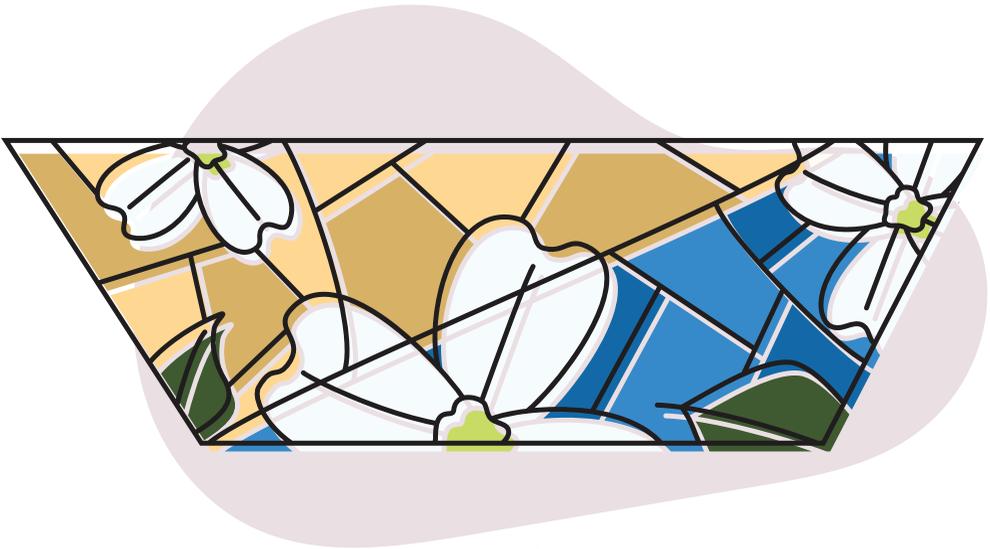
DISCUSSION

How are you growing personally?

PRAYER

Lord, I ask that You open my ears to the voice of Your spirit. Protect me from my selfish tendency to make everything about me. I repent from fighting to steal glory that only You deserve. The gods I have worshiped were made with human hands, but You, Lord, created the universe with just a few words, "Let there be light."

Please do not let my light fade into darkness. By faith and through the encouragement found in community with other believers, expose what I have been unwilling to surrender to You. Help me earnestly repent and turn again to the simplicity of my first days with You. Everything is empty and meaningless unless I find You in it. Give me eyes to see You and a heart ready to respond in gratitude and praise to all You do. Thank You for Your great mercy lavished on me. To You be the glory forever. Amen.



G O S P E L

INTRODUCTION

During the fall, we will spend time looking into the letters of the Apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica, Greece. Paul wrote these letters on his second missionary journey from Corinth between AD 50-51, as the gospel made its first push into Europe.

One of the guiding principles of our church is that “truth travels best on the road of relationships.” We see a Biblical example of that principle in the pages of the Thessalonian letters. Paul not only shared the gospel with the Thessalonians, but he shared his own life with them as well. He cared for them as a father or mother loves their own children. The love Paul showed them was replicated by the people of the Thessalonian church, and their love for one another became a light to a lost world. Their love revealed the gospel not only in word, but in the way they lived. This letter’s message is simple: remain faithful to Jesus and the hope of the gospel, and continue to grow in love for one another.

The young church in Thessalonica provides us with a model to examine and learn from as we try to love well as a church and live faithfully in our day. Although Thessalonica wasn’t a perfect church, Paul was incredibly proud of the ways they made a gospel-impact on the world around them. We are excited to dive into these two ancient letters to see what they may teach us about making a gospel-impact today.

Visit clarity2020.org for additional resources.

MEMORY VERSE

John 14:6–“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

SONGS

Visit clarity2020.org for a seasonal playlist of songs to sing with your family.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

PRAYER

Use your prayer time to pray specifically for those around you as well as those around the world who do not know Jesus. As you pray for God to work in their hearts, fill in the blanks below with their names.

“Father, help us continue to build a caring relationship with _____. We know that You love _____ and sent Your Son to die so he/she may have eternal life. Open _____’s eyes to see the truth of the gospel. Give him/her an understanding of his/her need for You. Please, help me share how Your love has changed my life. We wait for the day when _____ chooses to give his/her life to You, Father. Help him/her understand that the only way to receive eternal life is through Jesus. Amen.”

Pick a country in another part of the world and pray for that country specifically. You can pick a new country each time, or one that you pray for regularly. If you need help picking a country, visit joshuaproject.net, where you can learn about the prayer needs of each country.

“God, we pray for the people in _____. We know that You love all of the people of the world, including those who live in _____. We ask that they would come to know You and love You. Please help the Christians in _____ to teach others about You. Keep the churches safe and help them grow. Bless the missionaries who are serving You in _____. Provide for the needs of the people there and help them to see how much You love them. God, give me a heart to love the people from _____ and help them understand that the only way to receive eternal life is through Jesus. Amen.”

PRACTICE — WORSHIP

The Lost Around Us. There are people all around us who do not know Jesus. We know from John 14:6 that Jesus is the only way to the Father. Encourage each member of your family to pick someone that doesn’t know Jesus and to share the name of that person with the family. Spend time praying for that person to come to know Jesus. Encourage each other to tell that person about Jesus.

Spiritual Stories. Sharing our spiritual stories, or testimonies, is an important part of our Christian faith. As we share our stories, we are testifying to the work of God in our lives. When we share our stories, we are reminded that we need God in every area of our lives, not just for salvation. Use the following questions to help you share

your spiritual story with your family: What was my life like before I knew Christ? When did I first hear or understand the gospel? What made me decide to follow Jesus? How has my life been different now that I am a follower of Jesus? What is God teaching me right now?

Get to Know You Dinner. We believe the gospel travels best on the road of relationships. That means we can better share the gospel when we have relationships with the people around us who need Jesus. As a family, take some time to talk about other families who you interact with during the week but do not know very well. Pick a night of the week and invite them over for dinner. Prepare some questions beforehand to help you get to know the other family better. You could ask them: Where did you grow up? What pets do you have? How long have you lived here? What are your favorite things to do on the weekend?

Unreached People Group of the Day. An unreached people group is a group of people without a local community of believing Christians who can share the gospel with them. Typically, this is a people group that is less than 5% Christian. Commit to praying for an unreached people group. A great resource to help you pray for unreached people groups is the Joshua Project App. Download the app to get information about unreached people around the world. Take time each day to pray together for the “Unreached of the Day” or pick a people group in a specific country. Pray that God would make Himself known among that people group. You can look up more information on each of the unreached people groups at joshuaproject.net.

MOMENTS & MEMORIES

Pumpkin Carving. Visit a pumpkin patch and buy a couple of pumpkins for your family to carve. You can buy or download carving kits with patterns or you can create your own designs with a marker. You can save the pumpkin seeds and roast them for a fun treat.

Gourmet S'Mores. If you have a way to build a fire, build one and make gourmet s'mores. Instead of a standard chocolate bar, let each person pick out whichever candy bar they would like to make their s'more. If you don't have a way to make a fire, you can broil the marshmallows in the oven to brown and melt them.

Leaves are Changing. Pick a time to drive around Northwest Arkansas and admire all of the leaves with changing colors. Some beautiful places to go include White Rock Mountain, the Buffalo River, or Lake Wedington. You can pack a picnic dinner and make a night of it. You can also play a game where you try to find as many different colors of leaves as you can.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

clarity2020.org

“Your Story is God’s Story: Creating Your Testimony” | cru.org

Voice of the Martyrs: Kids | kidsofcourage.com

The Joshua Project | joshuaproject.net

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 1:1-7
Monday	1 Corinthians 1:1-31; Psalm 119:9-16; Proverbs 25:6-8
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Psalm 119:17-32; Proverbs 25:9-11
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 3:1-23; Psalm 119:33-40; Proverbs 25:12-14
Thursday	1 Corinthians 4:1-5:13; Psalm 119:41-48; Proverbs 25:15-17
Friday	1 Corinthians 6:1-7:16; Psalm 119:49-56; Proverbs 25:18-21
Saturday	1 Corinthians 7:17-40; Psalm 119:57-64; Proverbs 25:22-25

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-7

Paul opens his letter to the Thessalonians by recognizing their faithfulness and thanking them. He came to them sharing the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; and God worked in power through that simple story to completely change the lives of those who believed. Through the gospel, the Thessalonians discovered that they were loved and chosen by God, and they began to model their lives after the self-giving love of Jesus.

The gospel story of Jesus' life, death on our behalf, and resurrection is not simply a story. Too often we can have a tendency to see the gospel of Jesus as something that happened long ago, seeming distant and unsubstantial. Sometimes we could even say we believe Jesus paid the penalty for our sins but not understand how that makes a difference in our daily lives.

Paul reminds us in this letter that the gospel is not merely a story, but it is the power of God to change lives.

Not only did this change the lives of believers in Thessalonica, but it also quickly began to change the lives of others, even transforming the Roman world. The Thessalonians became a model for all the believers in their province and even extended their influence to other regions. It would be like seeing radical life-change from within our communities multiply our influence to churches all over the Southeast and Midwest.

Is it possible to see radical life-change today? Yes! The gospel story is not just a story. It is still the means by which God changes our world. As our transformed lives model Jesus' extravagant love, our world will be transformed too!

REFLECTION

What is the gospel? Write out what Jesus has done for you in your own words and thank Him.

Who has modeled for you what it means to follow Jesus? How so? Is there someone you could ask to help mentor you in what it means to follow Jesus? (This is the process called discipleship.)

How have you seen the gospel-impact others around you? Is there someone you could meet with to help them follow Jesus?

DISCUSSION

Who in your life are you thankful for?

PRAYER

God, thank You that through Christ I am adopted into Your family. Continue to build my faith. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, give me a deeper understanding of Your Word, and by Your grace, empower me to come into alignment with Your will.

Lord, place people in my life who can show me how to better follow You. Speak into my life through Your church and the people who know You. Give me the wisdom and humility to learn from others and to see how You have worked in their lives.

Place people around me that I can have an eternal impact on. Use me to make Yourself known to others and show me who I can teach the things You have taught me. Don't let me keep Your grace and goodness to myself.

Give me a greater revelation of Your steadfast love for me, and from that revelation, stir my heart to love others well. You are all I need. I rest in Your complete sufficiency today. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 1:8-10
Monday	1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Psalm 119:65-72; Proverbs 25:26-28
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 9:1-27; Psalm 119:73-80; Proverbs 26:1-3
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1; Psalm 119:81-88; Proverbs 26:4-6
Thursday	1 Corinthians 11:2-34; Psalm 119:89-96; Proverbs 26:7-9
Friday	1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Psalm 119:97-104; Proverbs 26:10-12
Saturday	1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Psalm 119:105-112; Proverbs 26:13-15

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:8-10

As Paul moved throughout the Roman empire, he continued to hear how the gospel's life-changing power spread from the church in Thessalonica. The entire Roman world had heard about how the Thessalonians abandoned the worship of false gods and turned to serve Jesus. Paul makes it clear that he didn't have to share about this radical life-change within the Thessalonians because it was well known by those he encountered on his missionary journeys.

Paul affirmed their faith and devotion to the one, true God. He didn't praise them for their own accomplishments or talents. Instead, Paul acknowledged

that it was their faith that people everywhere were speaking so highly of. He made note of their service. He commended them for turning from idols to the Living God.

How amazing it would be if this is the way that we were discussed! As we live radically changed lives, may our neighbors, coworkers, and friends take notice. May we be a church that grabs the attention of those around us because we ring out with the sound of the gospel's life-changing power. May it be our faith and devotion to the Lord that people can't miss and can't help but talk about.

REFLECTION

How would people describe your life? What would they say is most important to you? What would they say is your life's goal?

How would your life look different if the gospel was always your primary motivation? How would your life look different at home, school, work, and in the community?

How are you involved in the global spread of the gospel? Take time to pray for those sharing the gospel around the world.

DISCUSSION

Who has been a role model in your life?

PRAYER

Lord of Love, Giver of Grace, teach me to deeply delight in every aspect of Your gospel. Lead me to freedom from my sinful nature. May my words be loving when I'm tempted to be passive, and may my testimony be honest when I am tempted to hide. Father, I want to be known for loving You. Let faith and love be defining characteristics of my life and the life of my church. Make the gospel and Your glory my life's primary motivation.

Continue to use Your church to reach the furthest parts of the world that don't know You. Bless the global workers who have devoted their lives to You. Give them peace, joy, safety, and hope, and ultimately, bless their work. Bring people around them who are hungry to know You and establish Your church in the farthest regions of the earth.

Father, I am Your vessel. I am Your servant. I am Your handiwork. I am Your child. Unveil my eyes to see my destructive idols. You alone, I will serve! Grant me a deep and true love for those you have placed in my life. May that love guide me toward an urgency in prayers of intercession for their souls. May my obedience always reflect the gratitude I feel in being relentlessly pursued by You. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 2:1-12
Monday	1 Corinthians 14:1-40; Psalm 119:113-120; Proverbs 26:16-18
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 15:1-34; Psalm 119:121-128; Proverbs 26:19-22
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 15:35-58; Psalm 119:129-136; Proverbs 26:23-26
Thursday	1 Corinthians 16:1-24; Psalm 119:137-144; Proverbs 26:27-28
Friday	2 Corinthians 1:1-2:4; Psalm 119:145-152; Proverbs 27:1-4
Saturday	2 Corinthians 2:5-3:18; Psalm 119:153-160; Proverbs 27:5-7

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

When Paul came to the people of Thessalonica after a rough time in Philippi, he shared that he came with no hidden motivation other than to share the good news with them. Paul, and those with him, went out of their way to work hard to provide for themselves, so they weren't a burden on those they were staying with. This was just one of the many ways Paul and his fellow believers modeled a Christ-centered life to the Thessalonians—a life that was full of patience, love, sacrifice, intentionality, and leadership.

Paul takes a selfless position for the sake of the gospel. For Paul and his fellow believers, it could have been so easy to come into Thessalonica and assume a position of authority because God, the ultimate King,

entrusted him to share this message with others. Yet, instead of having a pious attitude towards those who didn't know the good news, Paul and his fellow believers extended grace, love, intentionality, and servanthood towards all they encountered. They were truly being the hands and the feet of the Lord.

Each of us has some leadership responsibility in life; it may be in our career, family, school, or church. This authority can be used to show grace and serve, or it can be self-serving and dominant. Paul shows us that a life of service, patience, and love is truly the way of Christ-centered living and leadership—one that also has the greatest impact in this life and the next.

REFLECTION

Have you experienced a gospel-centered leadership like this before? How did it impact those under and around the leader?

How could you apply more servant-based leadership qualities in all areas of life? In what areas could you put this into practice?

How could you seek to intentionally grow as a spiritual leader? Who could help guide or train you in some way? Make a plan to find a mentor, join a training, do a study, or find another tangible way to grow.

DISCUSSION

What qualities do you think are most important in a leader? Why?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the epic, transformational power of Your gospel. Your Word tells me that I was spiritually dead—lifeless, and without any hope—due to the infection of sin. But You, God, are worthy of all praise! In Your great mercy, You made new life possible through the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus, from the dead—new life not disfigured or weighed down by my guilt and shame. You have made a way for all who profess Jesus as Lord to rest in Your presence with confidence, knowing that they are at complete peace with You—an awesome, Holy God.

Please captivate my heart with Your story of love and redemption. Jesus, help me see people the way You see them. Please forgive me when I am distracted by outward appearances. Help me look to the heart as You do. May my hands become beautifully calloused with the work of the gospel, willing to do whatever You ask, when You ask it. By Your Spirit, lead me in Your love, opening my eyes to anyone spiritually lifeless and without hope. May Your words of love flow from my tongue as naturally as breathing, all for Your glory. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 2:13-20
Monday	2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10; Psalm 119:161-176; Proverbs 27:8-10
Tuesday	2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13; Psalm 120; Proverbs 27:11-13
Wednesday	2 Corinthians 6:14-7:16; Psalm 121; Proverbs 27:14-16
Thursday	2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Psalm 122; Proverbs 27:17-19
Friday	2 Corinthians 10:1-18; Psalm 123; Proverbs 27:20-23
Saturday	2 Corinthians 11:1-33; Psalm 124; Proverbs 27:24-27

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 2:13-20

Paul's journey was not always smooth and successful. Paul shared with the Thessalonians the opposition he experienced from the Jews and warned the Thessalonians of the opposition they may face as well. However, instead of feeling defeated by these attacks, Paul attributed them to Satan's work and encouraged his fellow believers to remember the good news that Jesus has conquered all sin through the cross; therefore Satan had no power over them.

When the Thessalonians heard the gospel, they believed that it was the Word of God and not of man. Through their belief in the gospel, the Holy Spirit began to dwell in them, giving them the power to live by the Word of God and take part in Jesus' victory over evil.

We may not ever go through the same level of persecution as Paul and his fellow believers did, but we will certainly face spiritual attack and opposition. Sometimes the spiritual battles may be clear, but other times we don't even realize the spiritual opposition that may be at work.

In all situations, we must remember that we have a God who is supreme and sovereign over all! He can conquer, and has conquered, all evil through Jesus' crucifixion on the cross. Those who believe in the gospel have the power of the Holy Spirit and must stand firm in His truth, knowing that our God is greater than all. Through the Holy Spirit, prayer, and God's Word, we can see the victory that Jesus has already won on our behalf!

REFLECTION

How have you seen opposition to the gospel in your own life?

Is there a Bible verse or passage that has been your comfort or strength in times of spiritual attack?

How can you encourage those around you to stand firm in the midst of trials in this life? Who may need that encouragement today?

DISCUSSION

What is something that I can be praying for you this fall?

PRAYER

Jesus, You stood against evil. You spoke truth to unjust authority and corrupt power. You turned over tables of greed and idolatry. You cast out demons. You knew who You were dealing with.

Teach me to see and name my enemies—those spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Give me eyes to see beneath the surface and to discern spirits. Give me courage to call out the sin that is at the root of whatever symptom I am encountering. Search me and see if there be any opposing way to Your gospel in me, and lead me in the way of life.

Thank You for the victory I have in You! In the end, no opponent will stand against Your everlasting love. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 3:1-13
Monday	2 Corinthians 12:1-21; Psalm 125; Proverbs 28:1-3
Tuesday	2 Corinthians 13:1-14; Psalm 126; Proverbs 28:4-6
Wednesday	Hebrews 1:1-14; Psalm 127; Proverbs 28:7-9
Thursday	Hebrews 2:1-18; Psalm 128; Proverbs 28:10-12
Friday	Hebrews 3:1-19; Psalm 129; Proverbs 28:13-15
Saturday	Hebrews 4:1-13; Psalm 130-131; Proverbs 28:16-18

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-13

Paul invested all he had in order to see the life-changing power of the gospel come alive in other people. He poured his life into others, to see them pour their lives into others for the sake of the gospel. After being away from the Thessalonians, he sent Timothy to check on them. He wanted to know the state of their faith after the investment he and others had made.

Timothy returned to Paul and reported of the Thessalonians' faith and love. God had used the spiritual investment of others to change the lives of the Thessalonians. God is ultimately the only One who can change someone's heart. Only He can save.

As is evident studying Paul's journey, not every attempt to share the gospel will feel like a success. There will be opposition and suffering, and it may sometimes be difficult to see how the gospel is advancing. Following God is

a lifelong commitment, and there are endless challenges to a person's faith.

However, when God is working through us, there is eternal value in all spiritual investments! Whether it is through prayer, Bible study, parenting, or acts of service, when a follower of Christ invests in the life of another person, God has the ability to make the gospel come alive. God can work in any situation and can use anyone who is willing to follow Him.

People invest their lives in many different ways. May we invest our lives in a way that really matters and has an eternal impact. May we offer all of our time and resources for God to use, investing in the lives of others. May we see the advancement of the gospel and hear reports of those transformed by the good news living lives of faith and love. The gospel cannot be stopped!

REFLECTION

Where are you investing your life? Your time? Your money? Your gifts? How could you see these grow?

Who has invested in you? Send them an encouraging word of how the gospel is active in your life.

How have you seen God advance the gospel in your home or community? How can you adjust your life to take part in that kingdom-work happening around you?

DISCUSSION

Who are you currently investing your life into?

PRAYER

Gracious Father, thank You for sending Your Son to seek and save sinners like me. I humbly pray that You give me a new, fresh understanding of Your love—Your advent, Your ministry, Your death, Your resurrection, Your ascension, the entirety of Your life—in this moment. Give me eyes to see and ears to hear the unstoppable work of Your gospel that brings salvation to all who believe.

King Jesus, You are sovereign over all things, and Your will is to one day restore the peace and flourishing of all creation. Align my will to Yours, and allow Your Church to increase and abound in love.

God, give me boldness and courage to share Your good news with those around me. Allow Your truth, goodness, and beauty to be revealed in and through the way I serve others. Allow me to plant seeds of Your unfailing love in the hearts and lives of those You have placed in my path, trusting Your Spirit to do the good work of growing new life in precious souls.

Your will be done! We rest and glory in that reality. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
Monday	Hebrews 4:14-5:10; Psalm 132:1-7; Proverbs 28:19-21
Tuesday	Hebrews 5:11-6:20; Psalm 132:8-18; Proverbs 28:22-24
Wednesday	Hebrews 7:1-28; Psalm 133-134; Proverbs 28:25-28
Thursday	Hebrews 8:1-13; Psalm 135:1-9; Proverbs 29:1-3
Friday	Hebrews 9:1-28; Psalm 135:10-21; Proverbs 29:4-6
Saturday	Hebrews 10:1-18; Psalm 136:1-7; Proverbs 29:7-9

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

As Paul encourages the Thessalonians in his letter, he reminds them to live their lives to please God. Specifically, he encourages them to seek holiness in their sexuality. To be holy means to be set apart. It is what marks a Christian as a follower of Christ and sets them apart from the surrounding culture. A holy life demonstrates God's supernatural power at work and glorifies Him.

God created and celebrates sex. He desires the best for His people and gave us a specific context to most fully enjoy this beautiful expression of intimacy. We are able to honor Him when we take part in sex the way He designed it. We are equally able to honor Him when we choose to resist engaging in ways that are contrary to His design.

We live in a very sexual culture, but this is not so different from the culture Paul

was writing to. While the call to holiness can seem exceedingly difficult, requiring us to seek forgiveness and move beyond the shame of our mistakes, God provides a believer everything needed to live a life of holiness. Just as Jesus died to give us freedom from the power of all sins, He is able to empower us to live a life of holiness. He has also given us the church to help support us.

If we trust in Jesus, God has forgiven us all of our past and future sins! He gives His people the Holy Spirit, who provides the power to overcome temptation. We are able to turn to God for strength in overcoming sin and forgiveness for our failures, knowing that He has enough grace for both! We are able to consider it a joy to honor Him in our sexuality and every aspect of our lives!

REFLECTION

What is God's design for sexuality? Why is it worth pursuing His design?

Take time to confess to God any sexual sins and ask God for forgiveness. Be specific. Ask Him to grant you the strength to overcome any temptation.

How can you seek to live a sexually holy life? Are there repetitive practices you need to address? Is there someone who can hold you accountable? Should you seek further help within the church for support?

DISCUSSION

What are the most important aspects of a healthy marriage?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for being the God of redemption and honor. Thank You for rescuing me from my old patterns of living, and continually changing me into the person You desire me to be. Lead me to honor You in all areas of my life, including my sexuality. Don't let me be a slave to my own passion or false idols, but make Your desires my desires. Keep me far from temptation and lead me away from lust, pornography, ungodly relationships, fantasy, and covetousness. Where I find myself being tempted, help me to seek help from others.

You are loving and forgiving. You have enough grace to cover all of my sin and shame. When I fail or think about my past sins, help me to see Your forgiveness. Help me to trust that Your grace is enough to cover my sins and give me the strength to resist them. Thank You that when You look at me, You see Jesus and His righteousness.

Thank You for Your redeeming grace that touches every aspect of my life, and that there is nothing Your healing touch cannot reach; there is nothing I can hide from You. Continue to show me how the grace of Jesus brings honor and holiness to my life. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Monday	Hebrews 10:19-39; Psalm 136:8-16; Proverbs 29:10-13
Tuesday	Hebrews 11:1-40; Psalm 136:17-26; Proverbs 29:14-16
Wednesday	Hebrews 12:1-29; Psalm 137; Proverbs 29:17-20
Thursday	Hebrews 13:1-25; Psalm 138; Proverbs 29:21-23
Friday	1 Peter 1:1-25; Psalm 139:1-5; Proverbs 29:24-27
Saturday	1 Peter 2:1-25; Psalm 139:6-13; Proverbs 30:1-4

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

God commands us to love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another, confess to one another, teach one another, and so many other honorable commands.

in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 Paul shares this desire with the Thessalonians. Though they have loved each other well, Paul encourages them “to do so more and more.” He emphasizes that living a quiet life, working hard, and minding your own affairs is the way to “win the respect of outsiders and...not be dependent on anybody” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Paul is calling them to a humble and holy life of love and service. Living this way will be respected by the community and open up doors for showing love, because at the root of love, is serving. If Christ is the ultimate example of love, we should remember that He came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28).

Today, we are all surrounded by opportunities to love and serve one

another, specifically through the work we do. Whether it is in the marketplace, in the classroom, in the medical field, or at home, the opportunities are abundant for taking the focus off ourselves and placing it on Christ. Choosing to work hard and complete the tasks we have been given shows integrity, honors those in authority, and allows us to serve others. Rather than becoming involved in others’ business, breeding comparison, envy, slander, anger, and frustration, we can engage in pure, encouraging, and uplifting thoughts and words. Choosing to listen rather than sharing unsolicited opinions allows you to hear where others are coming from and have a heart of compassion when needing to share truth. Ultimately, living this way honors the Lord and wins the respect of others in the workplace, opening doors for the gospel.

We are saturated with opportunities to love and serve one another. May we be known by that.

REFLECTION

When have you experienced being loved and served by another? Who did it? How did it impact you?

How can the way you live life at work, open the door for the gospel?

How are you able to better love and serve those in the church and your community? Who can you talk to about finding a way to serve regularly?

DISCUSSION

Who do you know that is great at serving others well?

PRAYER

Lord, give me eyes to see those around me. I want to see others as You see them—made in Your image and worthy of service. Teach me, Father, that my life is not my own. Show me how my life is made to serve You and those around me.

Let my work not be done primarily for my own gain. Rather, may it be from a posture of worship. Help me to use the gifts You have given me to honor You through how I work.

Jesus, Your sacrifice was the ultimate act of service for others. Make me more like You in giving up my life for the sake of others.

Lord, teach me to serve quietly. Help me to walk worthy. May the integrity of my work reflect who You are and what You intend to bring about in Your kingdom. May You receive glory in and through my labor today. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Monday	1 Peter 3:1-22; Psalm 139:14-24; Proverbs 30:5-7
Tuesday	1 Peter 4:1-19; Psalm 140:1-5; Proverbs 30:8-10
Wednesday	1 Peter 5:1-14; Psalm 140:6-13; Proverbs 30:11-13
Thursday	2 Peter 1:1-21; Psalm 141; Proverbs 30:14-16
Friday	2 Peter 2:1-22; Psalm 142; Proverbs 30:17-19
Saturday	2 Peter 3:1-18; Psalm 143; Proverbs 30:20-22

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

Death isn't easy. We often feel a heaviness just at the thought of the word. However, when we believe in the truth of the gospel, that Christ defeated death on our behalf, we have something so beautiful to hold onto—hope.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul writes that physical, earthly death is inevitable. However, for believers he declares that death is no more because of Christ's triumphant victory over sin on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Those who know and believe in Christ's resurrection and forgiveness of sins will partake in this victory over death and experience everlasting life with Jesus.

If we truly know and trust the everlasting hope of eternal life with God, we can have hope that we will meet other

believers again when they "go home to be with Jesus." That doesn't mean we won't miss those who have passed away, but we can have hope that they are experiencing something greater. Neither does it mean that death isn't difficult. Death itself is a result of sin entering the world.

Christ's victory over death means that we have an everlasting hope that cannot be taken away from us! While we live, we can know Him and devote our lives to His kingdom. When we die, we are able to go be with Him. While He has given us new life even now, we will be made complete when we are with Him. There will be no more pain, shame, anxiety, worry, anger, lust, envy, or any other sin. What a joyful and beautiful truth we can cling to!

REFLECTION

If you were to die today, what would happen to you? Why? In Christ, we can have certainty if we believe in Him. If you are unsure, who can you talk to about this today?

How does having the view of death described above change the way you are able to live now?

Who can you share this message of hope with? How would you share this with them?

DISCUSSION

What is something you hope you'll be remembered for?

PRAYER

I am certain, O God, that You are my hope! Because Jesus has died and risen from the dead, anyone who places their trust in You will never be disappointed! Thank You that You have promised eternal life beyond the grave for those who call on Your name! Thank You that Jesus will return with a loud shout! God, how I long for the day when I will be with You!

Lord, I know that my days on this earth are short and few. Help me to take full advantage of this life You have given me, not for my own gain but for You and Your kingdom. Use my life to make Yourself known in this world. Let every one of my remaining days bring You more and more glory. Let me see You and praise You when my life is full of joy. Let me see You and praise You when life is difficult and painful. Let me be motivated to live for You every day, no matter how many days I have.

Each morning, wake me with the hope found living in Your presence. You are here now; keep me faithful and believing. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Monday	1 Timothy 1:1-20; Psalm 144:1-6; Proverbs 30:23-25
Tuesday	1 Timothy 2:1-15; Psalm 144:7-15; Proverbs 30:26-29
Wednesday	1 Timothy 3:1-16; Psalm 145:1-5; Proverbs 30:30-33
Thursday	1 Timothy 4:1-16; Psalm 145:6-13; Proverbs 31:1-3
Friday	1 Timothy 5:1-6:2; Psalm 145:14-21; Proverbs 31:4-6
Saturday	1 Timothy 6:3-21; Psalm 146; Proverbs 31:7-9

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11

As Paul wrote the Thessalonians about their future hope after death, he also described the future hope of Jesus' return. He says that they should not worry about when Jesus will come back, but to be ready for Christ's return at any moment, day or night. They should live with that future hope in mind while living in the present, faithfully loving others until He returns.

If we are to be ready at any moment, how do we live those moments? We live them believing that God's Word is true. We live by faith—faith that Jesus will return to rule on this earth and we will live with Him in eternity. Believers in Jesus Christ can hope in the glorious future promised with Him in heaven. But what about now? What about our time here on earth?

We are called to live a life of faithfulness. To be faithful means to be loyal, constant,

and steadfast. It means to be consistent and reliable in your character and beliefs. We know that we are sinners who have made mistakes and turned away from God. We know that God is faithful and has promised us that if we believe Jesus died to forgive us of our sins, He will give us eternal life. We know that if we trust in Him, we have been adopted into His family and can live as children of God, empowered by Holy Spirit.

God has loved and been faithful to us, so we can lovingly live faithful to Him. We accomplish this by obeying His Word because it's true. We pray and spend time with Him. We love others. He has given us a new identity and we can live faithfully in that identity. We have a hope for the future and a mission for the present!

REFLECTION

What would you say it looks like for a person to live with great faith today? How do you see this in your life? How could you see it in your life? Be specific.

Would you consider yourself a person of faith in God? Why or why not? Ask someone close to you if they see your faith and process together.

Who do you know that has great faith? Take time to encourage them and ask them about that faith.

DISCUSSION

What single thing would you like to make absolutely certain you do (if at all possible) during your lifetime?

PRAYER

Jesus, I wait expectantly for Your return as promised in Your Word! You have conquered every enemy opposed to Your rightful reign. Death is no longer master of anyone who hopes in You. But darkness is all around me and there are many searching for some sense of light—for hope and peace.

By Your grace, You bring light into the world. Help me to see You clearly and to see every circumstance in light of Your grace. Keep me awake and clear-thinking. Don't let me be fooled by the voices that offer me cheap counterfeits of Your light. The day is coming when Your kingdom will restore all that was broken by the curse of sin. Please forgive me when I lose sight of that. Keep me watchful for Your return and my heart heavy for those who don't know You as Lord and Friend. Please show me one person this week who I can talk to about the grace I've found in You. I have no greater treasure to offer them.

As Champion over death, Your name has greater worth than any other. May I proclaim it boldly. You stand alone as Lord, and yet You invite me in close. May I treasure Your desire to draw near to me. May my life faithfully and irresistibly express to others the light I've found in You. Amen.

DAILY READINGS

Sunday	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
Monday	2 Timothy 1:1-18; Psalm 147:1-7; Proverbs 31:10-13
Tuesday	2 Timothy 2:1-13; Psalm 147:8-12; Proverbs 31:14-16
Wednesday	2 Timothy 2:14-26; Psalm 147:13-20; Proverbs 31:17-20
Thursday	2 Timothy 3:1-17; Psalm 148; Proverbs 31:21-23
Friday	2 Timothy 4:1-19; Psalm 149; Proverbs 31:24-27
Saturday	Jude; Psalm 150; Proverbs 31:28-31

DEVOTIONAL: READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28

As Paul closes his first letter to the Thessalonians, he gives them a list of encouragements and ways to live. He begins his encouragements by speaking of how they should treat one another—acknowledge those who work hard among you, have peace with each other, encourage the disheartened, be patient, do what is good for each other. He then encourages them in how to live personally with God—rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, do not quench the Spirit, reject evil. These are all ways that Christ wants us to live.

If we know Christ and the Holy Spirit is in us, we are able to live as He desires for us to live. Yet, it is not just of our own doing, but God working through us. Paul seems to sum this up when He says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through

and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

To “sanctify” means to “make holy.” It is the word we use for the process of the Holy Spirit working in our lives to make us more like Jesus. It is a daily process that takes time and starts the moment you first trust in Him until we go to be with Him in eternity. It is something that we long to see happen but could never do apart from God. We participate by placing ourselves in the best environments for Jesus to transform our lives. We abide in Christ. We spend time with Him. We seek accountability from other believers and graciously allow them to speak into our lives. We find opportunities to serve. We pray continually and ask for help from the Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION

Spiritually speaking, where do you want to be in five years? Where would you want to have grown in knowledge, skill, or ministry experience? Write down a few goals, noting steps you could take to see yourself get there. Find someone who can help you or walk alongside you.

What are the biggest obstacles to growing spiritually in your life? What are you doing to overcome those obstacles?

Who is someone that is a few steps ahead of you spiritually? Ask them how they got to where they are and if they can help you grow.

DISCUSSION

How have you grown over the last year?

PRAYER

God of peace, continue to make me more like You.

I thank You that Your work in Christ is done. Jesus, thank You that You loosened the stranglehold of sin and removed the sting of death. Nothing can separate me from Your love! Not brokenness, affliction, trials, even death. Victory is Yours!

Yet, I acknowledge that Your work in me is still being done. Holy Spirit, thank You for faithfully loosening the grip of sin as I submit to Your leading. Help me to continue to turn toward You and away from sin. Thank You for comforting me when life is difficult and darkness is around me. Help me to seek Your peace and comfort every day.

O God, sanctify every part of my being. Sanctify this church, this city, and all of creation. Heaven, make your home on earth. Lord, continue to make all things new! Amen.

“All shall be well. And all shall be well. All manner of things shall be well.”

–Julian of Norwich

APPENDIX

H O L Y W E E K

FAMILY DEVOTIONALS

FAMILY DEVO DESCRIPTION:

During the week leading up to Easter, often called “Holy Week,” bring your family together for a daily devotional time reflecting on who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Each devotional is intended to help prepare you and your family to experience the darkness of Jesus’ last days leading to the cross and the celebration of His glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday. The devos will give you the opportunity to read the Bible together, respond, reflect on what you’ve read, and pray together, all in about five minutes. You are free to extend this time as long as it fits your family. As you lead your family, we pray these experiences will help you understand both the sorrow found in Jesus’ journey to the cross and the joy found in His resurrection.

Set up: Buy or collect six candles and something you can use to light them. Begin the Family Devo time with all six candles lit. Each day, at the end of the devo, you will be able to respond by choosing one family member to blow out one candle. The next day, light one less candle. On Friday, the last candle will be blown out. Easter Sunday you will get to light all six candles to celebrate that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead, just like He said He would.

SUNDAY (one week before Easter): Light all six candles.

Read these verses about how God created the whole world.

Genesis 1:29-31 NIRV

“Then God said, ‘I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that produces its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food. I am giving every green plant as food for all the land animals and for all the birds in the sky. I am also giving the plants to all the creatures that move along the ground. I am giving them to every living thing that breathes.’ And that’s exactly what happened. God saw everything he had made. And it was very good. There was evening, and there was morning. It was day six.”

Genesis 3:23-24 NIRV

“So the Lord God drove the man out of the Garden of Eden. He sent the man to farm the ground he had been made from. The Lord God drove him out and then placed angels on the east side of the garden. He also placed there a flaming sword that flashed back and forth. The angels and the sword guarded the way to the tree of life.”

God created the entire world and everything in it. Ask each person to name some of their favorite things God created. Encourage your family to listen to each other’s answers. Compare how different and beautiful each person’s answers are. God created the animals, the plants, the _____ (fill in with whatever was named) for people to enjoy. God also created Adam and Eve. His plan was for Adam and Eve to walk, talk, and have a close relationship with Him in the Garden of Eden. But their sins changed everything for them and for us.

Because of sin, we live separated from God. Sin causes there to be darkness in the hearts and lives of everyone who does not know Jesus.

Respond: Choose one family member to blow out one candle.

Reflect: Discuss together what sin is. Why is it so hard to do what is right? When do you feel most tempted to want something you don’t have?

Pray together: Jesus, help us to choose Your way. Help us to obey Your rules and to do what is right. Thank You Jesus for giving us Your Holy Spirit to help us. Amen.

MONDAY: Light five candles (leave one unlit).

Read these verses about Jesus entering Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:6-11 NIRV

“The disciples went and did what Jesus told them to do. They brought the donkey and the colt. They placed their coats on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their coats on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Some of the people went ahead of him, and some followed. They all shouted,

‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’

‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!’

‘Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. The people asked, ‘Who is this?’

The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus. He is the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

God’s plan to live in relationship with us continues. God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to live on this earth so people could know and believe in Him. As Jesus rode into the city, the people were so excited. They believed Jesus was going to be the king of the land and save them from evil people and unfair laws. People did not understand how Jesus would save them from much more than just physical things. People didn’t understand that Jesus was actually God’s Son and would carry their sins to the cross and die in their place.

Respond: Choose someone to blow out one candle.

Reflect: What does a king or queen do? Have you ever gone to see someone who is really important? Why did people celebrate Jesus coming into town? What might have you been thinking if you were there? Jesus is the Son of God, the King over all things. But He didn’t come to sit on a throne or live in a castle, He came to save us from sin. Jesus is mighty and mysterious; it is very hard to understand the difference between a king over the land and the King of all kings.

Pray together: Jesus, help us understand You more. We believe You are the King of kings, the ruler over everything. Help us discover more about who You really are. Amen.

TUESDAY: Light four candles (leave two candles unlit).

Read these verses about Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

John 13:12-15 NIRV

“When Jesus finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes. Then he returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord.” You are right. That is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. So you also should wash one another’s feet. I have given you an example. You should do as I have done for you.’”

When people arrived at a home during the Bible times, a servant would offer to wash their feet. It sounds strange to us today, because we all wash our own feet. Jesus was the guest at this home; someone should have offered to wash His feet, not the other way around. This had to be a misunderstanding! It made the disciples feel very uncomfortable. They couldn’t understand why Jesus would ever do this.

People today often misunderstand who Jesus is and why He teaches us to look for ways to serve each other. Just like the disciples, we need Jesus to help us understand God’s way is very different from the world’s ways. Serving others is better than being served.

Respond: Choose someone to blow out one candle.

Reflect: When do you like others to serve you? Is it easier to be served than to serve? Name someone who has served you. Who could you serve today? Tomorrow, remember to ask each other if you did it.

Pray together: Jesus, help me show your love to _____ today by serving them. Jesus help me find ways to serve others every day this week. Amen.

WEDNESDAY: Light three candles (leave three candles unlit).

Read these verses about a man named Judas.

Matthew 26:14-16 NIRV

“One of the 12 disciples went to the chief priests. His name was Judas Iscariot. He asked, ‘What will you give me if I hand Jesus over to you?’ So they counted out 30 silver coins for him. From then on, Judas watched for the right time to hand Jesus over to them.”

One of Jesus’ closest friends chose money over Jesus. Judas had been with Jesus for at least three years. Judas knew a lot about Him, he had watched Jesus do miracles and some truly amazing things. Judas had listened to Him teach and tell stories about how to love others, but he didn’t understand how much Jesus really loved him.

Respond: Choose one person to blow out one candle.

Reflect: Who is someone you know that really loves you? How do you know how he or she loves you? Here is an example of knowing something in your head but struggling to believe it’s true: I know in my head that broccoli is very good for me; but when broccoli goes in my mouth, it is really hard to believe it is good for me. Can you think of an example of something your head knows is good, but it’s hard to believe in your heart? (Getting a shot, taking a bath, etc.) What is different about knowing someone loves you and believing someone loves you? Judas knew a lot about Jesus, but he did not believe with his heart that Jesus was more important than money or anything else.

Pray Together: Dear Jesus, help me not to believe lies about You. Help me to not be distracted by things and think they are more important than You. I know you are really God and You are more important than anything else in the world. Please help my heart to believe it too!

THURSDAY: Light two candles (leave four candles unlit).

Read these verses about Jesus praying in the Garden.

Mark 14:32-38a NIRV

“Jesus and his disciples went to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with him. He began to be very upset and troubled. ‘My soul is very sad. I feel close to death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here. Keep watch.’

He went a little farther. Then he fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass by him. ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. But let what you want be done, not what I want.’ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray.’”

Jesus asked the disciples to watch and pray with Him in the garden. He wanted them to stay awake and be with Him. He did not want to be alone during this difficult time. He was grieving and upset. He knew what was about to happen to Him. The disciples couldn’t stay awake, even though Jesus asked them to do so three times.

Respond: Choose one person to blow out a candle.

Reflect: When is a time you tried to stay awake but couldn’t keep your eyes open? Think of a time when you couldn’t or didn’t do something you knew you should do. Talk about it together, and let everyone who wants to respond have a chance to share (parents be prepared to share a personal story). Tell about a time you had something really hard to do and you needed courage to do it.

Prayer together. Jesus, thank You for loving us even when we fail. Thank You that nothing we do or say changes how much You love us. Your love for us never changes! Amen.

FRIDAY: Light one candle (leave five unlit).

Read these verses about Jesus dying on the cross.

John 19:16-18 NIRV

“Finally, Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be nailed to a cross.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. He had to carry his own cross. He went out to a place called the Skull. In the Aramaic language it was called Golgotha. There they nailed Jesus to the cross. Two other men were crucified with him. One was on each side of him. Jesus was in the middle.”

John 19:40-42 NIRV

“The two men took Jesus’ body. They wrapped it in strips of linen cloth, along with the spices. That was the way the Jews buried people. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. A new tomb was there. No one had ever been put in it before. That day was the Jewish Preparation Day, and the tomb was nearby. So they placed Jesus there.”

John 3:16 NIRV

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.”

Jesus wants us to live with Him forever. The only way for that to happen was for Him to take our punishment. Because He loves us so much, He chose to take all of our sin, all of the wrong things we have done, the sin we will do, and take our place on the cross. Isn’t this incredible? It is hard to understand this kind of love. Good Friday is a day to remember how good Jesus is. On this day thousands of years ago, Jesus was crucified, He died, and He was buried for the sins of every person in the world.

Respond: Pick someone to blow out the last candle.

Reflect: Have you ever been accused or blamed for something you didn’t do? How did you feel about it? Why did Jesus do that for us?

Pray together: Jesus, we will never be able to understand why You love us so much. But we want to say thank You for what You did, for dying in our place and for taking our sins away forever! Thank You for being our Savior. Amen.

SATURDAY: Do not light any of the candles today.

Reflect: Find a time today when you can all look at the candles with no flame together. Try to imagine how hopeless the disciples and followers of Jesus must have felt. Talk about a time when you were sad or when you thought nothing would ever work out.

Pray Together: Jesus, teach us how to trust You even when we are sad and when nothing seems to be going right. Thank You for suffering and dying for our sins. We can't imagine how hard it must have been. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY MORNING:

Read these verses about when Mary discovered the empty tomb.

John 20:1-18 NIRV

“Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. It was still dark. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance. So she ran to Simon Peter and another disciple, the one Jesus loved. She said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb! We don’t know where they have put him!’

So Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. Both of them were running. The other disciple ran faster than Peter. He reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there. But he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him. He went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there. He also saw the funeral cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place. It was separate from the linen. The disciple who had reached the tomb first also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she cried, she bent over to look into the tomb. She saw two angels dressed in white. They were seated where Jesus’ body had been. One of them was where Jesus’ head had been laid. The other sat where his feet had been placed.

They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’

‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said. ‘I don’t know where they have put him.’ Then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there. But she didn’t realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?’

She thought he was the gardener. So she said, ‘Sir, did you carry him away? Tell me where you put him. Then I will go and get him.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’

She turned toward him. Then she cried out in the Aramaic language, ‘Rabboni!’ Rabboni means Teacher.

Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me. I have not yet ascended to the Father. Instead, go to those who believe in me. Tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news. She said, 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her."

The tomb was empty! Jesus wasn't there. He had risen just like He said He would. This is the best news ever! It is the gospel, the good news. Jesus died on the cross; Jesus was buried, and three days later He rose from the grave. He was really dead and now He is really alive. The people were so amazed, they started telling everyone.

Reflect: Have you ever gotten a gift or a treat and you did nothing to deserve it? How is that like what Jesus did for us?

Have each person in the family think of one word to describe how you might have felt if you were the person looking into the tomb and discovered Jesus was not there anymore. And then saw Jesus standing next to you!

Respond: Light all six candles and celebrate that Jesus truly is the Light of the World! Jesus brings hope and healing. The joy of seeing and believing is beyond words. Jesus loves us so much that He came to the earth to prove He can save us from our sins! This is the truth! Hallelujah! Jesus is alive today!

Pray together: Oh Jesus, thank You for doing just what You said You would do. Thank You for suffering and dying in our place. Even though I cannot fully understand all that You did for me, and I cannot understand why You would do it, I am so very grateful You did. My faith is in You alone. What a free and undeserved gift You give to anyone who believes in You. Amen.



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