ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

We’re so honored that you’re starting on this transformation journey with us! It’s our wholehearted belief that the daily discipline of time in the Word and with God is a key element to building our spiritual muscles and help us become strong disciples. We believe and have seen it lived out that the daily discipline of devotion to God can help people become more fully who God created them to be.

With that in mind, we hope that each and every one who picks up this journal will be challenged and encouraged.

the setup

**SUNDAY:** There’s space for those that would like to take notes during the message. (Don’t forget to bring your journal along with you to worship!)

**MONDAY – FRIDAY:** There’s a daily scripture reading, space to write out your thoughts and a short devotional to encourage and motivate you throughout your week.

**SATURDAY:** There’s a challenge for you to try out or complete. Some may be easy for you and and others may be more demanding, but you’ve got this!

Remember to pray before you begin and ask God to bless you with insight and discernment as you reflect and respond.

Journeying with you,
The Adult Discipleship Team
The word passion is defined as a strong and barely controllable emotion. Passion can take us to new heights of euphoric feeling and to great depths of commitment. Who doesn’t want that? But there’s a second definition of passion that none of us would choose on our own – the suffering and death of Jesus – thanks, but no thanks! Yet every spring, Jesus followers throughout the globe set aside time and attention to walk through the season of Lent, replicating Jesus’ sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Why the journey through Lent? What is it about walking with the suffering Jesus that somehow gifts us with clarity and strength for our own lives? And how might our suffering be a bridge to greater meaning and fullness of this human existence? Living your best life is about to get turned on its head as we take a deep dive into the Gospel of Luke chapters 22-23 – finding fresh faith and a passion we never knew existed.

–Pastor Rachel
As the time for Jesus’ death was drawing nearer, Jesus knew he needed to prepare himself for this ultimate sacrifice. The first place chosen by the disciples, a Samaritan village, wanted nothing to do with Jesus. The disciples asked Jesus if they should ask the heavens to come down to destroy the village. Jesus rebuked them for thinking about such a response! Isn’t it great that Jesus has a forgiving heart? I can completely understand how the disciples wanted to respond with such force! They couldn’t imagine this group of Samaritans, who they considered inferior to the Jews, could be so unwelcoming to Jesus. The human side of the disciples took over and they wanted to punish the Samaritans. But Jesus, who loves all people, was quick to forgive. He did not want any harm brought to these people, despite their actions. After all, what if these very people would turn their life over to Jesus in the future? While we humans are ready to write off each other for words and actions, Jesus sees us as his lost sheep. He constantly leaves the door open for us to accept him!

How have you strayed from Jesus in the past?

What can you do in these next 40 days to be ready for the resurrection of Jesus?

–Mark Kincaid
Some of Jesus’ words can make me a bit uneasy, confused or challenged by what is meant for my life. This verse states that meaning was hidden from the disciples and they were afraid to ask for understanding. Likewise, I will not understand everything God has in store for my life or the hardships I will encounter – and that is okay. Jesus was betrayed, tortured and put to death for human salvation. So when I feel betrayed, I find comfort that his life took this form. So many people experience betrayal, and the lives of others are cut short, as his was, which doesn’t make sense. Yet I am strengthened by the fact that Jesus knows the anguish through personal experience, and that he grappled with it and brought great good out of it by his love. Lord, when things go badly wrong and I am discouraged, remind me of your passion. Then I will be able to continue on, in the belief that you have radically defeated the evil of the world from the inside. Jesus calls us out of our comfort zone, asking us to open our eyes compassionately to human misery.

Reflect on the fact that everything is under God’s control and has a purpose. What could be the purpose of hiding meaning from the disciples and from you?

Speak to the Lord about this. When you have difficulty understanding something, how do you cope, how do you take this to Jesus?

–Cheryl Bender
The scripture begins with a certain man saying to Jesus, “I will follow you,” but Jesus reminds the man he has nowhere to lay his head, even though he is the Son of Man. This first part reminds us that as we become disciples, it will cost us something. One cost is comfort. There will be many uncomfortable situations as we experience our walk with Christ. In the next part another man says he would like to go bury his father before taking the journey. Jesus replies, “Let the dead go bury their dead.” It may sound heartless, but Jesus is helping the man realize once someone or a situation is dead, it’s not for us to take too much time. Rather, learn to let go and keep moving forward. A walk with Jesus will sometimes force us to let go of people, places, or things we love. The last section describes a different man that wants to go and bid his family farewell. Jesus responds, “No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Again, a walk with Jesus will cost us something and we are to keep our eyes and minds focused forward on him as we grow on the journey.

What are you willing to give up for a closer walk with Jesus?

What has distracted you or held you up from following Jesus with your whole heart?

–Adeanna Wingfield
CHALLENGE: INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATION

READ: James 3:3-12

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” The Bible says otherwise. Have you considered the great power words have? In Proverbs 18:21, King Solomon writes that “life and death are in the power of the tongue.” That’s a pretty big deal. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) WISQARS Leading Causes of Death Reports, in 2019 suicide was the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34. Many of these young people were bullied or had believed the lie told to them that they weren’t good enough or no one would ever love them. Many of these suicides could have been prevented if someone would have spoken life to them.

Before you speak, write a post on social media, comment on a post, send an email or text anyone this week, I want you to ask yourself, “How will what I say affect others?” “Will my words uplift someone or potentially cause harm?” Let’s be intentional about communicating in a way that brings about justice and life.

–Marcy Walker
Luke 22:7-23: Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.” “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked. He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.” They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

As Jesus prepared for the Passover, he readied his ragtag group of disciples for a week that would transform the known world. What does it mean that Jesus invited every single follower to his table: the betrayer, the denier, and all who abandoned Jesus when he needed them most? In this single communion supper, Jesus instituted a radical inclusion to the table of God. Calling all the outcasts, outsiders and those otherwise turned out or off by religion, there’s a place at God’s table for you. The bread and the cup are yours to internalize. The meal is yours to enjoy. The conversation is yours to engage. Jesus Eats with Everyone.
When I was little I would stare at the painting of the Last Supper that my grandma had hung in her family room. I thought those men were dressed funny, and they must be good friends to have Jesus’ last meal with him. I would wonder as a child who would be my last supper guests. Of course, my mom, dad and brother. My friend Nicole would definitely be there. I’m sure my brother would be allowed to bring a friend since I could. He always gets to bring a friend. And probably my cousins and aunt. Now that I’ve grown, I concentrate more on who was part of the supper that was struggling being there. Judas knew he was betraying Jesus. He knew no one knew. With Jesus announcing his betrayal, without saying his name, Judas had to be sweating.

Have you been in a position of betraying someone you cared about and having to face them afterward?

Why do you think Jesus was making his announcement about the one who would betray him?

–Stephanie Tracy
Tuesday, March 8

READ: Proverbs 22:9

NOTES: 

NEXT STEPS: 

reflection

As a mom of four kids, sometimes the only time we get to talk is in the car. Mostly the conversations center on things happening around us. But every now and then, we come across a situation that causes deeper conversations to happen. This particular day, we came to an intersection where there was a man asking for help. My son, Trenton, after reading the sign, asked if we had anything to give him: money, a bottle of water, snacks, anything. I checked my wallet and had one ten dollar bill and two one dollar bills. Should I give him the majority of the cash or the lesser amount? We gave him the ten dollar bill and said, “Be safe, we are praying for you.” An hour later, my husband called to say it was his lucky day...he had found a ten dollar bill in the parking lot! Does it always work like this? Absolutely not. The blessing that we were able to give this gentleman and the lesson that we were able to teach our child far outweighed the money. Our life is filled with many moments. The combination of those moments shapes who God created us to be. Our prayer is that this one moment caused a shift in his world for the better. We were not meant to do life alone.

How are you trusting God’s nudge to bless someone?

Has there been a time when you were blessed by someone else’s choice?

–Stacy Powell
My sophomore summer of college, I was an intern at Lima Community Church of the Nazarene, working with the finance department. I lived with the Executive Pastor and his family for the whole summer, and they were my first experience of people who said they followed Jesus and their lives mirrored it. This family has two boys, and one of the boys is on the autism spectrum. I’ll never forget one night, coming home and walking in on a conversation between my host parents. They had both been convicted by the Holy Spirit about Luke 14:12-24. They realized that they were close to the friends of the son who didn’t have autism. They were always over the house; they knew their families and everything in between. But when it came to people who didn’t look or act like them, they had never invited them in. They made a commitment that night to invite people that most people would ignore.

Who have you been inviting over to your home? Does everyone look like you?

Are you the same person on Sunday and the rest of your week? How could you invite God into your weekly rhythm?

–Jayden Groppi
A Chinese proverb tells it perfectly, “If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.” God’s word commands us to help, serve, and love one another. I remember early in my social work career I had a job that literally was to identify a need and fulfill it. Whether it was food, clothing, shelter, my job was to help meet a need. So we, in a sense, are social workers for the Kingdom! Let’s spend each day looking for ways to contribute to someone else’s life to make a difference. When we take inventory of what God has blessed us with, I am sure many of us have more than enough. Jesus is the perfect example of living a life of serving and helping others...he lived a life of humbleness and service. God does not want us to live a life of self-centeredness, he wants to love our neighbors, be a blessing to the less fortunate, seeking him in every opportunity to serve and give to those that are in need.

How do you meet a need in those that are less fortunate?

How can you make a difference in the life of someone who is in need?

—Christina Phillips
As a 12-year-old, I would lay in my backyard looking up into the fluffy clouds and sky, feeling the breeze across my face and having conversations with God. I could just feel his presence in nature. That place, called heaven as I looked upward, I just could not wrap my mind around what it would be like, what would I be doing once I am there. The thought of eternity was overwhelming to think of in limitless time. I would ask God, “When will I be there?”, thinking he would give me an answer, and to this day, still no answer. In the meantime, as I grow deeper in my trust and love for him, I am grateful he doesn’t always give us the answers, forcing us to continue to trust in him for guidance and to experience his beauty all around us. Let’s think curiously like children, always looking for signs that he is with us and around us in everything and enjoy the gifts of the present.

What signs do you see to know that God is near and changes are among us?

What is the go-to verse that lets you know God’s words are truth and forever with you?

–Margie DeHays
CHALLENGE: SUBMIT TO GOD

To many people, the word “submit” is enough to make your skin crawl. Stop and think about why that is. Maybe you’ve had a bad experience with someone who abused or misused this word. Or maybe the thought of surrendering your control is terrifying. Submitting, if put in the right, healthy context, is a very beautiful practice.

In ballroom dancing there’s always someone who leads and someone who follows. When I started urban ballroom dance classes I was learning as a follower. Because I am so used to having control or leading in so many areas of my life, I found myself trying to anticipate my partner’s next move which made it hard for him to lead me. He said, “Are you leading or am I leading, because there can only be one lead. If you relax and let me lead you, this will be a beautiful dance, but if we are both trying to lead it will fall apart.” So, I relaxed and stopped trying to anticipate his next step and followed him and the dance flowed effortlessly. This is exactly what God wants from us, to surrender to Christ and allow Christ to lead and guide us. Stop trying to anticipate the next move.

Today I want you to reflect on the areas that you have not yet surrendered to God. What is keeping you from submitting this to God? How could things be different if you did?

–Marcy Walker

notes
Luke 22:39-46: Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation.’ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.’ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ‘Why are you sleeping?’ he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’

Sometimes we find ourselves at the end of our rope. Not sure what direction to turn, not able to see our way out of a tough situation. It’s our human tendency to want to control—fight or flight when life throws shade our way. But there’s another less-intuitive way to face our most agonizing moments: surrender. What if we prayed and leaned into a “not my will” mindset? What if surrender became our first thought and not our last-ditch effort? Taking our cues from the deepest prayer of Jesus himself, let’s offer up our honest desperation and let the chips fall where they may.

**message notes**

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Monday, March 14


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NEXT STEPS:


reflection

How many times in life do we value our own will over the will of God? We are guilty of this time and time again. In this passage, the disciples are instructed by Jesus to pray that they do not fall into temptation. Jesus himself goes away to pray. He comes back and the disciples are sleeping. They are caught red-handed. The disciples’ lack of obedience eventually causes them to fall into temptation and even deny their relationship with Jesus Christ. Like the disciples, we all have times in our lives where we hear the Lord instructing and guiding us, yet we choose not to obey. The enemy persuades us into thinking that we will be happier and more satisfied if we follow our own will rather than the Lord’s will. Thankfully, this is not where the story ends. We serve a God of love, grace, and mercy. We are human. We have a sinful nature. We will mess up. But when we submit to the Lord, we have the power to withstand the temptation of this world. It’s then that we can truly live a life full of the wonderful blessings and promises God wants to pour over us.

Jesus, I submit my life to you. I no longer want to walk in the ways of the world, but in the ways of your love and truth. Help me to keep my eyes and ears fixed on you so I do not wander.

–Chelsea Whirledge
Recently, I began watching the series, The Chosen. One particularly instructive and eternally-impactful scene happened when Jesus returned from the city and his disciples asked why he had not come back sooner, as they were worried about him. He told them he needed time alone with his father to pray. They then asked him “We want to pray like you. Please teach us the way.” That was so powerful, because in that moment Jesus taught his disciples and all future Christians how we should begin and structure our prayers to the Father. How beautiful a beginning salutation to God as you start your prayer time: proclaiming his position as Father, reminding yourself where he resides, praising his holy name, anticipating his coming kingdom, and the most important and many times difficult part, a declaration to surrender to his will here on earth as it is in heaven. That last part is the catch: following his will. I for one am thankful for his forgiveness as I have struggled mightily before and continue to struggle surrendering to his will.

How do you pray?

Are you surrendering to his will?

Do you invite the Holy Spirit in and ask God to use you and send you to do his will?

–Lee Davis
Psalms is one of my favorite books in the Bible because it displays with great authenticity the struggle of living in a broken world and seeking a relationship with God. The writer of this psalm, Asaph, shows us how we should handle those burdens. Before anything can be done, we have to let ourselves acknowledge our struggles. For most of my life, I didn’t want to share my feelings with God. But God already knows what’s weighing on our minds. And it matters to him because it matters to us. In verses 7-9, Asaph even questions God’s faithfulness, and God's okay with that. God isn’t scared or upset by our questions. He’s waiting for us to acknowledge them so we can both be on the same page. This next part is important. After we’ve let it all out, we remember how God has helped in the past. Look back on your own life and recount times where God comforted you, provided for you, or saved you even when you were afraid he wouldn’t. Look back in the Bible and see the mighty ways God has come through for others. Be honest with God about your struggles, but also remind yourself that God is in the business of handling burdens.

Have you been honest with God about your mental or emotional burdens?

What evidence from your life or the Bible affirms that God will take care of your current burdens?

–Aliyah Bing
This beloved passage of scripture was spoken by a pregnant, unwed teenage girl! Mary’s life was being turned upside down. An angel visits her: You’re going to have a baby, the Christ, the Messiah predicted of old. She is having a baby! The conception, a sacred mystery, she now carries in her body the Hope of Israel, the Bright Morning Star. The Mighty God. The Prince of Peace. Emmanuel, God with us. All of the prophets’ words are fulfilled in her child. Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth whose pregnancy was also foretold by an angel. Her unborn child recognizes the presence of the King of Kings. Yet another sacred mystery! Mary’s heart bursts forth in praise, “The Mighty One has done great things for me.” Mary recounts the history of faithfulness that her people have known. She declares herself to be but another example of the greatness of God. Her God made promises and kept them. Her God had lifted up the humble, filled the hungry. The God of her people is merciful, faithful, just, capable. And personal! Mary’s God is our God. The same God who worked miracles and kept promises unchanged. Her baby is our Savior Jesus Christ. Her prophecy of the mercy of God “from generation to generation” is our experience. We each have a song of praise.

Where are the sacred mysteries of our lives?

What great things has the Mighty One done for us?

–Becky Lawrence
Friday, March 18

READ: Philippians 2:5-7

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NEXT STEPS: ______________________________________________________

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reflection

Some of my most enjoyable ‘God-feeling’ times have been on Ginghamsburg’s student mission trips. I have seen students start their mission week grumbling about being there only to be the ones who did not want to leave when the week ended. Why? Because the students and adult leaders serve side by side to help others. The students come into the week thinking they are different and didn’t want to be there, but during the week the students no longer saw the differences amongst themselves or the people they served. They became as Jesus did, making themselves the very nature of a servant, putting themselves in the same likeness as those they were serving. It is an amazing experience for students and adults to put our faith, our passion into action. Don’t miss your opportunity to put your feet to faith and love regardless, to take on the very nature of a servant.

Have you had an experience that had you as a ‘very nature of a servant’? What was that like for you and have you shared that experience with others?

What do you think your home, which is the hub of our church, our neighborhood would be like if we became as Jesus, a servant to any and putting our faith into action?

–Carolyn Pierce
CHALLENGE: UNPLUG

I like to think that I am good at unplugging. My husband and I don’t have cable or dish or internet in our home, just four-generation-old smartphones, from which we hotspot if we need to work from home, and an antenna we have to put up in the window if we want to watch television.

However, having fewer forms of connection doesn’t protect us from being constantly connected. When it’s going to be a long day in the garage we like to listen to music. I also connect to the speaker in my kitchen while I prepare dinner. I have a 40-minute commute to work each way and I tend to hop in my car and turn on a podcast.

I am not saying music or podcasts are bad, but as I sat down to write about unplugging, I realized, I don’t often really unplug. I don’t stop the input and live with what is in my mind and in my heart. I don’t sit, drive or work in silence. I don’t take in the sound of creation. I don’t listen to what God is saying to me each day.

It takes effort and intention to truly unplug the external and plug into our internal life.

What changes will you make to truly unplug this week?

–Shannon Flora

notes
THE KISS OF BETRAYAL
Luke 22:47-53: While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

Betrayal cuts deep. That relationship we thought was solid became much rockier than we ever imagined. Friendships dissolve, marriages are wrecked, jobs are lost, relationships are broken, and we are left wondering, how did this happen? Jesus was betrayed in one of the most intimate ways, with a kiss. Let’s go deep to explore how we can name our betrayal and move toward healthy forgiveness and when possible, reconciliation.
Monday, March 21


NOTES: 


NEXT STEPS: 


reflection

Jesus was betrayed in one of the most intimate ways, with a kiss. Let’s explore how we can name our betrayal and move toward healthy forgiveness, possibly even reconciliation. I went through a very traumatic experience, many years ago. I was assaulted when visiting a friend’s home. I pursued the help of the local police, hospital and justice system to deal with my pain. I was in extensive counseling, a Christian support group, a church, and surrounded by supportive family and friends. We were in a sermon series on forgiveness about that time. It went perfectly with what we had been learning about forgiveness in the support group. The message I heard pushed me to be ready to break those chains and forgive. After the sermon, I went up to the altar with the pastor and we prayed about forgiveness and I just let it all go and gave it to God! WOW! So much weight was lifted and I felt so free. Such a wonderful feeling. Where am I now? God is using me to help others to this day. Once people hear my story, they trust me and reach out with their story. I’m open and honest. Brothers and sisters, you can forgive no matter who or what has harmed you in the past. Whatever you do, choose to forgive. God will help you.

Do you struggle with forgiveness?

Is there anyone in your life that you currently need to forgive?

–Courtney Spencer
When I was in high school, I was in a hardcore heavy metal band. Because we were...different...we had some enemies. One dude was particularly nasty. He went out of his way to make our lives miserable. Parallel to his bullying and to several of my friends struggling through the reality of broken homes, I was discovering Jesus. As my friends rallied their anger around “Preppy” (as they liked to call him) and as Preppy continued his onslaught of petty insults, God was molding me into a peacemaker. I could see that both sides had their own context of pain, and I felt responsible to calm the sea. When our first album came out, I had an opportunity to list my thanks, which was a CD insert requirement for bands in the 90s. I listed Preppy’s real name. He caught wind of it and approached me after school. I thought I was about to get punched, but instead he asked why. I cheekily explained that his insults actually inspired better songwriting. But fully taking advantage of the moment, I forgave him, said I was sorry for any pain we caused him, and invited him to our next concert. He never came... but he also never insulted us again. Romans 12:17-20 is upside down. The only way to overcome evil is with good.

Who is your enemy?

What can you do to turn that relationship upside down?

–Dan Bracken
I caught a glimpse of a truth that evil never wants us to see. The end of verse 3 says, “Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” Our pursuit to live in harmony with God and his creation is infuriating to Satan. Honestly, when I fight with the devil, I find it to be a losing effort. This morning I was in a stomach-churning situation. Or at least I thought I was. But the truth was that I did not ask Jesus to handle the problem. I was listening to lies. I called out to Jesus, and he reminded me of his grace and love. I embraced truth and was at peace with God with the reminder that God has a place prepared for me.

Did you ever find yourself worrying when there was nothing to worry about?

What will you do with verse 10?

–David Phipps
These verses come in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, right at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, as Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray. They aren’t part of the prayer per se, but rather a reminder about how very important this step is. Why does he say this here? When I read these verses, I hear the golden rules that we’ve all heard: Love thy neighbor. Judge not lest ye be judged. (I was raised by some King James Bible lovin’ Baptists.) Pray for your enemies. Treat others as you want to be treated. Love regardless (ok...that’s not his, but it could be!). Forgiveness is an act of love. He’s giving the disciples yet one more avenue to heaven. Another way for us to live as God intends. Taking that bold step to forgive unlocks one of the paths to living into Jesus’ commandments. Is it easy? No, but that’s probably why Jesus says it.

Who in your life needs forgiveness? Pray on that name.

–Shannon Sellars
We have to be intentional in our interactions with people. Expect people to mistreat you, hate you, and curse you. Be ready to bless them, love them, pray for them and do good to them. This is what Jesus expects of us as his children. We are to mimic him. God is going to reward us greatly for being kind to the ungrateful and wicked. During this last tax season, I had compassion for a man who was discouraged because his friends were getting stimulus checks and he wasn’t. I knew I could help him and give him a temporary moment of satisfaction, so I told him I would fill out a tax return for him so he could get a stimulus check. He called me every day until I had the time to do it. Once it was completed, he told me I would not hear from him if he received it, but if he didn’t receive it he would be calling again. I was happy to give him something he couldn’t get on his own and I never heard from him again. I realized shortly afterwards I don’t thank God enough for how much he does for me. Because of the love and kindness God has shown me, I desire to do the same for those who are lost and don’t know him.

Who can you pray for that has mistreated you?

Who can you be good to that hates you?

–Jennifer Bing
CHALLENGE: LIVE OUT A SIMPLICITY PRACTICE

I define simplicity as un-complicating life so I can focus on what really matters. Simplicity creates margins in our lives. It honors the resources from our Creator. It offers us the leisure of taking in the moment and the beauty around us and in others. It allows us to see and respond to a need in another’s life.

In such a frenetic world, it might be hard to define what simplicity looks like in real life. I like to start with the question, “What really matters?” The way you answer that question might reveal areas of life that might need to be simplified.

It could mean...

- Finding contentment with what you have and not upgrading your phone, car or wardrobe just to have the latest. Maybe it goes so far as to downsize, sell or give away some of your possessions
- Creating a budget and living below your means
- Editing your family calendar to create margins in your family’s life. Perhaps setting “do not disturb” hours on your phone to be more present with those you love.
- Taking a walk and enjoying nature, or eating food that grew from the earth.

Don’t confuse simple with easy. They are not the same thing. Simplicity doesn’t just happen, it is intentional. How will you set your intention this week to live a more simple life?

–Shannon Flora

notes
Luke 22:54-62: Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, ‘This man was with him.’ But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t know him,’” he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ ‘Man, I am not!’ Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, ‘Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.’ Peter replied, ‘Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!’ Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The fires of temptation rage in our lives. Sometimes it’s the internal struggle we dare not give words, other times it’s out there for all to see: the short cuts we take at work, the short temper we unveil at home, the short supply of love we’ve got to give. Like Peter, we are eager to follow Jesus but when push comes to shove we find ourselves lacking a true identity on which to take account of our temptation to warm at the enemy’s fire.

message notes
I’ve heard that in the time of Jesus, one of the foremost blessings you could wish on someone involved being covered in the dust of their rabbi, or teacher. This meant that they were following the rabbi so closely, listening and learning from them, that the dust the rabbi kicked up in their travels would coat the clothes they were wearing.

Are we following Christ that closely? The twelve, and many others, called Jesus “rabbi.” He continues to teach today; through the Bible, our pastors, and life groups. Do we accept/acknowledge Jesus as our rabbi? Or are we following, like Peter in this passage, at a distance? Afraid that the “dust of our rabbi” will put a target on us. Do we deny the teacher and the teachings? This world is a dark, dark place right now. The closer to Jesus we follow, the brighter his light shines through us. Yet, when we deny him, we cloak ourselves and hide his light in us. The darkness of the world NEEDS His light. Remember this as you go about your day today: When all around you seems dark, and you can’t see any light, YOU just may be the light for those around you.

How could dedicating five minutes a day to a single Bible verse brighten your light?

What can you set aside to give God more of your time and attention today?

– Jon Sears
Our family moved last year. Honestly, I didn’t want to move because our basement had become a catch-all for 14 years. I dreaded the thought of cleaning and sorting everything that had accumulated down there. It was a daunting task to the point that it paralyzed me. Amazing how we clutch things and hold them too tightly, isn’t it? If I had given things away as we no longer had use for them, I would have been much freer. This is the freedom Jesus wants to give us on a much grander scale when we take up our cross and follow him. By releasing our fears, hesitations, and preconceptions, we can move into God’s next opportunities for us. We can’t stay the same and move forward. Moving into new phases means risk and the release of what’s come before.

When have you felt like you were losing everything only to find a better life in Jesus?

What do you need to deny in your life today in order to follow Jesus more closely?

Lord Jesus, help me not to hold too tightly to things or situations. Help me to listen for your voice and obey.

–Kate Johnsen
There are certain passages of scripture that make me uncomfortable. This account of Ananias and Sapphira is one of those passages. The finality of their choices is alarming. But so was the seriousness of their betrayal to the community. We know from Acts 4:32-37 that they had chosen to belong to a people that were in covenant together, agreeing to share everything they had. When Ananias and Sapphira withheld some of the proceeds from their sale, they were in direct violation of that covenant and they knew it. As harsh as the consequences seem, what we have here is a record of God's swift justice. So perhaps the better response to this story is not alarm, but the sober realization that God's mercy and grace more often override immediate justice. That is why the story stands out, because it isn’t the norm. We long for God to do something where things aren’t right but may we also be thankful that we worship a God who is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Was there ever a time God met with you mercy and grace instead of allowing you to suffer the consequences of a choice you made?

How can you adjust your prayer life to include opportunities for mercy and forgiveness for those who have done or are doing the wrong thing?

–Laura Griffin
Robin Williams has been widely credited for saying, “Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.” There is so much wisdom in that, isn’t there? The truth is we are all struggling and we all need grace. I think that’s why Paul encourages us in these verses to stop with the judgment. God is the judge. I am not, yet I spend a whole lot of mental space judging others. As if it’s not hard enough to stop that, Paul takes it a step further when he says don’t put “a stumbling block or even a hindrance in the way of another.” In other words, don’t make life more difficult for anyone than it already is. Judgment does that, doesn’t it? If you’ve experienced it, you know the guilt, shame and embarrassment it can bring. I do too, that’s why I’m asking God this morning to help me not distribute any stumbling blocks in the lives of those around me. My prayer is that if I encounter anyone stumbling, that God would use me to help turn that stumbling block into a stepping stone. Would you join me?

Is there someone that I’ve been judgmental toward that I could extend grace to today?

Am I making life more difficult for anyone in my path today? Spouse, kids, co-workers, parents, etc?

–Marcy Fitzpatrick
Friday, April 1

Being humble and having a pure heart for serving is no April fools joke! I have been in ministry for years. Early on I would often do things only to promote me or my “brand” and not to glorify God. This mindset led me to mistreat people and become very selfish in ministry. I know you are shaking your head right now like, “How can you be selfish in ministry?” Let’s look at verses 3 and 4. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Philippians 2:3-4 NIV) I definitely fell short in alignment with these verses. However, I had some great mentors along the way and they drew my attention to verse 13: “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13 NIV) I had to remember it was God working in me and through me! It wasn’t my power but God’s. This helped me to put aside self-promoting and focus on promoting Christ. My entire attitude shifted! I was no longer grumbling and fussing because I knew whose work I was doing and who I wanted to get the glory. Serving with pure motives and a great attitude is a wonderful thing.

Are you passionate about serving?

Are there areas that you struggle with humility?

–Chris Wingfield
**CHALLENGE: SET TIME FOR SILENCE AND SOLITUDE**

“Shhh…I am trying to be quiet.”

Have you ever thought that to yourself? Our brains seem to run faster than ever when we try to get quiet with God. Every to-do that isn’t done comes to mind, every anxiety and care that is troubling our soul seems more, well, troubling. I invite you to shut it all off this week. Stop, quiet your mind, relax your body and allow your soul to rest and listen to God.

The practice of the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude have personally been one of the most rewarding in my life. I find that when I put into practice time apart for silence each day with God that my relationship with God blossoms, and my peace abides in God alone despite the busyness of the rest of my day.

My challenge to you is to try it each day for the next week. Set aside 15 minutes when you can be alone. Find a comfortable, quiet spot, set a timer, sit upright, close your eyes, either put on instrumental music or sit in true silence and…do nothing. Allow your mind and body to quiet. Try thinking about nothing, or a simple “I am here God.”

That’s it, allow yourself to be quiet. When we truly set ourselves aside and let God be present we are setting ourselves aside for the divine.

–Sarah Hardin
THE POWER OF LOVE ❤️
Luke 23:1-12: Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.’ So Pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’ But they insisted, ‘He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.’ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

What about Jesus as Messiah would create such a clash with the political powers that be? And what might following Jesus have to do with our response to the political and religious authorities of our day? Taking our cues from Isaiah 53 – Messiah as Suffering Servant – Jesus’ way of suffering may just answer questions we didn’t even know we were asking. Jesus followers ultimately come to realize that the power of love is such a greater force than the love of power.
I have never been one to argue my opinions on social media, but lately I have been guilty of getting caught up in the hot topics. On more than a few occasions, I have found myself reading the arguments between others and feeling the need to jump in and defend those with the same opinions. However, adding my voice to the argument has only led to further quarreling, and not once have I seen a good outcome. I often left the exchanges feeling frustrated and angry. When I read about Jesus getting arrested, ridiculed and mocked, I want him to fight back and prove to those people that they are wrong about him. Now I understand that Jesus knew the crowd had made up their mind about him. He knew arguing and trying to prove to them that he is the son of God was not going to do anything to further God's kingdom. I recognize that stepping in and voicing my thoughts is sometimes the most righteous thing I can do, but sometimes it is quite the opposite. As a Christian, I need to use my voice for Christ's glory.

What do you want to say to someone who disagrees with you about any of the current hot-button topics?

How do you think God wants you to respond instead?

—Jody Willoughby
Tuesday, April 5

**READ:** Isaiah 53:1-5

**NOTES:**

**NEXT STEPS:**

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**reflection**

When I was a kid, I had a pretty simple view of who Jesus was. In my mind, Jesus was like Master Yoda from Star Wars. I just knew that if I called upon him, Jesus would show up and fill me with The Force. I remember sitting on my bed trying to summon Jesus’ power. I’d say stuff like, “If you’re real, make that lamp on my desk levitate.” I wanted the Lord to show up and flex his strength. I still feel that way today. When I look at the atrocities in the world around me, I want Jesus to show up and flex his strong arm. I want what I perceive as right and just to transpire. Then I realize I’m still like that little kid sitting in his room trying to summon The Force. I have to remind myself that my understanding of the world is still like that of a child. There is a larger plan in play here, and I’m not privy to the play book. The lamp on my desk never budged. But Jesus did fill me with strength that is far beyond my nature. It didn’t happen when I summoned him, rather when I finally answered his call and when I accepted the forgiveness that came with Jesus’ death.

Are you hanging onto any wrong ideas about who Jesus is?

Are there any areas where you need to submit your will to the will of Jesus?

—James Willoughby
There is great joy and excitement visiting Kings Island, especially when you are big enough to ride all the scariest rides! I took my teenagers to the park to meet their friends, staying close by in case of any lurking dangers. I gave clear instructions to my children: where to go, what time to meet me, what to avoid. Yet, they were excited to have fun with their friends. They decided to follow their friends instead of remembering my clear instructions. So, they were not back on time. I was fraught with worry and anger, and then so relieved to see them. As mad as I was, my love for them was much greater than my anger. It is hard to imagine God loving me so much that he piled all my sins upon his son to save me for eternity. Then I recall how much I would do for my children so they would be on the right path and free from harm. I am capable of great love even though I am just a mere human. I think of what the love of God must be like if I can experience so much love as a human. Thank you Lord for giving me a glimpse of your great love for me in experiences you have given me in my life.

How has God revealed his great love for you?

When did you find yourself willing to go after the lost because of your love?

–Kitty Kincaid
Isn’t it amazing how the authors of the Old Testament give us a sneak peek into the life and death of Jesus hundreds of years before his birth? The description of the death of Christ aligns with the events recorded in the New Testament. As I read this description, I realize how vastly different I am from Jesus. Jesus had many opportunities to reject his Father’s will and ask for mercy from his human oppressors. He could have avoided the immense pain and suffering, which he didn’t deserve, by giving authorities what they wanted. My response to impending pain and suffering would have been so much different. I am pretty sure I would have begged for mercy and insisted I was treated fairly. Jesus completed his Father’s mission so that future generations would be saved to enjoy eternity in heaven with him. His death on Earth was our chance for everlasting life in heaven! My prayer today is to be thankful for the all-knowing God we serve. Lord, I ask that you give me a sense of the future so that I may live my life not only for the present generation, but also so the future generations will know you!

Have I thanked Jesus today for his willingness to suffer and die for me?

How can I invest in others for Jesus today and for future generations?

–Mark Kincaid
This wonderful verse reveals God’s love for us through Jesus’ overcoming. It predicts the fact that we share in Jesus’ glorious reign and future. If you are a follower of Jesus then you are an heir of God. A great inheritance is yours as Jesus shares the spoils of his victory as he bore the sins of us all. The challenge for us is to live in such a way that we make a difference right here among all God’s creation. Making stories of faithfulness through everyday normal people living in the midst of loneliness, abuse, financial difficulty, suffering, poor health, and a broken system of justice from that of God’s. Jesus rules because of his sacrifice and intercession for all the created.

How are you aware of Jesus’ spoils and portion he gives you in your daily life?

How do you understand sacrifice and intercession within your own life?

—Cheryl Bender
CHALLENGE: TELL SOMEONE ABOUT JESUS

My friend Steven and I have been friends for over 10 years. Steven has been by my side on this journey with God since my walk started. Except Steven doesn’t believe in Christ or the church the way I do.

At a very young age, Steven and his family stopped going to church completely. Three years ago I dared to speak candidly to him over coffee about his faith journey and specifically why his family stopped going to church. Steven said that his family struggled when his dad lost his job 15 years ago and was out of work for almost two years. They had no money for food, rent, clothes, or any other basic needs. The problem arose when their church said they were not tithing enough money and they should stop coming to Sunday service till they could afford it. His family stopped going to church, and eventually moved to my city. I decided after our conversation that I would invite Stephen to my church, and would sit beside him every week if he wanted.

Steven and his family go to church every week now, and his family even got baptized last Easter. The hardest step we take is the first one. Until we ask we won’t be able to connect to that person and help open the door that may just let Jesus inside.

Who is the Stephen in your life with whom you might have a cup of coffee?

–Scott Plantz
CRY OF THE CROWD
Luke 23:13-25: Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, ‘You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.’ But the whole crowd shouted, ‘Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!’ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ For the third time he spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him.’ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Mob mentality. How does a crowd of mobsters go from cheers of triumph to cries of “Crucify him!” And where are we in the crowd? Looking at the theories of atonement we will explore the question of why Jesus had to die and consider our own personal response as a potential crowd gatherer that day.

message notes
Pilate is a character in today’s verse that we can all relate to in some way. Pilate didn’t think that Jesus had done anything to deserve death and even gave the people watching another opportunity to receive Jesus back. And even though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, the loud screams of “Crucify him! Crucify him!” lead him to hand Jesus over to be killed. How many times has this happened in your life? You’re confident you heard God speak to your heart about doing something bold but the people around you say, “That will never happen,” or “Keep on dreaming.” And out of fear, you listen to the people around you and ignore the things that God put on your heart. You see, the loudest voices sometimes are rarely the right ones to listen to. God speaks to me mostly in whispers, in the silence of my heart, mind and soul. It’s not too late to go after the things God has put on your heart.

Remember a time where God put something on your heart, but you were too afraid to act on it.

What dream is God pushing you towards?

– Jayden Groppi
With the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) drawing near, the chief priests were deciding on how to kill Jesus. They feared the people but did not fear God. There is commentary that posits that Judas’ motivation for his betrayal was because he was jealous of the other apostles, because they were all Galileans and he wasn’t. Judas Iscariot’s name may mean that he was from Kerioth, a city in Southern Judea and the only Judean among the other disciples. Some say his motivation was just simple greed, since he approached the chief priest and asked how much they would offer for delivering Jesus. Satan prompted Judas in his crime, but it was not against his will. God used Judas’ betrayal to further his eternal plan; it was Jesus appointed time to go to the cross. Betrayal comes in many forms: betrayal of a friend, betrayal of someone’s trust or principles, greed. We have all experienced a form of betrayal in our life. Thankfully nothing compares to Jesus’s betrayal.

–Chuck Fraizer
Preparing large meals at my house is common, but inviting people over for a large meal only happens a few times a year. And when that happens, you would think royalty was coming - deep cleaning happens in preparation for guests. It’s a big deal and the whole family knows it! Generally these meals are a happy celebration. But what if you knew this gathering was to be your last? The last hug, the last hello, the last goodbye, the last exchange of words. Would you be eagerly preparing your house if you knew it was to be your last? Or would you be too overcome with anxiety and fear to enjoy this moment? Jesus knew what was going to happen. He knew who would betray him. He knew this was the last time. He knew the pain and suffering that was to happen. Yet he still made preparations for them. To prepare them for his death, for the last supper together. To calm their nerves and answer their questions. Luke 22:15-16 says, “And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’” Jesus’ peace came from the amount of trust he had in God’s plan for his life.

What do you do when anxiety & fear overcome you?

How are you trusting God’s plan for your life?

–Stacy Powell
In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed and sweat blood as he realized the truth about all he was about to face. Why did he have to die? Jesus knew the answer, but his humanity wanted to run away from the assignment. Then Jesus does the most sacrificial thing, and shares with God the Father his true feelings, saying, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” We are also called to die to our own flesh and live in Christ. This means walking in faith, authority and power knowing even though we face daily obstacles, we are victorious and must submit to the will of the Father. “At times all leaders feel alone when they establish new territory. Jesus endured one of His loneliest times in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just hours before he would be tried, tortured, and crucified, every one of His team deserted Him. His story in the garden provides us with one of the greatest examples in history of a leader’s commitment. Every leader who does something significant for God experiences a Gethsemane.” -The Maxwell Leadership Bible

What can we learn about this lonely season?

When asked about Christ will we tell people we know Jesus? Even if it will cost us our life? What makes anyone think he is greater than the other?

–Adeanna Wingfield
Reflecting on the ultimate sacrifice of our Savior...Jesus’ death was not that of an ordinary man. Many of the miracles performed as he died at Calvary also prove Jesus was the Son of God. His death was a sacrifice that was intended to be payment for the sins of all that call on him. It is impossible for us to understand all that he endured to redeem us and bring us back in alignment with God. There is no great act that we will need to do to try to gain God’s forgiveness. Jesus died for our sin, once for all. Our job is to confess our sins, repent, and turn to him. We were separated and alienated, but he made a way for us to come back to God. When I look at Luke’s account of Jesus’ trial it tells me of how much he loves us. Jesus made a trade with us on the cross. It is as if he said, “I will take your sin upon me and give you my righteousness and forgiveness in exchange. You will no longer be called sinful, guilty, or forsaken of God. You will be called righteous and holy. You will be called ‘beloved of God.’” And how amazing is THAT??

How did the meaning of Jesus’ death become real to you?

How can you honor Jesus’ sacrifice in your daily life?

—Christina Phillips
CHALLENGE: FIND WAYS TO LIVE INTO TRUST

This last week is one of the hardest for me in the Christian calendar. I watch the Jesus I love go through so much. The physical and emotional pain, the struggles of the disciples, the turning of the crowd. So much of it breaks down to unmet expectations.

The people, they expected a triumphal king. Even the disciples expected the same. Yet, what they got was someone headed to death. The plans they thought they had made seemed in ruins.

Yet, as we know all hope was not lost. Proverbs 19:21 says, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” Notice it does not say our purpose but the Lord’s. Our challenge this week is not an easy one, in fact it may be the hardest Saturday challenge so far. This week we begin to trust in the Lord.

Some of you just laughed, either because you’ve heard it before but haven’t put it into practice or because you realize the simple truth. The Lord, he has better plans, better ideas and makes far better decisions than we do. Even when we cannot comprehend all that God is doing, he is working in and for us.

So today, find the worries of your heart. Write them down then give them to God. Then when you take them back again, give them back until you learn to trust.

–Sarah Hardin
Luke 24:1-12: On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Much like the women who stumbled into the tomb that first Easter morning, we all carry so many unfilled expectations. Empty relationships, sweets that don’t satisfy, workaholism that leaves us exhausted—all tombs in our lives. We’ve come searching for answers we can count on in the ways that we know. But doing the same thing over and over – expecting different results – won’t cut it. Time to quit looking for and searching among the dead to find the living, as the women in this story soon discovered. Time to look to new places for life-giving answers. It is possible to live fulfilled on this side of heaven. Excitement, curiosity and hope compel us to see the miracle for ourselves!