

LENT

PRAYER AND FASTING GUIDE



FOREWORD

Hello Grace Family,

*I'm grateful to journey with you through the Gospel of Luke in 2026 as we focus on **Knowing Jesus: His Life, Death, and Resurrection**. My prayer for this year is that we would know Jesus better than ever, in our minds, hearts, and lives.*

***Knowing Jesus** is about being transformed by the Spirit as we encounter the living Christ together. Jesus promised to meet with us wherever two or three gather in His name.*

We desire to fill our hearts and minds with God's Word. We desire to create intentional spaces called Encounters, where truth can move from our heads to our hearts — through Scripture, prayer, community, mission, service, sacraments and suffering. Prayer and fasting are also powerful ways God realigns our hearts and reminds us about our dependence on Him.

This guide is designed to help us seek the Lord and create space for God to work in us, drawing us into a deeper, more personal relationship with Jesus.

My hope is that through this season, God would form us more fully into the image of Christ.

I love you all,

Tim Howey

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever feel like following Jesus has become one more thing added to an already full life? Another commitment. Another box to check. Even good spiritual rhythms can start to feel rushed or transactional if we are not careful. Yet the invitation of Jesus has always been personal and relational. "Come and see." "Follow me." "Abide in me."

As we spend this year focused on really knowing Jesus, we want to slow down long enough to encounter Him, not just learn about Him. Knowing Jesus is not simply gathering information or adopting better habits. It is being shaped by His presence and transformed by His way of life.

*Throughout this season, each week will focus on a different practice through which Jesus makes Himself known to us. We will look at **Service**, where we encounter Jesus as we love others the way He loved. **Suffering**, where we learn to recognize Him as the Man of Sorrows who meets us in our pain. **Community**, where we see how Jesus forms us together, not in isolation. **Scripture**, where we hear His voice and come to know His heart. **Prayer**, where we learn to remain with Him. **Mission**, where we are sent as He was sent. And **Sacraments**, where we experience Him through baptism and communion.*

These practices are not meant to be burdens, but invitations. They are the ways Jesus has always revealed Himself to His people. As we engage them intentionally, we create space for the Holy Spirit to shape us into people who reflect Christ more clearly in our everyday lives.

Whether these practices feel familiar or completely new, we invite you to come with openness and expectancy. God is faithful to meet us when we draw near to Him. As Jesus promises, when we seek, we find. When we knock, the door is opened.

Our prayer is that this season would not rush past us, but that it would deepen us. That as we practice these rhythms together, we would move beyond knowing about Jesus and into truly knowing Him.

Let us begin with a posture of humility and hunger, asking God to reveal His Son to us in fresh and transforming ways.

— Knowing Jesus Team

Heavenly Father,

We come expectantly before your throne. As we take steps to eliminate distractions in our lives and draw near to you, would you begin a new work in us? We surrender the deep places of our hearts—the areas we want to keep hidden—and ask you to heal us and bring us into deeper relationship with you. May your Spirit guide us through this season, convicting our hearts and revealing new truths. Let the overflow of our time with you spill into the lives of those around us, spreading your light and love to all we encounter.

Amen.

SCHEDULE

Week 1	Sunday Service	Luke 22:1-23
February 15-21	Service	Matthew 25:40
	Service	Matthew 14:13-14
	Service	Joel 2:12-13
	Service	John 13:3-5, 14-15
	Service	Luke 6:43-45
	Guided Prayer	
Week 2	Sunday Service	Luke 22:24-46
February 22-28	Suffering	Psalms 34:18
	Suffering	Daniel 3
	Weekly Reflection	
	Suffering	Romans 5:3-5
	Suffering	1 Corinthians 12:26-27
	Guided Prayer	
Week 3	Sunday Service	Luke 22:47-71
March 1-7	Community	Matthew 18:20
	Community	Psalms 26:8
	Weekly Reflection	
	Community	1 Peter 5:8-9
	Community	John 13:34-35
	Guided Prayer	
Week 4	Sunday Service	Luke 23:1-25
March 8-14	Scripture	2 Timothy 3:16
	Scripture	Psalms 1:2
	Weekly Reflection	
	Scripture	Psalms 119:18, 33-40
	Scripture	Matthew 4:3-4
	Guided Prayer	

Week 5	<i>Sunday Service</i>	<i>Luke 23:26-43</i>
<i>March 15-21</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>James 4:8</i>
	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Luke 11:2-4</i>
	<i>Weekly Reflection</i>	
	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Psalm 6 and Hebrews 4:14-16</i>
	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Jeremiah 29</i>
	<i>Guided Prayer</i>	
Week 6	<i>Sunday Service</i>	<i>Luke 23:44-24:12</i>
<i>March 22-28</i>	<i>Mission</i>	<i>Matthew 28:18-20</i>
	<i>Mission</i>	<i>John 1:1-8</i>
	<i>Weekly Reflection</i>	
	<i>Mission</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 5:17-20</i>
	<i>Mission</i>	<i>John 4:7-29</i>
	<i>Guided Prayer</i>	
Week 7	<i>Palm Sunday</i>	<i>Luke 24:13-35</i>
<i>March 29-</i>	<i>Holy Monday</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 11:24</i>
<i>April 5</i>	<i>Holy Tuesday</i>	<i>Mark 12:28-34</i>
	<i>Weekly Reflection</i>	
	<i>Maundy Thursday</i>	<i>Leviticus 16, Matthew 26:26-28,</i> <i>Hebrews 10:1-17</i>
	<i>Good Friday</i>	<i>Luke 23:26-46</i>
	<i>Guided Prayer</i>	
	<i>Easter Sunday</i>	<i>Luke 24:36-53</i>

WHAT IS LENT AND WHY ARE WE PARTICIPATING IN IT?

The celebration of Lent is an ancient practice that began in the 4th Century AD under the reign of Constantine. The idea behind this 40-day period was modeled off of Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, symbolizing a time of preparation and spiritual renewal. It invites us to take time in our own lives to look toward the coming celebration of the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday.

*Over the years Lent has gone through slight changes, but the core tenets remain the same. Today we mainly look to Matthew 6 for our framework, where Jesus gives us simple directions on how to live as a child of God. That pattern references three specific duties of Christian living: giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus said, **when** you give, **when** you pray, and **when** you fast. By doing so, He made it clear that giving, praying, and fasting are all normal parts of the Christian life. When all three disciplines are at work, we release the complete power of God in our lives. A small word on each:*

Prayer

Historically, this has been a time when the Church has practiced deep repentance, self-examination, and renewal of the mind before the Lord. A time for the faithful to symbolically prepare the way for Christ's resurrection on Easter. Essential to this season is the practice of prayer. In this guide, you will receive daily devotionals, guided prayers, and pages to help you reflect with the Spirit on what Jesus has been speaking to you. As you read, remember the words of John Cassian: "To read without praying is a lukewarm reading; to pray without reading is fruitless prayer."

Fasting

Perhaps one of the more uncommon spiritual practices in the Western Church, fasting is the practice of giving something up that we might give more of our attention to God. The practice of fasting is always closely tied to prayer. A helpful analogy for fasting is not dissimilar to clearing a pathway to walk through your attic. You clear away the boxes (distractions/normal life activities) to make a clearer path for you to walk to the other side (your prayers going up to God).

Giving

The act of giving away what you have has been a staple since the church began. This is a great way to respond to God's grace in our lives. When we recognize what He has done for us in our own lives, how could we not respond with generosity and love to those around us! Some people respond by donating financially to the poor, their local church, or an organization they love. Others give of their time to aid in the advancement of the Gospel. Jesus desires a heart of generosity from those in His Church!

Of course, it's important to remember that by doing these things we don't earn God's love. However, we should desire to put effort into our walk with Him, and practicing the season of Lent can help position us for a closer relationship with Jesus. A place where we can encounter the power and presence of the risen Christ! Join us as we prepare our hearts to celebrate His resurrection on the ever-approaching Easter Sunday.

FASTING GUIDE

WHAT IS FASTING?

Biblical fasting is giving up particular foods and drinks or activities for a specified number of days. The type of fast you choose is between you and God; it should not be determined by what others are doing.

Fasting, prayer, and the reading of God's Word go hand in hand because, without prayer, fasting is nothing more than a diet. Simply put, fasting is one of the ways we conquer the physical pull on our lives. In doing so, we open the door to God's heightened spiritual activity in our hearts. When you deny your body, you feed your spirit and grow closer to the Lord.

You may choose to fast to amplify your prayers, to grow in holiness, or to stand with the poor. All of which are clear examples we see in the scriptures of where people chose to couple prayer with fasting.

HOW DO I FAST?

We have included a guide for "How to Plan a Fast" in this book but here's a quick overview. Before beginning a fast, write down a plan and make a verbal commitment to the Lord. When you approach it with determination, you'll be less likely to waver in weak moments. You may be surprised to find that fasting is not as daunting as you may think. But if you do find it to be a battle, don't lose heart: push through and know that God understands your struggle. God's fasting principles allow you the flexibility to take care of your job and duties while still making a sacrifice to honor Him.

If the traditional, complete fast has always made you shy away from this important discipline, you may be surprised to know that

there are many different types of fasts. Find the fast or combination of fasts that best fits. No matter which fast you choose, always consult your doctor if you have concerns and drink plenty of water.

WHERE IS FASTING IN THE SCRIPTURES?

BLESSINGS OF FASTING:

Isaiah 58:8-9

CORPORATE FASTING:

1 Samuel 7:5-6, 2 Chronicles 20:3-4, Ezra 8:21-23, Nehemiah 9:1-3, Jonah 3:5-10, Esther 4:16

DANIEL FAST:

Daniel 10:2-3

FASTING DO'S:

Matthew 6:16-18

FASTING DON'TS:

Matthew 6:16-18, Luke 18:9-14

PRAYER & SCRIPTURE WITH FASTING:

Luke 2:37, Nehemiah 1:4, Daniel 9:3, Joel 2:12, Acts 13:2

PREPARING TO FAST:

Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Samuel 7:3

WHEN TO FAST:

Matthew 9:14-15

WHY TO FAST:

Romans 12:1, Matthew 6:33, Mark 9:29, Isaiah 58:6, Luke 4:1-13

TIMES TO FAST

While most people will opt to participate in their fasts around the clock, others who are new to fasting or have other limitations may decide to have a different schedule. Here are a few options for fasting times to follow.

HALF-DAY FAST – FROM SUNRISE TO 3PM

FULL-DAY FAST – FROM SUNRISE TO SUNSET

TOTAL FAST – AROUND THE CLOCK

TYPES OF FASTS

First, we want to say that the type of fast that you choose should be what you feel the Lord is leading you personally to commit to Him for these 40 days. This year, we are coming together under a unified banner of prayer and fasting for 40-days. There is immense power when the people of God fast together! We want to invite you to prayerfully consider picking one thing to fast from this Lenten season.

Food Fast

This Food Fast involves the giving up of certain foods or types of drinks for a specific period of time. Certain foods are restricted, but all food is not stopped. It is simply the temporary setting aside of specified foods or specific drinks. We decide on one or more types of food and drink and do not partake in those items until the fast is completed.

Daniel clearly participated in the partial fast as recorded in Daniel 10:3. It seems that Daniel usually conducted a more complete fast, but in this case, changed his approach and practiced a partial fast, restricting it to only a few items. Daniel 10:3 tells us, "I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over." Giving up certain foods or drink for a period of time may seem a light form of fasting, but this is not always the case, because even small

sacrifices can draw you closer to God. Start where you are, not where you want to be!

HOW TO PLAN A FAST IN 10 STEPS

There are several important things to consider when planning a fast. Each step will contribute to a meaningful and impactful time of fasting. Of course, these are only helpful steps that we recommend you considering if fasting is new to you or if you are unfamiliar on where to begin. We believe this provides a helpful framework for how to enter into this powerful practice.

STEP 1 - BE AWARE OF THE SPIRIT'S PROMPTINGS

When you plan a fast, there may be a specific need to address, or you may feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The Lord may be calling you to stand in the gap for someone or minister to a critical need, which may also be your own. Sense the Holy Spirit's leading when it's time to plan a fast.

Ronnie Floyd gives helpful direction for the start of a fast: "One of the most important things to do before a fast is to ask God what He wants to accomplish during this intense time with Him." Seeking the Lord about His desired outcomes will give your fast a clear and purposeful direction.

STEP 2 - MAKE A SPECIFIC COMMITMENT TO COMPLETE THE FAST

Once you've decided to fast, "drive a stake" and commit to seeing it through. You may be tempted to end the fast early, but stay true to your decision and complete it. Decide beforehand that this will be a positive and complete commitment to the Lord.

STEP 3 - COMMUNICATE TO THOSE WHO NEED TO KNOW

Let your spouse or others in your life know about your fasting plan in terms of meal preparation, schedule changes, etc. Being considerate and thoughtful towards those around you is an important part of planning.

STEP 4 - SELECT A SPECIFIC PURPOSE

What is the specific purpose of your fast? Is it for worship, intercession, repentance, or seeking the Lord's will and direction? Be sure to identify the reasons for your fast. During your fasting hours, focus on that singular purpose or those multiple purposes.

STEP 5 - DETERMINE THE LENGTH OF YOUR FAST

Your fast should have a defined time frame. You can fast through one meal, two meals, a 24-hour period, or longer. For example, fasting through breakfast means skipping the first meal and having lunch at noon. A 24-hour fast would last from one day to the next.

For beginners, start slowly with one meal. You can gradually increase to two meals, then a 24-hour fast, and eventually longer, like 36 or 48 hours. There are examples in Scripture of people fasting for various lengths, from one night to 40 days. Determining the length of your fast provides structure and clarity.

Also, know that there's never a "convenient time" to fast. Life is full of appointments, schedules, and responsibilities. Satan will often wage war against any attempt to meet with the Lord through fasting. This is why it's so important to make a decision, set a date, and follow through.

STEP 6 - DECIDE ON THE TYPE OF FAST

Will you do a normal fast (no food or drink with caloric value), a partial fast, or a complete fast? Choose the type of fast that best fits your present circumstances.

STEP 7 - START YOUR FAST WITH REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

*Begin your fast with a time of repentance from sin. This can be a time of spiritual cleansing. In Richard Foster's *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, he talks about the "Prayer of Examine," which involves a thorough "spiritual housecleaning." Foster explains:*

"In the examine of conscience, we invite the Lord to search our hearts to the depths. Far from being dreadful, this is a scrutiny of love. We boldly speak the words of the Psalmist, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting' (Psalm 139:23-24)."

This is for your own good—for your healing, for your happiness. Let the fast begin with the Lord's cleansing power.

STEP 8 - FILL YOUR HEART WITH SCRIPTURE

During your fast, take in meaningful sections of Scripture. If possible, read entire chapters or books of the Bible. Filling your heart with God's Word will nurture your soul and spirit. This discipline is a critical part of deepening your fasting experience.

STEP 9 - PRAY FERVENTLY AND OFTEN

Prayer should be a major focus of your fast. This is a necessary element. During the fast, seek the Father, spend time with Him, engage in communication with Him, and enjoy His presence. Plan to pray as much as possible during this sacred time.

STEP 10 - KNOW THE LORD IS PLEASED

Scripture tells us that we can please the Lord as His children. One way we know He is pleased is when we successfully complete a fast. We have voluntarily given up something important to us in order to focus on Him. Like a father proud of his children, God recognizes our commitment and expression of love through fasting.

FEBRUARY 15, 2026

Sunday Service – Jesus Celebrates Passover - Luke 22:1-23

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SERVICE

FEBRUARY 16, 2026

Matthew 25:40

And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did it for Me.'

"You did it for Me." Jesus gives us a stunning revelation of truth here. He identifies himself so closely with the hungry, the overlooked, the lonely, the stranger, the sick, and the imprisoned that whatever we offer to them, He receives as if we gave it directly to Him. What this verse is saying is that mysteriously, Christ himself is present in the people we are most likely to miss. So the pressing question then becomes, "When you're serving others, is your heart turned outward or inward?"

As Christians living within the kingdom of God, we do not see serving others and serving Christ as two separate things. They're inseparably intertwined. It is because of this that we need to remember Jesus' words, "You did it for ME." But do you see serving this way? Do you see the single mom coming in late to church on Sunday morning as an opportunity to serve Jesus? What about the grouchy old man who never smiles as he passes by when you hold the door? Or the kids who never listen to the lesson? If we take this verse seriously, our perspective shifts not only to why we are serving, but also to WHO. We are serving Christ and Christ alone!

Before the next time you serve, I encourage you to say a quick prayer, asking the Spirit to help you to see people in this way. In your service, you serve Christ himself.

- Harrison Blake

SERVICE

FEBRUARY 17, 2026

Matthew 14:13-14

"When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick." Matthew 14:13-14

When the topic of service comes to mind, I love reflecting on how Jesus always left room for interruption. Sure, Jesus had a full schedule, traveling from town to town to share the gospel, but He didn't have a spirit of hurry and was always available to meet a need or heal someone.

When the paralyzed man was lowered through the roof in Luke 5, Jesus healed him and forgave his sins. When Jesus was on the way to heal Jarius's daughter and His cloak was touched by the women with the bleeding problem, Jesus stopped in the crowd to address her incredible faith and she was healed (Mark 5:22-43). After John the Baptist's death, Jesus withdrew to be alone, but He was followed by crowds. Instead of turning them away, again, He had compassion on them and the feeding of the five thousand became history (Matthew 14:6-21). He wasn't so focused on His own agenda. This leads me to wonder if our schedules are interruptible.

Often, when we get busy, we are less aware of the needs of those around us and not as likely to stop, slow down, and be empathic. We are less likely to be present and outward-focused. Think back to the last time you were in a rush. How aware of the needs of others were you?

I believe that if our schedules were more open to interruption, we'd have more

opportunities to love others well. An even more beautiful realization is that when we serve others well, we reflect the heart of Jesus.

- Faith Berry

SERVICE

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Joel 2:12-13

"Yet even now," declares the LORD,
"Return to Me with all your heart,
And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; And
tear your heart and not merely your garments."
Now return to the LORD your God,
For He is **gracious and compassionate,**
Slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
And **relenting of catastrophe.**

For some Christians, the observance of Ash
Wednesday 46 days before Easter -- a date
formalized by Pope Gregory in the 11th
Century -- is an invitation into a holy pause.
It is a quiet doorway into a season of return.
Joel's words rise from the dust of a people
who had lost their way. Yet God speaks with
surprising tenderness. "Yet even now," the Lord
says. These words open a path of hope to us,
reminding us that every moment is a moment
God can use to draw us close again.

Joel calls the people to return with their whole
hearts. Fasting, weeping, and mourning were
the ancient practices of naming what had
grown tangled inside the soul. They helped
the community focus on their lives with God
in the midst of their pain. In the same spirit,
Ash Wednesday encourages us to slow down,
to notice what has drifted, and to bring our full
selves into the light of God's glorious presence.

Continuing this focus on the heart, God's
own character shapes the entire passage.
Joel reminds us that the Lord is gracious,
compassionate, patient, and overflowing with
mercy. This is the God who receives every
faltering step. This is the God who listens when
we pray from a tired or fractured heart. When
we return, we discover a God who has already
turned toward us with kindness. A Father who

is ready to receive us with open arms.

One of my favorite quotes lately comes from
Father Paisios, saying, "The spiritual life is very
simple and quite easy. We make it difficult by
not struggling properly." As we look ahead on
our journey of fasting this Lenten season, we
know it won't be easy, but Jesus is with us
along the way. He is our rock and the source
of our strength. Suffering with Christ becomes
easy when we surrender our strength to Christ
alone. So begin this time with repentance and
surrender, and keep a watchful eye for the
presence of the Lord in your life! He is in this
place!

- Harrison Blake

SERVICE

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

John 13:3-5, 14-15

Some of the most powerful moments of service are quiet and easily overlooked. They do not draw attention or recognition. Yet Scripture reminds us that these moments often reveal the heart of Jesus more clearly than anything else.

On the night before His death, Jesus does something unexpected. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet" (John 13:3-5, NKJV).

Foot washing was the work of the lowest servant. It was uncomfortable, humbling, and often ignored. Yet Jesus willingly takes this role. Knowing His authority and identity, He chooses to serve. Jesus did not serve because He forgot who He was. He served because He knew exactly who He was.

After washing their feet, Jesus says, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15, NKJV).

Service is not about performing impressive acts. It is about being faithful in what is placed before us. Jesus calls us to follow His example by choosing humility in our everyday lives. Often, this looks like doing what no one else wants to do. It looks like serving without applause or acknowledgment.

Serving others also reveals what we value. When we willingly take on small and unseen acts of service, we resist the desire to be noticed or praised. Instead, our hearts are shaped to reflect the humility of Christ. In these moments, service becomes a place where God forms us and draws us closer to Himself.

We often wait for big opportunities to serve, believing they will feel more meaningful. But Jesus shows us that faithfulness in small acts matters deeply in the kingdom of God. When we choose to serve in ordinary ways, we encounter Jesus there.

- Megan Weaver

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

Luke 6:43-45

"For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

While you may not be an arborist, I think just about everyone can identify a tree according to its fruit. If you saw an apple tree, you would know it is an apple tree because apples would be growing on that tree. If you saw an orange tree, you would know it is an orange tree because oranges would be growing on that tree.

Jesus is teaching us here that we can identify a follower of Jesus and a non-follower of Jesus by looking at the fruit that is produced in their life and by their life.

This is where service comes into play. While doing good things doesn't make you a follower of Jesus, it can be an indicator of someone who is following Jesus.

As you spend time with Jesus, daily, moment by moment, the Spirit of God is at work in you, molding you and shaping you into the image of the one who sacrificially served the whole world with His whole life. As you grow to know Jesus more and more, you will produce the same sort of fruit with your life that Jesus produced with His life. Jesus cared for the sick; you will care for the sick. Jesus fed the hungry and cared for the poor; you will feed the

hungry and care for the poor.

It is out of the overflow of spending time knowing Jesus, that you serve others and lay down your life like Jesus laid down His life.

The question is: What kind of fruit is being produced in your life? Is it the same fruit that Jesus produced with His life?

As you get to know Jesus and serve Him in your day to day life at work, school, in your family, what you will find is that you will experience even more intimacy with Him through that service and good fruit will be produced with your life.

- Jordan Bertholf

FEBRUARY 21, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

Oh Humble Jesus,

Be with me in the act of serving others.

Let me see Your face in those in front of me.

Teach me to serve from Your heart and not my own strength.

Let my hands, my words, and my time reflect Your love.

Would you give me eyes to see the needs of those around me.

Helping me to listen long enough to hear their heart's desire.

Remind me that in serving others, I am serving You first!

May my life then point to Your presence and goodness through this love I pour out.

Amen

SERVICE

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

Sunday Service – Jesus Prays in the Garden - Luke 22:24-46

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SUFFERING

FEBRUARY 23, 2026

Psalm 34:18

It is likely any person reading this has lived long enough to have personally discovered some level of truth in the life rule that we grow the most in hardship.

This applies to pushing ourselves in education, moving beyond discomfort in fitness, growing closer with those we love through uncomfortable, honest conversations, and is no less true in our pursuit of knowing and becoming more like Jesus.

Suffering is not a spiritual practice we naturally choose but is one of the most formational spaces we'll ever experience. This is not to say that any sorrow in suffering is just an incorrect mindset on our part. The pain of loss, the exhaustion of mental health battles, the agony of growing apart from a loved one, the weight of suffering is real and God does not judge us for mourning but promises it will not go to waste, He will meet us in it, and He will redeem us and all of creation back to Himself.

Psalm 34:18

*"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit."*

Suffering has a unique way of making us confront just how little control we have and creates space for a deeper dependence on God. Here, we encounter Jesus in uniquely powerful and tangible ways. When we suffer, we are not merely pitied by a perfect God but we share in the suffering of the one who bore the cross.

If we can allow suffering to turn us toward Christ rather than away from Him we will

encounter the supernatural power of Christ even in seasons we would never wish upon anyone. Our prayers become more honest, our grip on Christ becomes tighter, and our ear becomes more tuned to His voice as our desperation for His comfort and guidance grows.

Psalm 34:18 reminds us that God's promise of a Spirit of power and life to the full is not just for our mountain top moments of boldness and victory but in our weakness as well. If you're suffering now or encounter suffering soon as life seems to rhythmically throw at us, let Jesus reshape your heart and form an even deeper hope in you rooted entirely in the confidence that the source of life and Prince of Peace is with you and revealing Himself and His power more to you in it.

- Kyle Mullins

SUFFERING

FEBRUARY 24, 2026

Daniel 3

"Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Daniel 3:25

Daniel 3 tells the story of three of the exiles from Judah - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - who were taken to Babylon and refused to bow to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. They chose to obey God even when it meant disobeying the king, and as a result, they were thrown into a blazing furnace. But when the king looked inside, he saw something he didn't expect. The fire hadn't destroyed them, it had set them free.

Scripture says they were unbound and unharmed. The ropes that had tied them up were the only things the fire consumed. What was meant to burn them actually released them. It wasn't because the fire disappeared; it was because Jesus was in it with them.

Jesus not only goes before us, but is also right beside us all the time, no matter what we are going through. Sometimes I can fall into the temptation of thinking God is distant, knowing the outcomes of every situation, but not being actively involved in them. This story shows that Jesus was IN the fire, not a far-away onlooker.

Trials test our faith and reveal whether we are really living out what we say we believe.

- *Do I trust in God's will over my own will?*
- *Am I living by outcomes or obedience?*
- *Do I still believe (and act in response) that God is good even when I feel hopeless, hurt, or confused?*

Surrender is simple, but I don't think it's supposed to be easy.

When I look back, I can see God's faithfulness so clearly in my past. The present, though, can be harder to recognize. It's easy to acknowledge God in my spiritual highs - when God says "yes" to what I want and I feel His boldness bursting through me from the inside out, when I'm thriving in community and discipleship relationships, or seeing His heart poured out on kids and students at camp. God feels close and tangible on the mountaintops. But He's just as ever-present in the valleys.

He reveals Himself in the deceptively mundane moments, in the hard conversations, in the desperate and vulnerable times. He intercedes and gives us exactly what we need. When life feels heavy and I wonder if I have to look intensely to find God, I can spin myself in circles only to discover that He's never left me in the first place.

While we're still in the fire, it's hard to make sense of what it is we're going through or why. But I think that if we take the time to truly be still, we'll notice He's right there through it all with a love so great that it isn't satisfied leaving us where we're at.

- Kylene Rogers

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

[illegible]

SUFFERING

FEBRUARY 26, 2026

Romans 5:3-5

In 2016, I was thrown a curveball in life, what we might call a “valley” in our walk with Christ, or an “opportunity to grow.” It wasn’t the first, and it certainly wouldn’t be the last. People process these moments in different ways to seek God’s voice, peace, and direction. During this particular opportunity for growth, I picked up a guitar and prayed these words in a melody that comforted me:

“Even when the night comes, I’m not scared.
Even when the night comes, I know You’ll be there.
Even when the night comes and my heart fails, I know You’ll always be there.”

It was simply a prayer from my heart to Jesus, an acknowledgment that nothing can separate me from His love, not even the darkest night where hope or light from God feels absent. For the believer, the question isn’t “How could You let this happen?” but rather, “How can this shape me into a better worshipper and follower of You?”

In Romans 5:3–5, Paul reminds us that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope, a hope rooted in God’s love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Our pain doesn’t have to define us. If we allow it, our pain can become a purposeful part of our journey with Christ.

We can never fully know who Jesus is unless we allow Him to care for us in our suffering, a truth that is often difficult to accept. Yet, when we do, God gives us opportunities to experience every aspect of His nature. James 1:2–4 urges us to “consider it pure joy” during trials, because the testing of our faith produces perseverance, leading us toward maturity and

completeness.

After walking through many valleys, I learned to approach them with growing confidence. Not prophetically, but with a posture that says, “Ok God, what lesson do You have for me in this trial?”

In 2022, our family experienced our greatest loss. My wife Addie and I lost our daughter, Maelee, at the age of 23 on Christmas Eve. No previous valley compared to the devastation of losing our oldest child. In the months that followed, we experienced firsthand the refining work of God through earlier trials and often wondered how people without a relationship with Him survive such loss.

We learned we are not meant to endure these trials alone. Through the local church, we experienced the power and love of God in ways we never had before and remain deeply grateful for His people. The Christian life doesn’t promise peace apart from pain. It offers opportunities to experience His love and peace through circumstances the world would deem unsurvivable. Even when the night came, we discovered He truly would always be there.

- Ben Abu Saada

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

1 Corinthians 12:26-27

Suffering. Everyone goes through it at some point. Rich, poor, smart, athletic, talented; no one gets a pass-through life without suffering.

If you don't deal with suffering, it only lingers and you begin to find ways to numb it. You could try to numb it with good things; family, work, friends, could be with unhealthy things, alcohol, drugs, overeating, scrolling nonstop. Or, just by keeping ourselves busy.

So, if you must deal with it, how do we walk through suffering? How do we walk through life when it gets too hard to handle?

This last year for my family was not an easy one. A line we repeated the most in our home was, "I don't know how people go through this life without Jesus and community". The need for Jesus in life and suffering is a must but today I want to focus on the importance of community when it comes to suffering.

When I reflect on some of our hardest weeks this past year, I look back and see how the church, our community, showed up for us. Whether it was meals, errands, helping with our kids, prayers, or encouraging texts, all of these things were tremendous help on days when we didn't know which way was up. When you are part of a community walking through life together, in those tough days of suffering that never seem to end, those people in your community show up for you, not out of pity, but out of love.

Community can be hard, because we are a bunch of humans trying to be in relationship with each other and miscommunication and hurt happens. So, it is easy to say you don't

need it. But as my brother recently said at a funeral, "You don't know you need the church until you need the church". So many people walk alone in suffering when that was never how God intended it. From the beginning, He knew we as humans were made to have community and not walk through this life alone.

Suffering is never easy, but with Christ, and the community that He intended us to have, suffering can be something you can endure without having to hide from it. You can face the fear of suffering with confidence in our Savior knowing fear doesn't have the last word. All we have to do is be willing to let people in. This is the beauty of Christ centered community. This is one of the many reasons God created the church. Because the wonderful thing about community is when you walk through life together you experience suffering, but you also experience the breakthroughs and mountain tops together as well.

"If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."

- Luke Lauber

SUFFERING

FEBRUARY 28, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

Jesus, the wounded healer,

Would you meet me in my pain and weakness.

Let me feel Your presence in the depths of my struggle.

Teach me that You are with me even when I cannot understand!

Remind me that You are shaping me and refining me through this trial.

Give me the courage to trust You when my heart is heavy.

Help me to see Your hand in every wound and difficulty.

Remembering the pain you went through for me.

Draw me closer to You in moments of loneliness and despair.

And would Your presence bring comfort, hope, and strength.

May I know that nothing, not even suffering, separates me from You.

Amen

SUFFERING

MARCH 1, 2026

Sunday Service – Jesus is Arrested by the Jews - Luke 22:47-71

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

COMMUNITY

MARCH 2, 2026

Matthew 18:20

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

On Friday nights, a few friends come over to my house for what we call Sabbath Dinner. We've gathered each week like this for over a year now to enter the Sabbath with feasting and time in community. We light a few candles and say a prayer or two, and while these overtly spiritual practices center our minds on Jesus, I really do believe in the reality of Jesus being with us there at that table. I have to think He wasn't lying to us when he said, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." I don't think He's present for the prayer, and then "poof" His spirit leaves as soon as we start eating. Jesus loved to celebrate with people, and so we come each week expectant to feast with Jesus on Friday nights.

A few months ago, a friend of mine who comes each week shared with me about how Sabbath Dinner has shaped his walk with Jesus. He said that these simple dinners have made him bolder and helped him carry his faith into everyday conversations. He looks forward to the meal each week because it gives him a sense of community that is both grounding and life-giving. Being surrounded by young Christians who genuinely love Jesus has helped him become more open about his faith and more attentive to the ways Christ is forming him. He told me he's grateful for what God is doing in his life through the simple act of gathering around a table.

What a testimony of the power of community in a believer's life! The community that has come around him has shaped him and pointed

him to Jesus. When we choose to gather in Jesus' name, we open ourselves to His presence, His encouragement, and His transforming work through the people sitting beside us. And it's because of this verse that we can be assured that we are not alone at that table, Christ is there with us! His presence sits among us, as we laugh and as we weep. When we feast and when we sit quietly listening. These moments transform us by the power of His presence, as we gather. Growing us closer to Him, and each other.

- Harrison Blake

COMMUNITY

MARCH 3, 2026

Psalm 26:8

"O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells."

-Psalm 26:8

glory to the world. Let's commit to engaging in this rich community, allowing God to work through us and in us.

Does your heart reflect the words of David? Do you truly love the Church—not just the physical building or Sunday gatherings, but the community of believers God has placed you in?

How are you delighting in the Church?

This year at Grace Church, we're reflecting on and being intentional about the places where we encounter God. The church community is certainly a significant place we encounter God. The Church points one another toward God and His Word, stirs each other up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24–25), and is both a people and a place devoted to worship. God's glory is revealed throughout creation, yet it shines even more beautifully through His Church.

We encounter God when we worship Him for who He is, and through the encouragement and faith of others. Have you ever felt like a sermon spoke directly to what you were walking through? That's evidence of God working through His Word and His people.

We encounter the Lord's deep love and kindness through forgiveness when we have disobeyed Him. We experience His healing and tenderheartedness through the Church when we are suffering, lonely or in need of community.

May we be a people who not only attend church, but truly delight in it—seeing it as the dwelling place of God's presence. As we love, serve, and worship together, we reflect His

- Faith Berry

MARCH 4, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

[illegible]

COMMUNITY

MARCH 5, 2026

1 Peter 5:8-9

"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are." — 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NLT)

I love watching videos of animals in their natural habitats. I know Shark Week is a big deal for many, but I'm more of a cat person (sorry, Tim). Shows about lions especially fascinate me—particularly those that highlight how they hunt.

Lions are strategic predators. Working together, they isolate one animal from the herd, driving it toward members of the pride who are hidden in the tall grass, waiting to ambush. While group hunting is most common, lions occasionally hunt alone, patiently watching for young, weak, or distracted animals to drift away from the herd. Whether hunting alone or together, the goal is the same: separate the prey from the group.

Peter's description of the devil as "a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" is strikingly accurate. He uses the same tactics. His aim is simple: separate us from the flock so he can destroy us. He knows that there is safety, strength, and protection in the group.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and as His followers, we are His sheep. Within the community of believers, we find support, encouragement, accountability, and care. Here, we are known. We have brothers and sisters who help us "stay alert" to the enemy's schemes. They notice when we're straying and

gently guide us back toward Jesus. Within this community, we experience the Shepherd's protection expressed through the presence of His people.

Yet the devil is also a master deceiver. One of his most effective strategies is luring us toward isolation under the disguise of independence. He whispers lies like: Be your own person. You don't need anyone. Don't let people get too close—they'll judge you. They'll hurt you. If they really knew you, they'd pull away.

Ironically, the enemy convinces us that pulling away is safer, when in reality, isolation is where we become most vulnerable to attack. Jesus calls us to the exact opposite. His "one another" commands—love one another, encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, confess sins to one another—are impossible to live out in isolation. He created us to be part of a spiritual family that depends on one another and reflects His love to one another. When we stay connected to the flock, we find people who share our suffering, help carry our shame to the cross, and encourage us to stand firm in our faith.

So stay alert. Guard your heart against isolation. Lean into community, even when it feels uncomfortable or risky.

Because in the flock, under the care of our Shepherd, we find safety. And together, we stand firm.

- Kent Liles

COMMUNITY

MARCH 6, 2026

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." — John 13:34–35

The night before His crucifixion, Jesus shared the Passover meal with His disciples. Among the many significant moments in that upper room, He gave them a "new commandment." For anyone familiar with the Gospels or the Hebrew Scriptures, that may sound surprising. The command to love is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and was central to Jesus' teaching. So what made this commandment new? Five profound words: "as I have loved you."

The disciples could certainly look back over their years with Jesus and recall countless expressions of divine love. Yet they needed to look no further than the very room they were in. Earlier that evening, Jesus had given them a vivid, unforgettable example of the love He was calling them to display: He washed their feet.

To appreciate the weight of this act, we must understand its cultural context. In Jesus' day, washing a guest's feet was a task reserved for the lowest servant in the household. Yet Jesus—their Lord and Teacher—took the role of a slave and washed the dirty feet of the men He loved. When He finished, He said, "And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you" (John 13:14–15).

When I enter into true community with other

disciples, I encounter Jesus in tangible ways. I may not need someone to literally wash my feet, but there will be times when I must humble myself and allow others to care for me. I need real experiences of Jesus' love expressed through His people. Deep within, I need a community who knows me, accepts me, and chooses to actively love me. There will be seasons when I feel vulnerable, ashamed, or messy, and I need someone to look at me through the eyes of Jesus and extend His "foot-washing" grace.

But community is not only about receiving. I also need to be surrounded by people who trust me enough to let me serve them—to humble myself, sacrifice for them, and show them love as Jesus has shown it to me. It is through both giving and receiving this kind of love that I am shaped into His image. Every time I symbolically wash someone's feet—or allow them to wash mine—the Spirit gains more ground in my heart and mind. This is the kind of community God desires us to grow in.

Are you part of a Jesus-centered community that truly knows and accepts you? Are you allowing others into the messiness of your life so they can extend the love of Jesus to you? Are you investing in a group, a Huddle, or a mentoring relationship where you can love others as He has loved you?

Who is washing your feet?
Whose feet are you washing?

This is how the world knows we are disciples of Jesus.

- Kent Liles

MARCH 7, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

Lord Jesus,

*You grace each of us with equal measure in your love.
Let me learn to love our neighbors more deeply,
so that I can help create peace and joy in my community.
Inspire me to create spaces of warmth and love in my home.
To open our table to those who are in need.
Jesus, I thank you for the example you set for me in this way
and ask that the Spirit would guide my heart on this journey.*

Amen

COMMUNITY

MARCH 8, 2026

Sunday Service – Jesus is Tried by the Romans - Luke 23:1-25

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SCRIPTURE

MARCH 9, 2026

2 Timothy 3:16

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

As we encounter the Lord through the practice of reading His word, something supernatural happens. The Holy Spirit illuminates the truth to us and the truth can begin to transform us from the inside out. Jesus came not just to die for us, but to show us the way to live. He offers the Scripture—His very words, as a gift and resource to us.

As Paul writes to Timothy, ALL Scripture is inspired by God and profitable to the believer. Would we be moved by this passage to grow deeper in our understanding of the seemingly awkward or difficult passages to read in Scripture. To dig deep and to ask the Holy Spirit for help to be taught, reproved, corrected, and made more like Christ as we read. Would we have the humility to receive from the words of Scripture what God wants to teach us or transform in us.

It also tells us in this passage that Scripture completes the people of God and equips us for every good work. So often it can feel like we are going through life unprepared for spiritual battles or ministry opportunities we face. As we abide in His word, Christ equips us and gives us everything we need to follow Him and be a light to others. When we encounter God through Scripture, we become instruments of God – pushing back the darkness and ushering in the light everywhere we step foot.

In a world of confusion, noise, and hopelessness, let's be people who are life-long students of the Scripture and stand firm in the truth of God. Let us be people who are full of light and ready to share it with anyone who crosses our paths.

- Jenny Williamson

MARCH 10, 2026

Psalm 1:2-3

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers."

-Psalm 1:2-3

Psalm 1:2-3 reminds us that it is a joyful process to ponder and internalize God's Word, not a burdensome task. This engagement with scripture nourishes our soul and leads to a fruitful life, like a tree that is planted by streams of water.

When you are meditating on something day and night—it's affecting your heart and transforming your life. You're not just reading a scripture and moving on, but allowing it to take root and change your actions. The process isn't passive, but active. Because the Word of God is living and active.

When you are meditating on God's Word, you are living out God's commandment in Philippians 4:8— "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Time in God's Word provides sustained nourishment. Like the tree planted by streams of water that is bearing fruit, you are able to stand firm through difficult seasons when your life is on the foundation of the Truth. When you have a habit of being in God's Word, scripture comes to mind in specific situations or when a friend needs encouragement. Scripture is life-changing and dynamic—especially in those moments you need reminded of God's

truth the most.

View the Word of God as your "water source." Make time to be in God's Word daily, even if it's just a few minutes. The impact will be profound.

- Faith Berry

SCRIPTURE

MARCH 11, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

[illegible]

SCRIPTURE

MARCH 12, 2026

Psalm 119:18, 33-40

When you hold a mosaic up close, all you see are fragments—small pieces of color, shape, and texture that seem disconnected. But when you step back, the pieces form something breathtaking and whole.

This is what Scripture is like.

It is a mosaic made of stories, songs, laws, laments, letters, and promises. Written over centuries, through shepherds and kings, prophets and fishermen, Scripture seems at first like many small tiles. But together they reveal one unified masterpiece: the heart of God.

1. Scripture reveals who God is

Scripture is not just information; it is revelation of who God is. From Genesis to Revelation, the mosaic pieces form a consistent portrait of God's character. When we read one piece, we glimpse an aspect of Him: we see His **justice** in the prophets, His **mercy** in the psalms, His **faithfulness** in the wilderness, and His **grace** in the gospels. When we behold the whole mosaic, we see Him more clearly.

2. Scripture reveals God's will

Across its pages, God shows His purposes—what He desires for His people and the world:

- In the law, He clarifies what leads to flourishing.
- In the wisdom books, He invites us into discernment and prudence.
- In the teachings of Jesus, He reveals the nature of His Kingdom.

Even when different passages look like unrelated tiles, together they display God's

consistent desire: for His people to experience the wondrous beauty, deep intimacy, and immovable security of covenant relationship with Him.

3. Scripture reveals God's ways

Sometimes God works slowly.

Sometimes suddenly.

Sometimes through unlikely people or impossible situations.

When we read Scripture as a mosaic, we begin to recognize His patterns—His ways:

- He chooses the humble.
- He redeems the broken.
- He restores what seems lost.
- He brings forth light and life (because He is light and life).

4. Scripture reveals God's heart

A mosaic is not made of random shapes—it is crafted with intention. The same is true of Scripture. Every piece—even the hard-to-understand ones—reveals something of God's heart:

- His longing to dwell with His people.
- His patience in their wandering.
- His sorrow over sin.
- His relentless pursuit of reconciliation.
- His desire to bless, redeem, and restore.

When we step back and take in the whole story, we realize the consistent truth from beginning to end:

God is always moving toward His people with love.

- Samantha Dorsey

MARCH 13, 2026

Matthew 4:3-4

Our desire to be daily rooted in scripture is often higher than our discipline to be daily rooted in scripture. Why does the supernatural revelation of a God we worship and call Lord require so much mental fortitude to sit down with?

Scripture was written FOR us but it was not written TO us. The ancient near Eastern world was a very different culture with very different languages and very different writing styles. The less confident we are with what we're reading or what we're doing, the less enticing it is to prioritize whether that's starting to go to the gym, being transitioned to an unfamiliar role at work, finishing homework in a class that's confusing, or consistently studying scripture.

Jesus kicked off his ministry, right after being baptized, with a 40-day fast through the wilderness. There he resisted Satan who tempted him to wield his divine power for his own comfort and gain rather than the mission of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 4:3-4

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus did not counter Satan's suggestion with a personal suggestion but with scripture. This was possible not only because Jesus had memorized it but because Jesus embodied this verse throughout his years of preparation. We may not have record of much of Jesus'

younger life but the few instances we have involve discussing scripture in the temple. From that regular practice we then get to read about His masterful use of the scriptures in the wilderness that we're inspired by and seek to imitate.

To wield the sword of truth against attacks from the enemy we must first not reluctantly accept but eagerly tackle the awkward phase of learning how to hold a sword, what stance to take, and how to shift bodyweight as we swing.

When approaching scripture, it is wise to not base our commitments on the perfect plan, study, or coffeeshop with which to set up the perfect sitting with our Bibles but rather consider the longer term rhythm we are implementing into our year, the ways which we will wrestle with the hard questions we encounter, and the space we will create to seek the guidance of the Spirit regarding how to apply the scriptures and teachings we've read.

Through this, we are not merely learning a little more about the Bible each day intellectually but are reshaping our very soul and how we think by letting the word of the Lord wash over us daily. This transformative work is deep and slower than many would prefer but the life and ministry of even Jesus, God in the flesh, was built off of a foundation of consistently studying, discussing, wrestling with, and praying over the scriptures.

- Kyle Mullins

MARCH 14, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

*Jesus, would you, the living Word,
meet here in the words of scripture today.
Let every verse bring me face-to-face with You, the Living God!
Open my eyes to see Your heart in the stories and promises that I read about.
Let the words breathe new life into my spirit.
Shape my mind with Your wisdom and my soul with Your love.
Let Scripture draw me closer to you alone.
Teaching me to recognize Your voice in every line.
May reading Your Word become an encounter with You, alive and present.*

Amen

SCRIPTURE

MARCH 15, 2026

Sunday Service - Jesus is Crucified on the Cross - Luke 23:26-43

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

PRAYER

MARCH 16, 2026

James 4:8

Come close to God and He will come close to you.

It was 2018, and I was at the end of my rope. I had spent a year building up wall after wall. Doing anything I could to "protect" myself from what I perceived to be the source of my pain: People. I had tried to walk this supposed "way of life" that had been preached to me my whole life, but now all I could see was pain. All this dread and isolation had led me to a spiritual retreat center in St. Jo, Missouri. I had heard it was a place that accepted people of all faiths, so I felt less intimidated coming in as someone who didn't even know what faith meant anymore.

That evening, I arrived at the retreat center. Found my broom closet of a boarding room and settled in for the night. After winding down for the evening, I had the most profound spiritual experience of my life... I was lying in bed and was struck with an immense fear like I've never felt before in my life. The best way I can describe it would be a panic attack combined with sleep paralysis all in one terrible bundle. I laid there for 6 hours in this state. Sweating. Terrified. Exhausted. The thought began to creep in that this was the end. Was I going to die? I didn't know... and speaking of, who would know? I was alone in the middle of Missouri.... It was at this point that I cried at to the Lord. "If you're real, I need you right now more than ever!"

It wasn't more than a moment that the fear lifted, and I felt a peace I had never felt before in my life. It was such a stark contrast that it left me stunned. It felt as if someone was giving me a big hug. I had never felt something

quite like this before... And to be quite honest, I wasn't quite sure what was going on, but I knew the Lord was present. And I would do whatever it took to pursue him for the rest of my life.

In the darkest moment of my life, the Lord was right there for me when I turned my face to Him. I'm reminded of the prodigal son, where we see the Father wasted no time running down the road to meet his son who had come home. I was the son, and Jesus came running down the road to meet me. I had never felt him closer!

Jesus is there for you! Draw close to him, and he will draw close to you! That's a promise. Not only from me, but from the Lord himself!

- Harrison Blake

PRAYER

MARCH 17, 2026

Luke 11:2-4

The idea of prayer is such a peculiar thing. Praying to God, where do you even start? It's interesting that the disciples followed Jesus around for three years and the one thing they asked Him to teach them was how to pray. Even more odd is how simple Jesus' prayer is. A proud religious person would be offended at how simple the prayer of Jesus is. Wouldn't the God of the universe want us to pray a hard prayer, a prayer that would take a lot of effort and theological knowledge? Instead, he showed them how simple a conversation with God can be,

*"Father, may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
Give us each day the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation."*

So simple yet so much depth. And the theme: our dependence upon the Father for all things.

I have seen people, even myself, trying to figure out the right formula, the right words, how much to ask for, how much to be thankful, and how much to pray for others. All God wants is for us to talk to Him. Just like a good father would do here on Earth. It's less of what the conversation consists of and more about a conversation with their child.

If the child has needs, the father would want to hear them. If the child is excited about something, the father would want to hear that. If the child had concerns for others, or the world, what father wouldn't want to hear his child? Why do we think our perfect Heavenly Father would be any different?

In fact, he is better than that, way better.

So, what are you waiting for? Start talking to Him today. All the other stuff will fall into place when it needs to. He will show you the way. He wants to have a relationship with you. He will help you figure out the rest one day at a time. Start with what is on your heart now, however big or small, serious or silly, just start talking and let him do the rest as you follow Him.

- Luke Lauber

PRAYER

MARCH 18, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

[illegible]

PRAYER

MARCH 19, 2026

Psalm 6 and Hebrews 4:14-16

Psalm 6 is one of David's most vulnerable prayers. It's raw, unfiltered, and achingly human. David doesn't posture, polish, or pretend—he simply pours out his heart before the LORD.

These are not the words of a man trying to be strong. They are the words of someone who has reached the end of himself—physically, emotionally, spiritually. And yet, this psalm reminds us of one of the most comforting truths in Scripture:

God invites our honesty.

He doesn't flinch at our weakness.
He doesn't roll His eyes at our exhaustion.
He doesn't shame us for the nights we're overwhelmed and the days we feel barely held together.

In fact, Psalm 6 shows us that our hearts' deepest experiences and expressions become our prayers in the presence of God.

1. God welcomes the whole of you.

David brings God his fear, his fatigue, his tears, and even his confusion. Sometimes we think God only wants our praise or our spiritual strength—but Psalm 6 reveals the opposite. God wants the truth of our hearts.

Your tiredness.
Your worries.
Your disappointments.
Your "God, how long?"

These are not signs of faithlessness—they are expressions of dependence.

2. God is closer than your feelings suggest.

David felt distant from God, but despite what he felt, he was deeply seen and heard. Near the end of the psalm, something shifts:

"The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer." (Psalm 6:9)

Nothing in David's circumstances changed in that moment—but his heart did.

With one sentence, despair gives way to confidence. Why? Because he remembers who God is:

The God who listens.
The God who responds.
The God who stays.

3. This psalm gives us permission to breathe deep.

Whatever you're carrying—work pressures, personal grief, the quiet burdens no one else knows—Psalm 6 is your invitation to stop hiding and start surrendering.

You don't have to hold yourself together in God's presence.

You don't have to pray impressive prayers.
You need only to come.

And the promise still stands: "The Lord accepts my prayer," not because your prayer is polished, but because His heart is tender toward you.

- Samantha Dorsey

MARCH 20, 2026

Jeremiah 29:1-14

Here is an excerpt from verse 7: "work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare."

In Jeremiah 29, Jeremiah the prophet is writing to the people of Jerusalem who have been taken captive and exiled to Babylon. They are away from their home, in a totally new culture, and definitely not living in the life they dreamed of. I can only imagine how discouraging and hopeless they must feel. How tempted they were to retaliate, look for hope in other sources than God, or just be grumpy, unhappy people.

In this passage, Jeremiah shares that God's heart for them in this exile is not to run away or retaliate, but to settle in and bring kingdom values right where they were. He says they should plant and harvest, marry and have kids, work for the peace and prosperity of the city, and PRAY for it's welfare.

There is something about prayer that not only petitions God but changes and shapes the heart of the one praying. You may find yourself in a season or circumstance of disappointment. Maybe the life you live is not the life you dreamed of. But just like Jeremiah challenges those exiled to Babylon to pray for and work for the prosperity of the people around them, the same invitation stands for us.

Today the invitation is to pray for your family member, your neighbor, your co-worker, your city. Would you earnestly pursue peace and life abundant for the people in your life that maybe you didn't choose to have in it? As you

pray, I believe God will not only work in the people around you, but at the same time bring you peace and mold your heart to be more like His.

- Jenny Williamson

PRAYER

MARCH 21, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

Ever-present Jesus,

I come to You now, longing to meet You here in this place.

Would You show Your face to me even now.

Teach me to sit quietly, listening for Your whisper.

Remind me that You delight in my honesty and my silence.

As I pray, align my heart with Yours as I pour out my soul to You.

Help me encounter You in every spoken word and every sigh.

May prayer become a place where I see You clearly.

Let this time with You renew my spirit and fill me with Your life.

Amen

PRAYER

MARCH 22, 2026

Sunday Service – Jesus Dies, is Buried, & Rises - Luke 23:44-24:12

[illegible]

MISSION

MARCH 23, 2026

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

In Matthew 28, Jesus teaches His followers that He has been given all authority over heaven and earth and with that authority, He is calling His followers to be an active participant in the spreading of the good news of the Kingdom of God. He calls them to:

- 1. Make disciples of all nations.*
- 2. Baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.*
- 3. Teach these new disciples everything Jesus has taught them.*
- 4. Always know and remember that Jesus is with us as we go.*

This call to actively spread the good news of the Kingdom of God is for you too if you are a follower of Jesus. Jesus doesn't want any of His followers sitting on the sidelines; He wants everyone in the game participating because this is what you were made for. As we go, we are encountering Christ and partnering with Him in the power of the Spirit to invite people into the Kingdom of God.

How is God asking you to encounter him today through going with him in mission?

Would you join us today in prayer for people to encounter Jesus?

- Pray that God would empower you by His Spirit and help you live your life on Mission for Him, sharing the good news with anyone that God places in your life.*
- Pray for the people of the nations to come to know Christ as King.*
- Pray that God would reveal to you if He wants you to go on a mission trip with Grace Church this year.*

- Jordan Bertholf

MISSION

MARCH 24, 2026

John 1:1-8

John 1 opens with a reminder of who Jesus is. Before creation, before time, before anything existed, Jesus was already there.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, NKJV).

Then, in verses 6 through 8, we are introduced to a man named John. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:6-8, NKJV).

John was not the Light. Jesus was. John's role was simple and clear. He pointed to the Light. His life existed to help others see Jesus.

That raises an important question for us. What does your life bring light to?

Many times, we overcomplicate what mission means in our walk with Jesus. We think of mission as something distant or dramatic. Something that requires travel, preparation, or a special calling. But John's calling began exactly where he was. He bore witness to Jesus with his life and his words.

What if we replaced John's name with our own?

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was ____."

"There was a woman sent from God, whose name was ____."

Each of us has been sent. Not because we are the Light, but because we know the Light. Our purpose is not to draw attention to ourselves, but to point others to Jesus through the way we live, love and speak.

Jesus' final words before ascending remind us of this calling. He did not tell His followers to wait for the world to come to them. He said to go. Into our neighborhoods, cities, communities, and to the ends of the earth. You are not the Light, but you have been sent to bear witness to the Light.

So, I ask again...what does your life bring light to?

- Kyler Koch

MISSION

MARCH 25, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

[illegible]

MISSION

MARCH 26, 2026

2 Corinthians 5:17–20

Mission is not about what we do first. It is about what God has already done in us. Paul writes, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (v. 17). Before we go out to serve, we are invited to experience the renewal God has already begun in our lives.

Mission starts with transformation. God reconciles us to Himself first, and then He invites us to join Him in His work of reconciliation. We do not bring people to Jesus out of duty or guilt. We share His love because our lives have been changed by His grace. This is the heart of mission—joining God in what He is already doing.

Later on Paul reminds us in verse 19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”. Mission is not our idea. It is God's work, and we get to be a part of it. He is already at work in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities. Our role is not to force faith but to live it out and share the message God has entrusted to us.

Being an ambassador for Christ matters. An ambassador represents someone else. In our daily lives, our words, actions, and attitudes can point people to Jesus. Mission can be simple. It can be listening, serving, or loving well in the spaces where God has already placed us.

Ask God to show you where He is already at work and how He might invite you to join Him. Mission does not start with a program or a to-do list. It starts with seeing what God is doing and joining Him in it.

- Megan Weaver

MISSION

MARCH 27, 2026

John 4:7-29

Do you remember the day you came to faith? Where were you? Were you in a crowded room with someone speaking? Were you by yourself in a quiet place? Did something finally click? Did God meet you in an emotional place? Were you seeking Him, or do you feel like He found you? What changed? Did you tell anyone about that moment... When something truly significant happens, our instinct is often to share it immediately with the people around us.

In John 4, we see this kind of response in the life of the Samaritan woman. She goes to the well for an ordinary, everyday task. She is not looking for a life changing encounter, yet she meets Jesus. John 4:7 says, "A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.'" What begins as a simple conversation becomes a life changing moment.

As Jesus speaks with her, He reveals that He knows her completely and still offers her living water. Then, in John 4:25-26, Jesus makes His identity clear. The woman says, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus responds, "I who speak to you am He." In that moment, the woman encounters the Messiah face to face. Her life is changed, not gradually, but instantly.

What is striking is what she does next. John 4:28 tells us, "The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city." She leaves behind the very reason she came to the well. The task that once felt important is suddenly secondary to the news she now carries. Her response is immediate. There is no

delay, no hesitation, and no need for further instruction.

She goes straight to the people around her and says in John 4:29, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" She does not present a polished argument or have all the answers. She simply invites others to meet the One who changed her life. Because of her willingness to share right away, people listen, come to Jesus, and experience Him for themselves. By the end of the chapter, an entire city is impacted by her response.

This is what encountering Jesus produces. When we truly meet Him, the natural response is to tell others. Think about your own life. Who do you tell when you receive life changing news? A new job, an engagement, a birth, or a moment of healing. We share because joy overflows.

As followers of Jesus, we carry the greatest news anyone can hear. Like the Samaritan woman, we encounter Him in the middle of everyday life. The question is not whether the news is worth sharing, but whether we will respond immediately. When we do, God can use our simple obedience to draw others to Himself.

- Kyler Koch

MISSION

MARCH 28, 2026

Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Be with me where You are sending me.

Let me encounter You in the places I fear to go most.

Open my eyes to see Your work around me and in others.

Give me the courage to carry Your love into the world.

Help me to act with Your compassion and humility.

*I pray that you guide every step I take as you grow me in
attentiveness to Your voice and Your call.*

Amen

MISSION

MARCH 29, 2026

Palm Sunday – Jesus Appears to 2 Disciples - Luke 24:13-35

[illegible]

MARCH 30, 2026

Holy Monday – 1 Corinthians 11:24

And Jesus...drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. - Matthew 21:12

Today we celebrate Holy Monday, a day during holy week marked by Jesus' cleansing of the temple. It was only the day before, Palm Sunday, that Jesus arrived in Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Greeted by waving palm branches and people shouting "Hosanna, Hosanna!" People literally crying out for salvation upon seeing the return of their humble king.

The first thing he did on entering Jerusalem is the first thing he does on entering a life: He goes straight for the temple. The place of worship. He then begins to clean out whatever is not part of God's design in our lives.

This process is called sanctification. It can be defined in many ways, but here I will explain it as a cleansing of all ungodliness in our lives. Jesus alone can do the work of transformation in our lives, but this doesn't mean we don't have a role to play. He is a gentleman and is polite enough to stay out of places where he is not wanted. This is where we come in. Our job is to listen to the Spirit in our lives and surrender over to Christ all parts of our lives. Trusting that he can do better with our lives than we can!

This act of surrender can seem hard, but in fact, when we surrender to Jesus, we're stepping more fully into the true intention for humanity: A life in union with God himself! As we begin this Holy Monday, with our eyes set on the resurrection of Jesus, take a minute to sit before the Lord and ask the Spirit to reveal

to you what areas you need to surrender to Him today. His response to you might seem daunting, and you're invited to wrestle with Him, but you're also called to obedience! Not a demanding obedience but an invitation of deeper love and union with Jesus Christ himself! May our hearts be shaped into the image of Christ as we give over the parts of ourselves to be transformed by the divine love of God!

- Harrison Blake

SACRAMENTS

MARCH 31, 2026

Holy Tuesday – Mark 12:28–34

We call it Holy Tuesday now, but on that day in Jerusalem it was simply another moment in a crowded Temple, filled with questions, tension, and watchful eyes. Jesus is teaching openly, even as opposition grows stronger. The cross is drawing near...

A scribe steps forward and asks Jesus a sincere question: "Which is the first commandment of all?" It is a question that gets to the heart of faith. With so many laws, traditions, and expectations, what matters most?

Jesus answers "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Then He adds, "This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

In the middle of the Temple, where sacrifice and religious duty defined daily life, Jesus centers everything on love. Not a love that is vague or emotional, but a love that claims the whole person—heart, soul, mind, and strength. Loving God is not meant to be divided or partial; it is meant to shape every part of who we are.

And it does not stop there. Jesus binds love for God to love for others. The two cannot be separated. Devotion to God will always move outward toward people. If love for God is real, it will be visible in how we treat those around us.

The scribe responds with understanding, agreeing that loving God and loving others "is

more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus looks at him and says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Not far. Close enough to see it, to name it, to desire it. Yet still invited to step fully into it.

Holy Tuesday invites us to pause and reflect. It is possible to know what matters most and still live just outside of it. To admire the truth without allowing it to transform us. Jesus' teaching presses beyond correct answers and into surrendered lives.

As you go through your day, take a moment to ask yourself: Where is my love for God showing in my thoughts and choices? Where is my love for others visible in how I speak and act?

- Megan Weaver

APRIL 1, 2026

MIDWEEK REFLECTION

What has your experience been with the Encounter highlighted this week?

How have I encountered Jesus in my week so far?

How might Jesus be inviting you to encounter Him through this practice this week?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

APRIL 2, 2026

Maundy Thursday – Leviticus 16, Matthew 26:26-28, and Hebrews 10:1-17

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus gathered with His disciples for what appeared to be a familiar Passover meal. But this table was more than tradition. It was the unveiling of what centuries of sacrifice and longing had been pointing toward all along.

The Last Supper is the meeting point of two worlds: the long shadow of the **Day of Atonement** and the bright dawn of the **New Covenant**, ushered in by the promised Deliverer.

1. The Day of Atonement: A Yearly Reminder of Incomplete Sacrifice

In Leviticus 16, Israel observed Yom Kippur, the one day each year when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies with blood on behalf of the people. A goat was sacrificed. Blood was sprinkled. Atonement was made—but only for a time.

Year after year, the sacrifices were repeated. Sin was covered, not removed. The system worked, but it was incomplete. It was designed to create longing.

2. The Last Supper: Jesus Interprets the Mosaic Entirely Around Himself

When Jesus lifted the bread and the cup, He wasn't simply giving new symbols— He was announcing that the entire sacrificial system had been pointing to Him all along.

In one powerful moment, Jesus declared: The lamb is here. The priest is here. The sacrifice is here. The mercy seat is here.

3. The Once-for-All Atonement

The book of Hebrews picks up the thread Jesus began at the table and reveals the full

picture:

- Jesus is the **better High Priest** (Hebrews 4:14).
- He enters a **better sanctuary**—not made by hands (Hebrews 9:11).
- He offers a **better sacrifice**—not the blood of animals, but His own (Hebrews 9:12).
- And His atonement is **once for all** (Hebrews 10:10).

No yearly return. No repeated ritual. No lingering guilt.

Where the Day of Atonement opened the way briefly, Jesus opened the way permanently. Where the high priest entered trembling, Jesus entered triumphantly. Where sacrifices rolled sin forward, Jesus removed sin entirely.

4. The Table Becomes a Place of Assurance

When we come to the LORD's Table, we do not come hoping God will accept us—we come because Jesus already has.

Communion is not a plea; it's a proclamation. Communion is not a ritual; it's a relationship. Communion is not a temporary cleansing; it's an eternal declaration.

Every time we take the bread and cup, we are remembering:

- Our High Priest has finished His work and taken His seat at the right hand of the Father.
- The sacrifice made on our behalf has been fully accepted.
- Our guilt has been completely, irrevocably removed.
- Our access to God is secure.

- Samantha Dorsey

APRIL 3, 2026

Good Friday – Luke 23:26-46

On this day, Christians all around the world take time to remember and reflect on the crucifixion of our King Jesus upon the cross. This is the day that we call “Good Friday” because 2000 years ago, God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. If I am being honest, Good Friday is a day of conflicting feelings and thoughts. On one hand, it is a good day because Jesus has taken our sin upon Himself and paid a debt we could never pay on our own. But it also seems like a bad day because in the depths of our human wickedness, we put God Himself upon a cross to die. It’s a good day because our God willingly hung upon the cross out of His deep love for us. It’s a bad day because it was our sin that held Him there.

I want to offer you the lyrics of “How Deep the Father’s Love” to help you reflect on the depths of Jesus’ love for you and the sacrifice that God has made to bring you into an eternal relationship with Him. As you read through the lyrics to the song, my encouragement would be to slow down and use this song as a springboard for your prayer to the Father this Good Friday.

*“How deep the Father’s love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss –
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.*

*Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.”*

- Jordan Bertholf

APRIL 4, 2026

Holy Saturday - Sabbath Reflection - Guided Prayer

*Jesus, meet me in these holy signs of Your grace.
Let the bread, wine and water point me to Your presence alone.
Help me to sense You close in each sacrament,
as alive and real today as you were here on Earth!
Let my participation in them nourish my soul.
Help me approach them with expectation and excitement.
Would your presence fill me and transform me afresh each time.
I love you and look forward to your coming more and more every day!*

Amen.

APRIL 5, 2026

Easter Sunday – Jesus Appears to the Apostles - Luke 24:36-53

[illegible]



KNOWING JESUS

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