



# Family Lenten Devotional 2019

First United Methodist Church, Killeen



Church Family,

Lent gives us time to reflect on our lives. We ask for God's help to investigate the places in our soul where we struggle with sin and depart from God's plan. This year, we will ask God to show us how we can better connect to the needs of this world.

Throughout Lent, we will read through *The Hole in Our Gospel* by Richard Stearns. This book will encourage us to consider a Gospel that calls us to serve our world. If we do not find ways for our beliefs to turn into action for our neighbors, then we have a hole in our understanding of the Good News. I pray you will prayerfully listen to God for yourself and for our congregation. I pray this study will change lives in the Killeen area and around the world.

I encourage you in your daily reading of these devotionals. Each of us has a story to tell that can assist us in connecting to Christ. May the Holy Spirit lead and guide you as commit to the practice of devotional reading. May you find time to breathe deeply as you spend time with God and these stories from your church family.

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Alan

## What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 days that precede Easter (excluding the Sundays).

In the Christian Scriptures, the number 40 relates to the period spent in the ark by Noah, the period spent by Israel seeking the Promised Land after the Exodus, and the amount of time Jesus was in the wilderness after His baptism and prior to the beginning of his ministry. For us, the season of Lent is an invitation to 40 days of renewal (“Lent” means “spring”) and 40 days to prepare ourselves to take in the Good News of Easter through deeper disciplines of prayer, fasting, and sacrifice.

Lent begins on what is called “Ash Wednesday.” Part of the tradition of Ash Wednesday is to receive a mark of ashes on your forehead.

Receiving the ashes reminds us that God’s love is triumphant over sin and death, and that God remains “in communion” with us, that in Christ, our mortality is overcome.

Another important tradition in Lent is to sacrifice something or give up something for Lent. For example, some people will give up television, others will give up eating meat, some will give up beer or coffee, others may give up gossiping.

This year, instead of making a commitment to sacrifice, I encourage you to make a commitment to one of the ministries in the church this Lenten season. Maybe you will commit to helping with Children on Wednesday night or Sunday morning, maybe you will commit to going with Youth on their summer mission trip or maybe you will commit to serving on the Methodist Park committee or any other committee that is currently looking for additional volunteers.

My Lenten sacrifice is: \_\_\_\_\_

My Lenten commitment is: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

*“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”*

As I studied these scriptures, knowing the Pharisee had looked down upon this tax collector and exalted himself for all his good deeds and his tithing and verbally abused the tax collector, I began to think where I may have unintentionally done the same. As a Catholic did I look at others going into the confessional booth and smirk to myself when their confession took “forever?” As a Lay Pastor in the Reformed Church, Crystal Cathedral, did I look at those who came to our church to just make themselves look important; always trying to make sure they were in the camera’s lens and dismiss their spiritual needs? As a Lay Pastor/Elder in the Presbyterian Church did I put the “order of worship,” the appropriate prayers and responses ahead of the urgent needs of those seeking peace and acceptance? Through the years of changing churches, theologies and doctrines, I have learned a difficult and yet extremely important lesson--these things are not important because as Jesus taught us in Mark 9:40, “For he who is not against us is on our side.” So, confessions, orders of worship, rote prayers, limelight and fame are not what He taught. Jesus simply taught us to follow in His footsteps and love one another as He loved us.

**Prayer:**

*Dear Heavenly Father, If I did fail in my service to You Lord, help me to recognize my failings, admit them to You in my own personal prayers, asking for Your help in doing Your will in the way You would want me to. God, be merciful to me a sinner! Amen.*

**Contributed by Rebecca Caldwell**

---

**Bold Faith**

*“On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD  
in the presence of Israel:*

*Sun, stand still over Gibeon and you moon, over the Valley of Aijalon  
So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,  
till the nation avenged itself on its enemies.  
as it was written in the Book of Jashar*

*The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.  
There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened  
to a human being.*

*Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel.”*

Now the first thing you see and are amazed at is that the sun and moon stopped and stayed in place for almost a full day. I mean this has never happened before or since with a person asking GOD to do this. What a supernatural thing to happen, and it is amazing! I do not want to discount this miracle of GOD.

What I think is even more amazing is Joshua asking GOD to do this in front of all these people. I mean really how embarrassing this would be if GOD did not do it. I don't know if I would be so bold and ask this of GOD. Ok, I do know, and I would not do it. Joshua's faith is a very powerful message to the Israelites and to us today.

GOD does answer prayers, and HE most certainly will answer a bold prayer. A bold prayer requires a bold faith in GOD. Joshua had this faith. He knew that not only could GOD do this but also GOD would do this. Wow is all I can say. What if we all prayed this boldly to GOD knowing that HE can and will answer our prayers?

So I want to encourage each and every one of you to pray to GOD and pray boldly with a bold faith knowing that GOD can and will answer your bold prayer. Have faith and trust GOD with everything. HE will guide you. HE will direct you.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, You are so faithful, trustworthy and true. Forgive us for not trusting You with everything.*

*Forgive us for not praying boldly to You. Lead us, guide us, and encourage us to come to You with everything and to have a faith so strong that we know not only that You can do it but that You will do it. In Jesus' Mighty Name, Amen.*

**Contributed by Laura Dungan**

---

**Proverbs 3:5-6:** *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."*

---

**Isaiah 43:2:** *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."*

March 8<sup>th</sup> 2014. It was a Saturday. A day I purposefully tried to prepare for every waking moment for almost 3-weeks. I prayed, I cried, I read the books, I got angry, I was regretful, I talked to people, and then I prayed and prayed and prayed some more...for peace in my heart to not fall into the despair I felt so many years ago and for so many years after the saddest day of my life. Yet, I was so completely unprepared for the day, or any day thereafter. I was blindsided by a feeling that words couldn't describe as my daddy went home to be with my sister, Vicki, and his mom, dad, sister, and brother in Heaven. It was not despair. It was not anger. It was, as best as I can describe it in words...peace in my heart and a feeling of absolute faith in God's promise.

About 14 years prior to Daddy's passing, my best friend in the universe, my sister, Vicki, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly just a few weeks after rallying back from a 14-hour surgery to fix some of the ravages that cancer had left behind. Friday, October 20, 2000, about 4:00 a.m., I got the call...and I thought, "That's it. No more 'believer' in this gal. I'm done. Thanks be NOT to GOD. What God? What God would leave me here to LIVE in this heartache? To watch my parents LIVE in the greatest sadness a parent could experience?" (I say 'live IN the sadness' because, for me, it has never ceased to be any less sad than the moment it happened. Not one ounce of sadness has ever left my heart.)

Somewhere along my walks and talks (okay, 'talks' might be putting it mildly...I screamed, cried, begged, and beat my fists on the ground as I fell to my knees in the middle of the trail) with Jesus and God over that 14-year span, I began saying, "I HAVE to believe that there IS a God, that there IS a Heaven. Because I cannot live this life without BELIEVING that I will be reunited with Vicki with all the love and joy that we had every moment of her existence on Earth! I HAVE to believe in that...otherwise, what's the point of living at all?"

Through repeated efforts of everyone around me and just an overwhelming feeling of having a pointless existence in this world, I made the journey back to 'believing' in that which I cannot understand, but that which I cannot live without—hope and faith that it's all true. And when my daddy passed away, there was no anger in me for God, despite the immense sadness. All I've felt since that moment through today is...at peace and ready to join Daddy and Vicki in the joy of His kingdom whenever He calls me home.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, I pray that You continue to fill my heart with peace throughout the most unimaginable sadness as my family and friends are called home to You in the coming days of my life. I pray that through my tears and even my anger, that You know that I am Your faithful servant on this Earth today, tomorrow and every day until You bless me with the gift of all gifts—everlasting life with those I love in the house of the Lord. Amen.*

Easter 2018 was a little bittersweet for me. Yes, I praised the joy of a risen Savior at God's hands. My disappointment centered around not accomplishing my goal of approaching Lent in a different manner. Little did I realize what was in store for me. My preparation for what change was coming came in God's time in June 2018. I watched the movie *I Can Only Imagine*. In fact, I watched the movie two more times. I just didn't want to miss anything. Knowing there was more to this story, I began to research Bart Millard. I read his book *I Can Only Imagine* for the rest of the story. I was also introduced to the music of Mercy Me, shocked they had been around 20 years and at the top of Christian Contemporary music for many of those years. This group considers themselves ministers for Christ. Their music opened my heart to the modern words of Contemporary Christian music. The lyrics were so beautiful. The song "I Can Only Imagine" changed my focus to meeting God after life on Earth. In the song "Greater," the lyrics,

*"And greater is the One living inside of me  
Than he who is living in the world"*

helped me find understanding. I am Redeemed.

With each of the songs and the story I began to understand that before Christ ascended to heaven, He carefully installed the Holy Spirit in each of us. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our lives change because it is within us to be God's hands and feet. Christ taught us how to live and died to redeem all. The Holy Spirit within each of us guides our priorities and actions.

My approach to Lent is different because I am free and redeemed to do God's will.



**Prayer:**

*Dear God, Thank You for Jesus whose example we followed. We live in grace because Christ died for the sins of the world. Thank you for this grace and help us understand it. Amen.*

**Contributed by Sue Boudreaux**

*“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

In the past few months, I’ve had to attend the funerals of dear friends. We raised our children together at our church. These children are no longer children. They are exactly the kind of adults we dreamed of when they were little. Then I thought of the parents that raised these children. The Jeans, the Friddles, the Smiths, the Hammers, the Cartmells, the Rainwaters, and the Frisches. We raised our children at church. We’ve faced challenges of health and losses. We’ve watched our children mature. We are so very proud of the adults that our children have become! Not only are our children strong adults today, but they are also nurturing to each other. Our children live all over the world, but they are still connected. They are connected because of their foundation of faith. They reach out there for each other each and every time they are needed. They are not alone. They have each other! They are also passing these same values to our grandchildren and to those around them.

Then, I look around at our church. I see the Giffens with their 3 boys: Jake, Max and John. I see Leighann and her husband with Iris and Opal. I see Foster and Beau. They are being raised together in church. They are strong representatives of their parents and their grandparents. They will become the leaders of tomorrow because of the values of their parents and grandparents.

By giving our children the foundation of faith, we are preparing them for the challenges and blessings they will face when we are not with them physically. They will never walk alone.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for families who teach their children the importance of their Christian faith. Thank You for families and friends who support our children and give them the foundation they need to become strong Christian men and women. In Your Name I pray, Amen.*

**Contributed by Carolyn Dugger**

*“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”*

### **Patience**

Last year my husband and I bought our first house together. It was a process that caused emotions that I had never experienced before.

My husband and I spent a total of two years looking for our dream home. We were faced with being out-bid, homes not passing inspections, and offers not being accepted. I thought we would never have our dream home.

In August of last year, it finally happened...so we thought. We found a home we both were in love with, and the owner accepted our offer. We had a closing date of September 12th. We scheduled movers and began to pack; come to find out, the loan had not even been submitted. The mortgage company was not returning phone calls or emails. I tried so hard to be calm and patient, but I became angry and upset. Several weeks turned into months. I contacted my realtor and asked for my earnest money; I was done.

My husband told me that God was in control, and He will give us the desires of our heart. We had to leave this in God's hands. We prayed together. I told God I wanted this house and let His will be done. The next morning I asked my husband to send an email to the mortgage company and our congressman, expressing how we felt mistreated and were having a horrible experience with this company. That following morning, the president of the mortgage company contacted my husband. The president apologized for how we had been treated. He asked if he could resubmit our information.

Within two weeks of the conversation with the president, our loan was approval and a closing date was given for our dream home.

#### **Prayer:**

*Dear Heavenly Father, I ask that You show me favor, although I am undeserving. Father please continue to give me patience to wait on You. Thank You for assurance that You will never fail to keep Your Word. Amen.*

**Contributed by Kenitris Aarhus**

---

*4 "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."*

*8 "Love never fails."*

*13 "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is LOVE."*

---

I always tell my grandchildren to be loving and kind to EVERYONE. What is wrong with our children and youth today? Absolutely nothing! I've witnessed many children and youth who are doing great things for our church, for individuals, and for themselves. The children are so alive with joy at Children's Time, going to Children's Church, Vacation Bible School, and camp outs. The Children's Choir performs at church services during Christmas. I could go on and on. This is very good.

The Youth do fundraising to help pay for their mission trips. There they are helping others who are in need. They serve throughout their community. One senior I was visiting with humbly shared with me that he was on a youth council and meets with the Bishop once a year. After I said, "Shut the back door" to him, I told him how proud I was of him. I saw another youth getting the Pastor's attention saying, "Come, Pastor, and see all the food we cooked for tonight." Many of our youth greet at the church's front door. Children are looking for acceptance, too. One young man walked up to my grandson recently at a stock show asking if he could play football with a group of children playing in a corner of the barn during their break from the show. Sure, my grandson said. Another boy said, "Who is he?" My grandson said, "He's playing with us." I whispered, "Does it matter who he is?" "No, it doesn't matter," my grandson said. These children had such good manners and were so loving and respectful to each other. My grandson won the Breeding Showmanship Award that day.



The next day was a different story. It was time for the Market Showmanship class. He showed and was not selected to be in the final two. The remainder of the class was asked politely to exit the arena. Before they exited, they must shake the judge's hands. On this day there was the judge and half a dozen seniors judging. He became emotional because he had not shown as well this second day.

Walking up to shake all the judges hands with head down, fighting back tears, one senior judge put her arms round him, turned him away from the other judges, and walked with him out of the arena. What love and compassion this senior judge showed!

These few stories I've shared are examples of the faith, hope, and love which are so desperately needed in the world today.

---

**God Restores Us and Protects Us with Important Purposes**

---

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you.”*

I overheard this Bible verse in my first year of college when I was seventeen years old. Two very concerned female students were discussing it and were frustrated that they did not know what it meant and had to discuss it for a class. They kept repeating the verse over and over. My heart was pounding inside of me while I stood at the other side of the library cubicle wanting to help them, but I never did. I was ashamed of being born and raised in church and was self-conscious.

The oracle that opens in Isaiah Chapter 43 foretells in its turn the redemption of Israel/Jacob by none other than God. Images from the time of Exodus appear: the water that does not submerge and the fire that does not consume (an echo of Isaiah 1:25 in which Yahweh announces purification through the crucible of adversity). The Lord does not wait for the people to change on their own; he freely transforms the deaf and blind people (Isaiah 42:18) in the nation that proclaims the Glory of God (Isaiah 43:7). The trust that God infuses to the people implies the certainty that nothing opposite to them may shake them as a nation; the strong waters, the turbulent river, the fire and the flame symbolize Israel's enemies. The New Testament retakes the certainty that no adversity may overtake the faithful of the Lord. What's solid about these chosen ones is that God has called them by their name, and they are his personal property (Isaiah 43:1b), thus provided entity to proclaim God's glory.

I believe God's grace, redemption, and protection will be with me when I stand for the words of eternal life. I wasn't courageous enough to stand up for the Gospel in my first year in college, but God has kept working in my life ever since. I believe during this Lenten season and all throughout the year God's protection will be upon us when we preach, uttering words and testifying with our demeanors as well. I believe God's protection will be with us when we obey his teachings and encounter turmoil along the way.

Can we trust and be at peace that God is our protector? Can we walk our journey as if we are under the protection of the Almighty? Are we aware that who calls us by our name expects us to contribute to His visible glory? Are we thankful that God provides us second and third chances; that He provides us new opportunities to make up for our shortcomings? With what purposes (or callings) has God redeemed and protected you? Do you consider them important?

**Prayer:**

*God, you create, restore and protect us with the purpose of living lives worthy of repentance and worshipping you. May we be strengthened in our Christian faith when it's time to learn the hard way and when we just don't feel like standing up for what we are called to do. Help us, walk with us, protect us as you have promised. Allow us to comprehend there's no need to rush or flee for you are all we need to smile through tough times and proclaim the good news of salvation where they are most needed. All of this we pray, in the name of Jesus, **Amen**.*

**Contributed by Gabriel Zepeda**

*“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”*

My thirty-year marriage to George ended with his surrender to Alzheimer’s Disease. Alzheimer’s is a great teacher.

I first realized George had Alzheimer’s when we were towing a 35-foot Avion trailer. Far from home he stopped on a two-lane, paved highway and refused to go over the next hill. I directed traffic while he walked to the top of the hill to see if the road continued. My world shifted that day. I grieved the loss of the man I could trust to make sound decisions for us both and accepted the man who needed me to step up as a more vocal partner.

A couple years later, the police stopped George after he went through a stop sign. George explained to the officer, “If everyone stops, no one will get anywhere.” I sold his car and became sole driver.

Alzheimer’s teaches us to grieve each loss and fall in love again and again and again. I loved the adult and then lost him to his twelve-year-old mentality. I lost my twelve-year-old to an eight-year-old who rescued a bird that flew into a garage window. We spent the day taking the bird to a veterinarian and buying birdseed.

My eight-year-old left me, and I fell in love with the four-year-old sorting nuts and bolts for me again and again. He loved to take walks and eat fast food. By his last Christmas, he was a one-year-old playing with shoes on the floor. I experienced existential joy on the floor beside him.

Grief and joy are the same lesson.

Years ago a friend who had just lost her husband told me, “I am looking at this as a new adventure. I have never been here before.”

This new day requires me to find joy in a new relationship(s). There is more than one season to each life.

**Prayer:**

*Our Father in heaven, Mother of cardinal, earth and sky, Great Spirit of wind and prairie grasses: Teach us the lesson of holding on and letting go, holding on and letting go. Teach us to love unconditionally. Teach us to give ourselves permission to live anew in joy. Amen.*

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Tug and I moved from Dallas to my hometown in 2007. We gave up our retirement plans to help my deceased son's wife and two small children. Those plans didn't happen. We loved our church in Dallas and were looking forward to finding our forever church home. We prayed! After a couple of visits, the decision was made. We started attending FUMC-Killeen in 2008.

This is where my story begins! One day I made an appointment to speak to the Senior Pastor to discuss where I could best serve God and this church. I had been praying but was at a loss. He immediately replied, "We need someone to take over the Prayer Team." Yikes! Now what was I to do? I had prayed all my life, but I couldn't pray out loud or in front of anyone! I told him I would have to think about it, maybe responding, "I would pray about it!" I called the pastor the next day and hesitantly agreed to "try" to lead the Prayer Team. Joni Lien and Sue Teinert, who had been leading the prayer team, were great mentors. Why am I sharing this now? I thought I needed the pastor to tell me where I should serve. All I needed was to have the confidence in approaching my Heavenly Father, knowing He listens and waiting patiently for His response. Trust in the Lord with all your heart!

**Prayer:**

*Gracious God, thank You for loving me even when my words and thoughts are simple and my confidence waivers. In Jesus' Holy Name I pray. Amen.*



**Contributed by Beverly Tuggle**

*He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.*

On July 7, 1997, my husband had a severe heart attack, and the doctors gave him 30 minutes to live. He prayed to God to give him 15 more years, and he lived until July 7, 2012.

A few years that followed the heart attack he was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. He was operated on, and the doctors removed all the cancer. Then in 2007 he was diagnosed with prostate cancer and suffered much pain from chemotherapy and radiation, yet he never complained; instead he talked about his love for God.

Then in 2011 he was diagnosed with cancer of the bladder, and it had to be removed in June of 2012. My husband had to have someone with him 24 hours a day, so my son, daughter-in-law, and I took turns caring for him. On July 7, 2012, at 3:00 a.m., the Lord spoke to me to take my son's shift, so I was able to be with Herbert when he died that morning at 4:20 a.m.

Before he died, he had asked the hospice nurse not to cover his face when they took him out of the house because he was merely asleep in the Lord, not dead. So, I thanked God for all the love Herbert gave me and for all the love he gave my son. Then I sang a song of praise to God and told Herbert that the glory of God was so bright that it lit up all of heaven. He looked forward to heaven and smiled and did indeed go to sleep in the Lord.

He never went to bed angry, and we both said we loved each other when we woke and before we went to bed. We committed to go on a date every Friday.

Before Herbert's death, he was totally blind in one eye and only had enough vision in the other to follow a shadow to get around the house by keeping the lights on. I could tell that he had complete vision in the sight of the Lord.

**Prayer:**

*You are the perfect healer and give sight to the blind. You are my comforter and hope. I am not afraid to die because I know when I get to heaven, I will be in the presence of my Lord. Amen.*

**Contributed by Ruth Hirschmann**

## **Courage, Faith, and Salvation**

Jeremiah, a young man and possibly a teenager, heard this from the Lord: "I formed you in the womb and sanctified you before birth. I ordained you as a prophet for the Nations. Jeremiah replied: "but I cannot speak, I'm just a youth!" Although afraid, he listened to God. God instructed Jeremiah to go to the Nations and speak to the people. God admonished him saying, "do not be afraid for I will be with you." God touched his lips, and said, "I have put words in your mouth! You will be over the Nations and Kingdoms. You will tear down and destroy evil. You will build and plant anew for all the ages."

Years later Jesus was teaching in a home when an observer told Him that his mother and brothers were outside. He looked at those around him and asked, "Who is my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my mother and brothers." Near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was preaching to the multitudes when he was forced into a boat to finish his sermon. He told his followers that they would learn through parables. He then told the story of a sower of seeds. Some seeds fell by the wayside and birds devoured them. Others fell on stony ground. They sprang up quickly, but were scorched by the sun and blown away to die. Others planted in thorns were smothered by the rapid growth of thorns. Seeds planted in fertile ground yielded a healthy crop producing some tenfold and even thirtyfold. A sower of words who preached the gospel experienced the same fate. Some words fell by the wayside; others fell on hearts and were taken away by Satan. Those sown on rocky ground instilled joy, but did not last, as few had a strong faith. They stumble and the word is lost when they face challenges. These words sown like seeds in thorns are overcome by cares of the world, riches, and excessive desires. These words are lost and their meaning forgotten. Words that fall on open minds and hearts are accepted. These people have faith; they believe in the word and are nurtured by the word of God.

As God's people and His workers, we are obligated to build a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ and the gospel He preached. This faith will resist even fire and survive any challenge. Those who believe will be justly rewarded.

### **Prayer:**

*Our Heavenly Father, we pray that You will give us the faith of Jeremiah. Help us to resist temptation and sin. Let our faith grow and become strong in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Bless us and show us the paths of righteousness. Amen.*

**Contributed by Darrel Charlton**

*“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “Tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.*

“You can’t walk on the water if you don’t get out of the boat.” I first saw this in an *Upper Room* devotional. Like Peter, we all want to walk on the water. But do we have the faith to step out of the boat? Years ago, I was in a job crisis. My job was ok but not what I was supposed to be doing. I knew I needed to find something else but that was scary. And who likes to job hunt? All those interviews and rejections – not me! But then I read this devotional and realized that I could “walk on the water,” but first I had to get out of the boat. I have framed this saying and keep it by my desk to remind me every day that “walking on water” is possible but only if I have the faith to step out of the boat in the first place.

**Prayer:**

*Our most gracious heavenly Father give me the strength of faith to step out of the boat and walk on the water. Amen.*

**Contributed by Anne Hoel**

There are persons for companionship, “But he who finds a Wife finds what is good.”

Have you ever looked up all the different meanings for “friend”? I have friends that are labeled with special titles. Maybe like many in your category of friends you include things like ‘my new BFF’, or maybe ‘friends forever’. Think a moment about other categories, i.e., acquaintance or those you claim as ‘someone I know’. Do you have someone that fits the description found in Proverbs? I used to think it was so great to have a ‘Chum’ in school. And then of course several ‘Buddies’ through growing up and even Pals in the Military. But I have come to cherish the time I found what the Lord has brought into my life. He gives so many reminders through Scripture that when we study, discuss and live by those instructions, we learn just what He means and will always provide the guidance we will need to find just who will fill that special spot as friend and now goes by the title of Wife. Have you been that fortunate? This day a few decades ago I was, and now I have what is ‘good’.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, guide us always in the way to continually seek Your guidance and to accept it in our lives so that we may always live in fellowship with You and know what is ‘good’. Amen.*

**Contributed by Ken Smith**

*“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

There will be days when life hands you more than you believe you can handle; days when your obstacles seem insurmountable. Hold onto God’s promise and know He is always by your side. Lean on God and His Word; He will sustain, strengthen and equip you to face the trials of life. What an honor it will be to testify on His behalf as you weather to storms of life.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, you are our comfort and strength. Thank you for walking beside us daily. Thank you for your love, mercy and grace and for the strength we draw from your Word and the assurance of your constant presence in our lives. Help us to be a light for others as we face life’s challenges with confidence. Amen.*

**Contributed by Kathy Ruiz**

*“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter)*

*“In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD listened; he saved me from all my troubles” (Psalm)*

Being alone can be difficult. In life people may leave, but the Lord is always with you. Kids grow up and leave the house, relationships end, loved ones pass away, or, in my case, work takes them farther from you. No matter the reason, being alone is hard.

As Christians we are in fellowship with each other, and we can gain comfort from that. In my life when I am alone because we have moved and everything is new, there isn't always a community to fellowship within when things are hard. Remembering that the Lord walks with us all of our days and through all our trials helps ease the burden of loneliness. Going to the Lord in prayer and turning things over to God heals our soul and, in that time, alone with the Lord, He will deliver to you comfort and clarity of mind to get you through whatever the situation may be (1 Peter 5:7). It sometimes takes those moments with Him to see that He has already given you the answers you need, but we are often so caught up in a narrow view that we cannot understand things through his wide lens. Take time in your life and throughout your day to reflect and consider that everything has a purpose, and with faith his plan will be revealed. Nothing happens when you are with God by accident. There are lessons in everything, and when you call to Him, you will be saved from all your troubles (Psalm 34:6). We serve a loving God, and He takes up your burdens to ease your pain if you only call upon Him. I am always comforted knowing in my life that I am never truly alone; He is with me. He is working in ways that I cannot imagine to prepare me for the roads ahead or to be the person working in someone else's life.

**Prayer:**

*Dear Lord, Help us to always call upon You, no matter the reason. Be with us as we work through life's various burdens to lift them from us as we draw closer to You.*

*Amen .*

**Contributed by Lacy Queen**

## Truth

*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*

**Winston Churchill:** *"Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."*

In 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries announced their 2016 Word of the Year: Post-truth (adjective): Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

The accompanying press release by the Oxford Dictionaries explained that, "rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event—as in post-war or post-match—the prefix in post-truth has a meaning more like 'belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant.'" A post-truth world, then, is not one in which the truth has ceased to exist; it is one in which it no longer matters.

I admit that I have some angst approaching this subject as it has political and secular overtones. But when I reflect on biblical direction regarding truth, I see a different interpretation of truth and what it means to us as Christians. I believe that, as Christians, we are both obligated and directed to seek the truth in all things, both secular and spiritual. Most importantly, the truth that we seek and Christ refers to in John is not of this world and may not be revealed to us until we have reached a higher spiritual awareness.

In John 18:37, Jesus replied to Pilate, *"Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."*

**Prayer:**

~~Holy God, may my thoughts and actions be directed toward Your Truth and not those of this world. In Your Son's name, Amen.~~

---

**Day 18: Saturday, March 23rd, 2019**

**Psalm 32:3**

*"Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' And you forgave the guilt of my sin."*

**Contributed by Mike Tuggle**

During Lent, we often give up "things." I usually give up carbohydrates because I need to! But like David as he struggled with his sin, I need to give up trying not to sin. I simply cannot do it. None of us can. I can think of lost opportunities and things I wish I hadn't said. I feel so tremendously guilty and it hurts, just as David did in Psalm 32. With Easter, though, we have this amazing forgiveness that no human can ever extend to us.

Consider this Lenten season, giving up the fruitless measure of trying not to sin. It can't be done on our own anyway. Look up to the Majesty of the Cross and the grace of Resurrection and keep your eyes focused there. The results will be better than you can ever imagine. His thoughts and plans for us are beyond anything imaginable! Many heartfelt blessings this beautiful Lenten season!

**Prayer:**

*Father, Your beauty and forgiveness is beyond compare. I am constantly amazed at Your goodness and love for me. I don't deserve it. Yet, you fulfill every need with Your steadfast love! Thank You for Jesus and His dying just for me. Thank You that You have chosen me to belong to You. Please forgive me of my sin. Please forgive anything in my life that keeps me from You. Thank You for my family, my friends, this awesome church, but mostly, thank You for You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contributed by Kerry Perez**

*"<sup>2</sup> When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet Him. <sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.' <sup>13</sup> He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. . .*

*<sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, 'Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. . . ' <sup>20</sup> So the man went away and began to tell in Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."*

### **Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man**

What an amazing story! Every time I read and study this passage I am time and again brought back to a true understanding of just how powerful our Lord is and the authority he holds over all creation, to include Satan and his minions. This man, inhabited and controlled by demons too numerous to count, recognized immediately the power of Jesus and sought to sway Him from casting them out. Jesus would have none of it. At this point we see the group of demons having to ask Jesus for permission to depart the man. Jesus is in complete control from beginning to end! ! ! Finally, freed from the demons that had tormented him, the man asks if he can accompany Jesus, but Jesus says no, asking him instead to return to his family and friends to tell them what had happened and to preach the power and the gospel of the Lord our God!

#### **Prayer:**

*Lord, when I feel as though I am being inhabited by demons and I fear the forces of evil, in others or in myself, I remember that You took on the demons and defeated them. In You I have a Savior against whom the devil is powerless. Help me to understand Your calling for me and what You would have me do to bring about Your Kingdom on Earth. Amen.*

**Contributed by Dave Hall**

***Jesus in Samaria***

<sup>4</sup> Jesus had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> He came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, which was near the land Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob's well was there. Jesus was tired from his journey, so he sat down at the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." <sup>8</sup> His disciples had gone into the city to buy him some food.

<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman asked, "Why do you, a Jewish man, ask for something to drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (Jews and Samaritans didn't associate with each other.) <sup>10</sup> Jesus responded, "If you recognized God's gift and who is saying to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would be asking him and he would give you living water."

The story of the woman at the well teaches us that God loves us in spite of our bankrupt lives. God values us enough to actively seek us, to welcome us to intimacy, and to rejoice in our worship. As a result of Jesus' conversation, only a person like the Samaritan woman, an outcast from her own people, could understand what this means. To be wanted, to be cared for when no one, not even herself, could see anything of value in her—this is **GRACE**.

Take some time today to think how you personally can share his grace with others as well as your testimony about Jesus and teach others to believe in Him .



*<sup>16</sup>So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*

My 84<sup>th</sup> birthday falls in the fourth week of Lent this year, so I chose the scripture reading from 2 Corinthians.

I was born in Killeen where my father was a country doctor (Dr. Joe), and my mother (Thelma) was a teacher of science and math at Killeen High School. When I reflect on how God has guided my life, I am amazed. I have "tasted" God's love, and even though I was the shortest boy in my class, God had a reason for that.

When I volunteered to be a missionary teacher for three years, I was ready to go wherever the Mission Board felt my short-term service was needed. If I had had my choice, I would have chosen to go to India, but the need at that time was for a teacher in Sarawak on the island of Borneo. A wonderful thing happened! I met and married a missionary nurse from the Philippines. So Nina and Andy have been blessed with a wonderful family.

My parents had trained to go to the Congo in the medical and educational field. They did their missionary work in Killeen. Recently I was going through books that my parents had treasured. One of the books was *The Christ of the Indian Road*. This book by a pioneer missionary in India was translated into 30 languages. My parents received many letters from India as well as from Africa and China. The prayers and letters from India had an influence on my growing years.

Sarawak resulted in seven terms of service. God's time is not the same as our time. Reflection on God's grace leads us to follow directions in amazing ways.

**Prayer:**

*Let us pray following the directions of the prayer for March 27—Pakistan Handicap and Orphan Children Charity Society, Food Security for Women Farmers. Four mission goals: 1. Make disciples of Jesus Christ; 2. Strengthen, develop, and renew Christian congregations and*

*“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.”*

As a young Army officer many years ago I was training in the desert near El Paso, Texas. The training was rigorous, and everyone in my group became very tired one night while on patrol. We had been awake and moving for several days, and with the fatigue and the featureless terrain of the desert, we found ourselves completely lost. Luckily we saw a very faint light many, many miles away and we began to walk toward it. If nothing else it provided us a direction of some kind to follow. In the morning we found the source of the light on the map and got our bearings.

As Christians we all have found ourselves tired, lost, and confused just like my patrol was in the desert that night. Fortunately, Jesus is the light on the horizon for us. If we follow that light we will eventually find where we are and know where we need to go.

**Prayer:**

*Dear heavenly father...we give thanks for the light that you provide. We pray that we will remember to follow that light so that we will never truly be lost again. Amen.*

**Contributed by Jake Carrico**

*“Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”*

We all like to belong. God created us to be relational. We join clubs, groups, and teams looking for a place to belong.

Sometimes we are put into a club we never wanted to join. Last August I joined the club of women with breast cancer. I heard a lot of information from doctors and other breast cancer survivors. It was tempting to get caught up in the situation and focus only on the cancer. Through the grace of God, though, there were other voices speaking to me that took my eyes off my situation. The love and support of this church spoke God’s words of comfort and healing. I received cards of encouragement with God’s promises to be with me and never leave me. He used the members of this church to speak His Truth to me. I heard His Truth because I belong to Him. And that is the best place to belong.

To God be the glory!

**Prayer:**

*Gracious Father, thank You for sending your Son to be the Way that allows us to belong to You. May we live each day listening to Your voice and sharing Your Words with others. Amen.*

**Contributed by Stacie Carrico**

*“For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful. I know that full well.”*

I tell my children they are beautiful because they are. They are created in God’s image. They are pieces of my husband and me. All of this is true, but one of my children doesn’t believe me. I didn’t believe my parents either. My son and I hear the same voice: We are fat, we are not intelligent, we are not good enough, and we are not good friends to people. I walk in a cloud of doubt all of the time, as does he.

I came across this verse while exploring a wonderful new ministry for our church. Our church is a part of a community with many special needs children. A lot of these children and families do not have a place to worship. Maybe the lights are too bright, the sounds too loud or the visual effects are overwhelming. I’m sure they could provide many more reasons. A trip to Walmart is not just a trip to Walmart. A lot of times, outings must be planned carefully to allow for different eventualities.

We don’t ask to be born with or without certain capabilities. While I was not born with a visible disability, I was born with a different way of thinking and learning. I tried to hide this difference. I wanted to be just like my friends. Straight hair instead of curly, thin instead of chubby, no glasses...etc. By the time I went to college, I could not contain my problems. My grades fell dramatically, as did my mental wellness. I couldn’t understand what the professors were saying, and no matter how much I studied, I couldn’t retain the information. The voice that told me I was worthless was getting louder.

I was angry for so many years. Why would God create me like this? Why would God punish me? What did I do to deserve this? I stopped going to church regularly around the age of 17, against my parents’ wishes.

Fast forward 25 years. I work hard every day to accept the way God made me. Some days are easier than others. It took years of figuring out what works best for me and what makes things worse. It’s up to me to learn how to accept the way I’m made, and that is a conscious choice. I work with my son continuously on how to make this a conscious choice. I want to help those kids out there that need help making that conscious decision. I want to spread the message that God made us beautiful no matter what we think we’re missing. When we see the beauty inside of ourselves, it’s easier to find it in others.

**Prayer:**

*Dear God, Your works are wonderful. Please help me to quiet my mind and open my heart to this realization every day. Amen!*

**Contributed by Brandy Boudreaux**

Pastor Alan's favorite scripture is the one above – *"If a seasoning has no flavor, it has no value."*

As Christians we should not blend in with everyone else, but we should affect others positively, just as seasoning brings out the best flavor. At a recent Celebration of Life for one of our church members, the following poem by Linda Ellis was read. I think of how my life is a "seasoning" to all those I encounter on this journey called Life:

### **THE DASH**

I read of a man who stood to speak at a funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on the tombstone from the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth and spoke of the following date with tears, but said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time they spent alive on earth and now only those who loved them know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own, the cars, the house...the cash. What matters is how we lived and loved and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard; are there things you'd like to change? For you never know how much time is left that still can be rearranged.

To be less quick to anger and show appreciation more and love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect and more often wear a smile...remembering that this special dash might only last a little while.

So when your eulogy is being read, with your life's actions to rehash, would you be proud of the things they say about how you lived your dash?

### **Prayer:**

*Dear God, thank you for helping me put things in my "Dash" as I encounter life and strive to make it a better place for all. In your son's name I pray, Amen.*

**Contributed by Marty Portmann**

*How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”*

*“He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.”*

Invader alert! Unwanted visitors have entered my domain and are destroying my hard-earned work. I have tried everything: placing barriers to keep them out; depriving them of their food supply; destroying their shelters; sending armed-to-the-teeth patrols to drive or take them away, but they keep coming back and in greater numbers than before! A new tactic must be available somewhere, somehow.

I suppose I could just give up. Or, I might deter their pilgrimages with poisons or sharp, sticky things that hurt them. I could even release predators into my domain. I sincerely doubt any of these remedies would work, however, because their needs are too important.

But wait! Current research reveals what might be the best approach. Provide them places of comfort and convenience. Feed them. Make their habitat a home for their families. When their needs are met, they will be happy and thankful. Maybe then they will allow my domain to respond to my beautification efforts.

After all, squirrels are not evil creatures. God made all creatures, great and small; even we humans. Why? Because of His unending, never failing, all-inclusive, no strings attached unconditional love. Love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. Let us plant seeds of love--must be the best way to go.

**Prayer:**

*Dear God, thank you for your wonderful creation. Send your Holy Spirit to help us to love your creation through our thoughts and deeds. Amen.*

**Anonymous Contribution**

*“Fools say in their hearts, “There’s no God.”*

Today is April Fool’s Day, a day where many of us take the time to play pranks on our friends. This holiday dates back to the sixteenth century when the Gregorian calendar moved New Year’s Day to January 1st instead of near the end of March. This change faced a lot of resistance, and those who chose to continue celebrating at the end of March were marked as fools, and the pranks were not meant as jokes. However, these days the pranks are light, and this day is more a celebration of the transition from winter to summer as nature tries to fool us with the sudden changes between showers and sunshine.

While we spend this day playing practical jokes on friends and family and all get a good laugh or two, we must remember that the most foolish thing we can do is to go through life without Jesus. We all need Him by our side at all times as our friend and Savior and He should be at the center of our lives, driving us as we make decisions and walk through this crazy life. Although times may get rough and may seem like they will never get better, we must continue to pray and believe that Jesus is with us and that He is working on great things for us. So, take some time today to realize that He is with you – He was there to wake you up this morning, and He is right next to you as you read this, regardless of what is happening in your life. You can always count on Him to be there for you, so don’t be fooled into believing that He is not!

**Prayer:**

*Dear God, thank You for the blessing of Your Son, Jesus Christ and for all the blessings You have bestowed upon us. Please continue to show Your presence in our lives as we go through good times and bad. Although Your blessings may sometimes be small, please allow us to realize Your never-ending love and to continue sharing Your grace with others. Amen.*

**Contributed by Lauren Moffatt**

*"I was hungry and you gave me food to eat.  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me."*

In 2010 our pastor, Skip Blancett, asked church members to bring a crockpot of soup every Thursday to provide a hot meal for those in need around our downtown location. Little did we know that the soup that was served on the church lawn would evolve into one of our most meaningful outreach programs, known each Thursday as Lunch with Our Neighbors. From the church lawn the program moved to the Salvation Army location and then to today's location at the Moss Rose Community Center, east of the downtown post office.

I did not get involved with the program until the third Thursday. That day I served a lady I will call "B" and could tell that she was very hungry, so I made sure she got an extra large helping. When she finished I said, "B, would you like any seconds?" She said, "Yes, I would like everything." After finishing her seconds, "B asked for a third helping, and I proceeded to take her a third full helping of food. I was shocked when B finished and asked me for money. I politely told her that we don't give money, just food. I then asked, "B, why do you need money?" She responded, "Tums." I took her a roll of Tums the following week.

Many humorous, as well as inspiring stories have come from that program over the last nine years. However, the one that I remember the most and keeps me going each Thursday occurred a few years back. I was working at the greeting desk where we sign in guests, distribute Gideon New Testaments, Bibles, Upper Rooms, sack lunches to go, and record all needed information, when I looked up and saw two little hands and blue eyes barely looking over the edge of the desk at me. I said, "Hi." What she said next almost made a grown man cry. "My tummy hurts." "I am hungry." We made sure that she got fed first. When she left she had a big smile on her face when we gave her a New Testament and a sack lunch. I said, "Come see me again." She said, "OK and thank you." She has not been back since, but I think of her and the importance of our program every Thursday.

In addition to this program, we have many great programs and services provided by our church. However, a concern I have is that those leading many of these programs and services are getting up in years and will not always be here to take care of things. We need new, young blood to take over the reins if these great programs and services are to continue down the road.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, thank You for the opportunity to serve others in meaningful ways that hopefully bring them closer to Your greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ. May all the great things that are being done in Your name be carried on for generations to come. Amen.*

**Contributed by Chuck Truesdale**

## Day 29: Wednesday, April 3rd, 2019

---

Lent is a season for love. Yes, we focus on self-denial, prayer, sacrifice, and penance. But we do that out of love — love of others and love of God. If we attempt to dive into the devotions and practices of Lent without a focus or defined purpose, then we risk bearing no fruit when the season is over. Love is the purpose and love will be the fruit. Why retell the story of Christ's death and resurrection each year if not to illustrate his love for us. May we continually seek to grow in that love and offer that love in turn.

Take some time today for personal reflection as you ponder this question:

Do I truly seek to love others as Jesus Christ loves me?

*"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."*

Recently I was made aware of how one of our Stephen Ministers had impacted someone's life, and I thought I would share (with permission) how being the hands and feet of Christ had impacted a person's life.

"My mom's been going through a lot lately, so I suggested the idea of a Stephen Minister to her. She's not really involved at church, so I was surprised at how excited she was about the idea. I helped her get connected with a Stephen Leader at my church.

"After just a few meetings, her Stephen Minister is already making a difference. My Mom loves being able to talk to someone removed from her life so she can share what she's feeling without judgment or getting unhelpful advice. She's even started to go to church again."

What a wonderful blessing it was to hear how one person who listened to God and sought to do His work helped someone in such a wonderful way!

### **Prayer:**

*Almighty God, You are the source of health and healing, the spirit of calm, and the central peace of the universe. We ask that You would fill us with such an awareness of Your presence within that we may have complete confidence in You. In all pain and weariness and anxiety may we rest in Your protecting care; may we know ourselves to be encircled by Your loving power so that we may allow You to give us health and strength and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, **Amen.***

**Contributed by Laura Winckel**

*“For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”*

My father raised my sister and me as our mother chose to give up her family for what she thought would be a better life. Even though Dad worked hard to care for his two little girls, I was filled with resentment toward our mother. Long before my teen years, she moved away, and I lost all contact with her. This loss created a lot of bitterness in me, and I even said aloud that hoped she was miserable!

I had no idea how unhappy she was or that alcohol was a big part of her life. During an argument, her husband picked up his handgun and fired three times, killing her. The news overwhelmed me with guilt and brought back those old feelings I thought I had dealt with or, at least, had forgotten.

Yet, God had a plan! He loved and valued me, and He was about to open my eyes and heal my heart. It was a Sunday morning in church while listening to others share their testimonies of difficult things in their lives the Lord had used to turn them back to Him that I heard my God’s voice. He said, “That’s you, Mary. That’s what I did for you.”

In that moment, I knew beyond all doubt who had spoken, and I understood that it was His mercy and protection that allowed a complete separation from my mother. Knowing her end, He saved me from that same fate.

Healing is a process. Bitterness had to be uprooted, and that would require my willingness to forgive. The Lord deals gently with wounded hearts and covers them with grace along their journey. In time, I was able to forgive my mother and be thankful for a father who trusted God.

Though the facts of my story remain unchanged, their only importance lies in how they can be used to help another who’s struggling. A rejected child is not who I am! I am a child of the King, the very One who hung the stars in heaven, and He knows my name! He loves me enough to speak it in my ear, and what He has done for me, He can do for another!

**Prayer:**

*Precious Lord Jesus, Pour out Your mercy and grace on every wounded heart and heal them with the knowledge that they are greatly loved and valuable in Your eyes. Show them You have a plan for them that will bring a wonderful future filled with hope. Amen.*

**Contributed by Mary Hall**

## Day 32: Friday, April 6th, 2019

---

In many cultures there is an ancient custom of giving a tenth of each year's income to some holy use. For Christians, to observe the forty days of Lent is to do the same thing with roughly a tenth of each year's days. After being baptized by John in the river Jordan, Jesus went off alone into the wilderness, where he spent forty days asking himself the question what it meant to be Jesus. During Lent, Christians are supposed to ask one way or another what it means to be themselves.

If you had to bet everything you have on whether there is a God or whether there isn't, which side would get your money and why?

When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like and what do you see in it that you most deplore?

If you had only one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in twenty-five words or less?

Of all the things you have done in your life, which is the one you would most like to undo? Which is the one that makes you happiest to remember?

Is there any person in the world or any cause that, if circumstances called for it, you would be willing to die for?

If this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?

To hear yourself try to answer questions like these is to begin to hear something not only of who you are, but of both what you are becoming and what you are failing to become. It can be a pretty depressing business all in all, but if sackcloth and ashes are at the start of it, something like Easter may be at the end.

**~originally written by Frederick Buechner &  
published in *Whistling in the Dark* and  
later in *Beyond Words***

*“And do not forget to do good and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

### **It's the little things.....**

I've always believed “It's the little things that make the big stuff possible.” A simple smile, an encouraging word, or opening the door for someone are all “little things” we can do to improve someone's day.

We can also share the Love of our Lord and Savior. This was difficult for me to do for a long time, but as I've continued on my own faith journey, I've found it much easier to do.

I encourage us all to share the Love of Jesus Christ and to do so with enthusiasm. You never know the impact it might have. The opportunity is in front of us each and every day. Let's take advantage of it.

#### **Prayer:**

*Lord, we give thanks for the opportunity we have to make a difference in the lives of others, to know that the smallest of gestures can make the biggest of impacts. We pray for encouragement and confidence to reach out to others and share Your word. Amen.*

**Contributed by Glenn Morrison**

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

Several years ago, my husband, Bob, and I journeyed with our church family in a small group study to read the entire Bible in 90 days. It was quite a challenge for me, reading twelve pages each day for the course of 90 consecutive days. We could finally say, "We read the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation." In all honesty, it was probably not the best idea, if you want to retain what you read. God's Word isn't meant to "speed read;" it is meant for us to nurture a living relationship with God, serve and love others in Christ's image.

About six years ago, our daughter, Megan was invited to an evening Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) class in Waco while she lived in Hewitt. She expressed such delight in reading the notes, answering questions, hearing lecture and discussing in a small group setting. Bob and I are so thankful she was led to study God's word so faithfully, in this delicate stage, as a young adult.

Megan would share specific lessons with me, as it touched her life situation, and her joy and dedication moved me to ask more questions about this particular study group. After all, I witnessed the Holy Spirit transforming her!

A few months had passed, and I was invited to attend a BSF welcome group on Fort Hood.

After being introduced to this international, non-denominational four-fold approach to Bible study, I was asked to join a prayer group to let God work in calling out the leadership for an evening BSF group in our community. There was already a day class that met in Killeen, but no class was offered for working women.

In the winter of 2014, God answered our prayer; a pilot class had been formed to start an Evening BSF Women and School Aged Children Class, and the invitation was made for FUMC Killeen to become its host church. I believe it was God's will for our church campus to fulfill the needs of this important ministry—a light on the hill.

The pilot class was a success with nearly 140 women and 30 school-aged children coming to understand the depth of God's love.

Since then, we have extended the invitation to our women of the church and community to share in this spectacular study. An Evening BSF Men's Class has been formed, through prayer, and hosted at First Baptist Church in Belton. Bob accepted the invitation to join the Men's BSF Class in 2017 for the study of John, and I believe he feels privileged to share his on-going experience. We enjoy studying the Bible lessons together, and we witness God's wonderful transformation in both of us. We have an Almighty God who loves us beyond our comprehension, and we learn that we grow in Christ's image when we spend time in His Word through scripture, prayer, and worship.

**Prayer:**

*Gracious God, Your love is greater than we can fully understand. You seek us out through so many opportunities to grow in Your Word. Help us to listen to Your call and actively respond by inviting our neighbors as we are nurtured in Your wisdom, grace, and love. We ask this in the Name of Christ Jesus, Amen.*

**Contributed by Lisa Kure**

<sup>40</sup> *Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.*

I met eleven-year-old Billy at the Atlanta Methodist Children's Home. He had high, Cherokee cheekbones, expressive brown eyes, a 70 IQ, and was short and stocky. He was coming home with me!

I asked Billy what he wanted most in the world. He said he wanted to be normal. "What is normal?" I asked. "To play sports!" Billy exclaimed, as if obvious.

I signed Billy up for football. He looked good in his uniform, but sat on the bench all season. Next I signed Billy up for basketball. Again Billy sat on the bench all season. He seemed happy just to be part of the team and enjoyed our routine of DQ burgers after each game.

The final tournament was held in a large, packed gymnasium. Billy's team tried, but the scoreboard suggested their cause was lost. Billy's coach called a timeout and had a conversation with the opposition's coach and referees. Billy went to the sideline with the ball. He looked confident and threw in the ball. Billy followed the ball, knocking players from both teams to the floor. The referee's whistle blew. I knew Billy was going to be sent back to the bench. Instead the referee called the foul on the other team and gave the ball to Billy for a second time. Billy threw the ball and ran into the fray pushing other players to the floor. The sound of the whistle stopped the mayhem. Billy's foul was once more assigned to the other team, and Billy walked alone to the free throw line. Billy pulled the ball down between his legs, released the ball, and miraculously it landed dead center in the hoop. Knowing Billy's story, every person stood up to cheer for him.

The coaches, referees and community were one in the spirit of goodness--a celebration of Billy.

At the DQ I told Billy how proud I was of him. He said, "I knew I could do it if I had a chance."

**Prayer:**

*Our Father in Heaven, Mother of cardinal, oak and sky, Great spirit of wind and prairie grasses: Let us be welcoming and open--instruments in everyday miracles. Amen.*

**Contributed by Ann Hendrix**

## **Day 36: Wednesday. April 10th, 2019**

---

Jesus healed many, including those who were lame and crippled. Now they could walk among the masses as living signs of the power of God. You and I may never have been healed in this way, but surely God has done some great things in our lives as well. We need to walk through this world as living signs as well. Then those who need healing in this world will have a greater chance of meeting their healer.

Take some time today for personal reflection and ponder this question:

In what ways has God offered me healing in my life?

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.....”*

Last June I traveled with my daughter-in-law and two granddaughters to England, Scotland, and Wales. This was their first trip abroad. Having been there several times, I had the pleasure of seeing the sites again through the eyes of “my girls.”

Near the end of our tour I asked them to choose one thing about the trip that they enjoyed the most. Immediately Amber, a Texas A&M meteorology student, said “Stonehenge.” Lisa, a Salado eighth grader, said “shopping.” Becky, their mother, thought for a moment and then said, “Everything is so old and so beautiful.” She explained that seeing the castles and thatched roofs in the countryside as well as sites such as Westminster, Buckingham Palace, and Edinburgh Castle “opened her mind's eye” to the literature and history of Great Britain she has always loved.

As we watch, listen, and learn for ourselves, the wonders of our world open up to us with new and exciting meaning. We can use these same tools to give our journey of faith a new and much deeper meaning. Through observing our fellow Christians in their walks with Jesus and their service to others while engaging in our own daily search for God's Word, we can grow in faith, knowing that all the while our Heavenly Father is with us to guide and protect us. The “light” of Christ is ever present no matter how bumpy the path may be.

At Easter and always, we remember one of our favorite Bible verses. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.....” By dying for us on the cross, Jesus gave to each of us the promise of eternal life if only we choose to follow Him.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, Give us the strength and courage to choose the path you have chosen for us that we may spend eternity in Heaven with You, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**Contributed by Alice Schlessiger**

## Day 38: Friday, April 12th, 2019

---

Such great power exists in reflecting on the Passion of Jesus Christ and realizing that he experienced real pain, real despair, and true human emotions. Our God has such profound love for us that He would seek to walk among us and take part in the full human experience. Our God knows our pain. Our God is not one who rests in a far-away place unconnected to His creation. He is the one born in a manger and then crucified by those He would seek to save. He is then and now Emmanuel: God with us!

Take some time for personal reflection and ponder this question:

When I face trials in this life, am I truly aware of a God who loves me and understands what I am going through?

*“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. “*

Chet Frisch was a leader in our church who had the vision of reaching out into the community and bringing God’s love to all he served. He began the Feeding our Neighbors program at our church in downtown Killeen. He wanted to reach out and bring the love of Christ to all around him.

When we moved our church to this new location, he looked down from our new church on the hilltop, to a piece of land considered worthless. It was in the flood plain. Chet Frisch had a vision. Once again, he said, “Here I am, Lord.” Could we turn this worthless land into an outreach to continue to show the community Christ’s love? “Who will help me build this village?” he asked. “I will,” said Gary. “I will,” said Paul. “I will,” said Marvin. The village began. The village grew. Challenges, in the form of illness, loss, floods and time came. Chet Frisch’s vision persevered. “Who will help continue the village?” “I will,” said Mike. “I will,” said Sonny. “I will,” said Ken. The village continued to grow. Crosses were added to the hilltop. A prayer trail was built. Bridges connecting both sides of the park were constructed. Young men like Patrick, Nathan, and Brandon learned from the men working in the park. Chet’s vision of serving the community and bringing all to Christ continues with the work he began.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, Thank You for men like Chet Frisch who have the vision to serve. Thank You for men and women who continue Chet’s vision by extending the word of Christ to all they meet. Thank You for reminding us that we can all serve our Lord in some way. Help us to find the ways You want us to serve and help us extend Christ’s love to all around us! In Your Service, **Amen.***

**Contributed by Jerry Dugger**

## **Day 40: Sunday, April 14th, 2019 1 Timothy 6:12-16 (NLT)**

---

<sup>12</sup>*Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses. <sup>13</sup>And I charge you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good testimony before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup>that you obey this command without wavering. Then no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. <sup>15</sup>For, At just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. <sup>16</sup>He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.*

Is there really such a thing as a good fight? I grew up hearing and seeing *many* fights, none of which I would consider good. I was in one or two fights myself, but never did I walk away saying, "That was a good fight," not even when I was boxing.

But think about what Paul is calling Timothy and other disciples to do; there is such a thing as a good fight. If you have trusted God, asked Jesus Christ to be your Savior, and you are truly seeking to follow Christ, then you can expect and should plan for a fight.

Ray Stedman, an evangelical pastor, said it this way, "The good fight of faith recognizes the true nature of the Christian life: it is a battleground, and you will never be given much of a breather. Many people have trouble there. They are always hoping that the battle will end, that the enemy will give up and go home, and they can begin to enjoy life without any troubles."

There will be haters, non-believers, "quiet" believers, but in the end our enemy *prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8 NIV). In Ephesians 6:12, 13,

*<sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

The pressure for us to fit in with others may be strong, but Jesus faced death. His very life would be taken for not compromising. We may face some ridicule and scorn from unbelievers, friends or even family, but we can find strength, realizing that Jesus is the example for us to follow in the face of opposition. As we fight the good fight of faith, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:9).

### **Prayer:**

*Father, wrap me in your armor to fight the good fight of faith for your glory and honor. Amen.*

**Contributed by Colleen Smith-Fey**

*"Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."*

Even though the word LIGHT is mentioned in the Bible many times and I have memorized several verses about light, there was one night when I was very thankful for the light from a 40-watt bulb.

My husband and I enjoyed watching the sun set over the Grand Canyon early one March without any thought about how quickly dark would come. By the time we boarded the last bus for the ride back to the bus terminal, it was pitch black. Being the visual person that I am, I was completely disorientated with no light to guide us. The moon was visible occasionally, but the tall pine trees and the cloud cover prevented it from being much help. We were totally alone with no idea how to get back to the parking lot where we had parked hours earlier. We walked hand in hand trying many paths, only to realize we were in the wrong parking lot since no car lights came on when we clicked the key fob. After what seemed like an eternity, in the distance I spotted that bare bulb at a concession stand we had passed as we entered the area where we could catch the tourist bus. We walked carefully as if the next step could be yet another wrong path; we finally found the place where we had parked. The above verse came to mind when we eventually found our car...the only one left in the parking lot!

**Prayer:**

*Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending us Your only begotten son to be our light not only that night at the Grand Canyon but throughout our lives. May we follow Your only son all the days of our lives and not walk in darkness. We know that You will guide our footsteps as we seek to follow You. Amen.*

**Contributed by Mary Pinson**

*“<sup>28</sup>Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

As Pastor Alan was preaching the sermon from this scripture several Sundays ago, I remembered the Sundays we spent as a family at Mother and Daddy’s when my children and my siblings’ children were young. We attended the worship service at Topsey Methodist Church every Sunday, then went to the ranch for lunch.

After lunch was finished and all the dishes were done, the kids went outside. They had 100 acres to roam and be free. There wasn’t a katydid or squirrel safe within that 100 acres. They took their BB guns and shot at anything that moved. We, as their parents, didn’t have to worry about traffic, strangers, or their getting into trouble.

Inside the house, the adults played cards and dominoes or sat around watching whatever sport was on television at the time.

When the time came for us to go home, no one was ready. My parents were sad to see us go as well, but they knew we would be back next Sunday.

Pastor Alan said, “Time is a gift.” He was absolutely right. We spent time cooking together, being together, and connecting with family. It was a centering time for all of us, both individually and with family. God granted us those years together to just relax and enjoy being together. That created a closeness in us that is still with the few of us who are left. That time, those years were such a precious gift.

**Prayer:**

*Dear Lord, Thank You for the time You give us to be together as a family and celebrate just being with one another. We need to center ourselves by just being quiet and giving ourselves a moment to find and be with You. In Your name, **Amen.***

**Contributed by Phyllis Wheeler**

## Day 43: Wednesday, April 17th, 2019      Philippians 4:1-13

---

And I will follow Jesus.

This date for this year's Lenten Devotional booklet is significant for me personally because April 17 is the birthday of our oldest son, Mark Andrew Honchul. In the scripture, verse 1, "Stand fast in the Lord." We had a previous pregnancy loss, but I believed with faith and perseverance in the will of God, and His will did prevail.

As we continue reading in this scripture in verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." With military moves and three other lost pregnancies, we rejoiced 4 ½ years later to welcome Daris Melissa (Missy) Honchul. We THOUGHT our family was complete. Reading in verse 9, "Keep on doing the things that you have learned and heard and seen and the God of peace will be with you" was oh so true.

We continued with military moves and were foster parents in Panama for the Army Community Services and in Killeen for the Methodist Homes in Waco and San Antonio. After 10 years more, we adopted Chris from Waco and Deana from San Antonio. Yes, in verse 13, "We can do all things through Christ which strengthens us."

### **Prayer:**

*Dear God and Father of all, May we continue faithful to the Word and believe to have joy and be thankful for all You bestow on us. Amen.*

**Contributed by Roz Honchul**

*“A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*

Today is Maundy Thursday. What does that mean? The word “Maundy” is derives from the Latin “mandatum,” which means “commandment.”

Jesus and His disciples were sharing their “last supper” when Jesus told them this new commandment—*after He the ‘Master’ had washed their feet.*

I’m more of a “Martha” person—meaning I’m the one serving, but **to be** served is to humbly experience God’s love and grace.

My grandparent and parents were loving examples of serving others. Living in a rural area they were always helping neighbors in whatever way they could—food, sitting with the sick, helping build barns, and taking care of animals.

My grandfather’s favorite gospel hymn, written by William Golden in 1918, said it simply, and today this is my prayer.

#### **A Beautiful Life**

Each day I’ll do a golden deed  
By helping those who are in need  
My life on earth is but a span  
And so I’ll do the best I can

To be a child of God each day  
My light must shine along the way  
I’ll sing His praise while ages roll  
And strive to help some troubled soul

The only life that will endure  
Is one that’s kind and good and pure  
And so for God I’ll take my stand  
Each day I’ll lend a helping hand

I’ll help someone in time of need  
And journey on with rapid speed  
I’ll help the sick and poor and weak  
And words of kindness to them speak

While going down life’s weary road  
I’ll try to lift some trav’ler’s load  
I’ll try to turn the night to day  
Make flowers bloom along the way

Life’s evening sun is sinking low  
A few more days and I must go  
To meet the deeds that I have done  
Where there will be no setting sun

**Contributed by Debra Friddle**

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

Good Friday. For me, this is one of those “thin” places each year, when God feels so near, when the world seems drenched with the sacred, and when this whole story we find ourselves in becomes especially powerful.

Good Friday causes us to reflect on things that we’d much rather avoid thinking about. Pain and suffering, human violence, scapegoating of the innocent, cycles of revenge and retaliation, and our own participation in or allowance of such things. Humanity still suffers from the same afflictions it did in Jesus’ time. The beauty of Good Friday, for me, is that Jesus’ life and example on the cross shows us the pathway out of those destructive cycles.

Shane Claiborne says it so beautifully: “On the cross, we see what love looks like when it stares evil in the face.”

Jesus’ prayer, “Forgive them,” was given freely, not contingent on an apology. I believe he included all of us in that prayer. That unconditional, surprising, unwarranted love is what changes our hearts and turns us to God.

Jesus’ enemy-love is still the most powerful force in the world. Even on nights like tonight, when love seems trampled and buried by the world’s violence and hate, we know the truth—His life and love is like any seed, which, when buried, is not dead, but is the promise of new life.

How can we grow in our capacity to love in this way? While we may not experience such dramatic trials, all of us *will* be wronged at some time. All of us will be misunderstood or betrayed. Sometimes new boundaries are needed. But we do not have to return hate for hate.

There is a prayer guide which Richard Rohr often includes in his daily meditations which helps me remember to extend love beyond my comfort zone. I will share it in case it helps you as it has helped me:

Begin by focusing your thoughts on a loved one--a friend or family member whom you find it easy to love. Say a prayer for that person. Give thanks for their divine spark. Pray for them to experience peace, wholeness, and love.

Next...bring to mind an acquaintance for whom you have no strong feelings. Pray the same good things for them.

Gradually, widen your compassion to pray this same prayer for someone who disagrees with you, who has been less than kind to you, or someone who has hurt you.

### **Prayer:**

*Thank You, Jesus, for teaching us to love our enemies. Help us to follow you! Amen.*

**Contributed by Traci McGrath**

*“Early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. She ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him.” Peter and the other disciple left to go to the tomb. They were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and was the first to arrive at the tomb.”*

The story of the empty tomb in John shares some interesting details. First, I think it is unusual to include all of the running. These disciples hear of an empty tomb and want so badly to see and believe. Walking just will not get them there. They must run!

In addition, what is there to know about this unnamed disciple? Throughout the book of John (13:21-30 and 19:26-27), there is one disciple who is nameless except for the fact that he loved Jesus. Traditionally we call him the “beloved disciple.” Scholars debate who this might actually be. Is the disciple Lazarus or even Mary Magdalene? Some think it is possibly the author himself, John.

One thing we do know: this disciple was known not by his own identity, but instead by his relationship with Jesus. Now there is something to consider! This disciple was simply known for his love of the Lord.

Lent is a time to remove things from our lives in order to better know Jesus. This includes setting down whatever might bring us our individual identity over our identity with God. “He must increase and I must decrease” (John 3:30). We want to be known for Christ’s accomplishments and not our own.

So let’s keep running. Let’s run away from our personal significance and sprint towards the resurrected one –Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:**

*God of us all, may my life reflect total love for You. May my life connect to the power of Your resurrection. Help me to set aside the personal desires and needs weighing me down so that might more swiftly run to You. Help me be known only by my love for You. **Amen.***

**Contributed by Alan McGrath  
Pastor – FUMC Killeen**



First United Methodist  
Church  
3501 E. Elms Road  
Killeen, TX 76542  
254-634-6363  
www.fumckilleen.com

Alan McGrath  
*Senior Pastor*

Alison Zollinger

## A Family Lenten Devotional from our family to yours

This devotional is sponsored by the Radical Hospitality Ministry.

Sue Boudreaux  
Rosalind Honchul  
Carrol Jean  
Lisa Kure  
Fia Lelauti  
Pattie Monroe  
Ken Smith  
Debbie Smith  
Patricia Vassaur  
Phyllis Wheeler

We hope this booklet will be spiritually uplifting during this time of Lent. Please share the devotions in this booklet with others.

All devotions are also available on our website at [www.fumckilleen.com](http://www.fumckilleen.com).

No copyright laws are applied.

Thanks to Phyllis Wheeler and Marty Portmann for editing.

Special thanks to Lauren Moffatt for formatting and publishing this booklet so all are able to enjoy it.

We would like to thank our members for contributing their devotionals to this booklet.

Special thanks to Joe Friddle for the cover artwork.