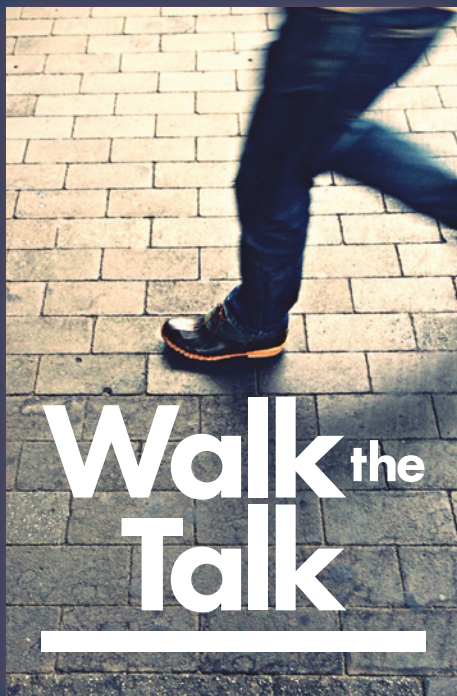


# Sermon Journal



February 18–  
April 7



April 8–May 19

Asbury  
United Methodist Church



Series 1:

# **Cross Fitness**

page 7

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Series 2:

# **Walk the Talk**

page 69



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# Asbury's Vision Statement:

**Developing all generations for significant lives in Christ.**

This defines our specific and unique calling.

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## Asbury's Marks:

**Worship and obey Christ**

**Learn and live out Scripture**

**Influence and invite others to follow Christ**

**Steward time, skills and resources**

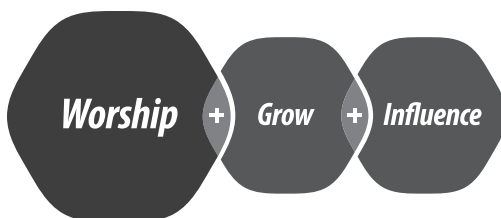
**United with the Body of Christ**

These are outward signs of spiritual growth for a Christ-follower at Asbury.

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## Asbury's Map

Worship +2. This is what we want people to do to connect at Asbury.



# Prayer and Priority List

- Every Sunday, come to worship, grow and influence.
- Every Sunday, communion and prayer are available at 9:00 am in Mason Chapel.
- Every Monday, Celebrate Recovery, Celebration Station and the Landing meet.

## February

- Wed, 2.18 Ash Wednesday  
 Sun, 2.22 "Cross Fitness" sermon series begins

## March

- Sun, 3.1 Communion in all services  
 Sun, 3.8 Joining Asbury luncheon, 12:15–2:00 pm, CLC  
 New member Sunday  
 Commissioning for Spring Break missions  
 Sat, 3.14–3.22 Spring Break missions prayer watch

## April

- Wed, 4.1–4.3 Stations of the Cross  
 Thur, 4.2 Maundy Thursday  
 Fri, 4.3 Good Friday  
 Sat, 4.4 Family Easter event  
 Sun, 4.5 Easter  
 Sun, 4.12 "Walk the Talk" sermon series begins  
 Sun, 4.19 Marriage recognition  
 Sun, 4.26 Confirmation

## May

- Sun, 5.3 Communion all services  
 Sun, 5.10 Mother's Day  
 Joining Asbury luncheon, 12:15–2:00 pm, CLC  
 New member Sunday  
 Sun, 5.17 Graduate recognition

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As we head into Lent and beyond, we're continuing our focus on "discipleship." It's interesting how much we know about physical fitness. We talk about "working out" and read about "getting into shape." Knowing about fitness is one thing, but practicing fitness is another. It takes self-discipline to get up early and go for a walk or a run. It takes motivation to head to the gym after work instead of heading home. It takes self-control to skip dessert.

Most everyone would agree that physical fitness is a good thing and worth pursuing, at least to some degree. We all want to be healthy! But isn't it funny how little time we spend thinking about spiritual fitness? Our spirits will outlast our bodies but we don't really think about caring for them in the same way. We shouldn't allow our spiritual lives to drift along, hoping for the best. Instead, we should make a focused and concentrated effort to hone our spiritual "muscles." Over the next several weeks we'll be looking at various means of grace that will help us get into shape spiritually. Remember, a means of grace is anything that helps us experience the presence of Christ and gives Him room to work in our lives.

First we'll consider what would be described as private practices or what John Wesley called "works of piety." These are the "innies" and they help us as individuals. After Easter we'll look at means of grace which are practiced outwardly—the kind of spiritual disciplines that are more communal in nature. You might call these "outies." Two scriptures I want you to consider: *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me,'"* (Matthew 16:24, NLT). And also this: Someone once told Jesus, *"Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."* And He replied, *"My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice,"* (Luke 8:19-21, emphasis added). Being disciples means being spiritually fit enough to "carry the cross" and that requires more than knowing—it requires practice!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent loop on the 'T' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'm'.

Dr. Tom Harrison, *Senior Pastor*

# How to Use the Journal

Congratulations on your decision to engage the Word of God on a daily basis! You have chosen the best approach to spiritual growth available.

Pastor Tom developed the journal several years ago to offer a structured daily reading plan because he wants people learning how to feed themselves spiritually. He places tremendous value on personal study and exposure to the whole Bible. There are many reading plans available, but he thought it best to provide one connected to the sermon series.

Journaling is typically a personal or “inward” discipline. How you relate to the Lord depends largely on your personality and the nature of your relationship. Some may prefer a more academic approach of word-study and cross-references while others may carry on intimate dialogues with Jesus using the Scripture as a springboard for conversation. However you approach journaling is OK.

While journaling is an inward discipline, the journal itself can be used as a guide for group discussion or family devotionals. Think of it as a tool for spiritual growth. Asbury puts time and expense into creating these because it is one of the best ways we can help develop all generations for significant lives in Christ.

To begin, you will need a Bible you can understand; the New International Version is a safe bet and the version Pastor Tom and Pastor Todd use for preaching. The New Living Translation is a little more “user-friendly” for beginners.

1. Pray first. Ask for wisdom and understanding and for the Lord to speak to you through the text.
2. Read the scripture referenced at the top of the page. If you have trouble locating passages, use your Bible’s table of contents. References are always listed in this order: book, chapter, verse(s).
3. Respond to the scripture text by answering these three questions in your own words: What does the passage say? What does the passage say to me? How can I apply it to my life? (These guiding questions may be used every day.)
4. The margin notes offer insight to the text, and the questions are there for group discussion or personal application. You may use the blank lines to write or “process” your responses.
5. Consider everything you write as dialogue with God—a casual, informal prayer conversation that helps you grow into knowing Him (and yourself) better.

Finally, be sure to bring your journal every Sunday to take notes.

## A Guide to Journal Symbols



context clues or background information about the passage



extra application or activity beyond reflection and prayer



# CROSS FITNESS



*Physical training is good*  
**BUT SPIRITUAL TRAINING IS**  
**BETTER**



**“PHYSICAL TRAINING  
IS OF SOME VALUE,  
BUT GODLINESS HAS  
VALUE FOR ALL THINGS,  
HOLDING PROMISE FOR  
BOTH THE PRESENT LIFE  
AND THE LIFE TO COME.”**

*1 Timothy 4:8*

# 'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free...

Busyness is now the status symbol of choice for many of us, and we are so busy going and doing and earning and buying that we have little margin left to devote to being who God has created and called us to be and receiving what He offers to us. The accumulation of activities and stuff has become a socially-acceptable and even desirable means of indulgence for Christians, but Jesus lovingly guides us away from such preoccupation: *"What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met"* (Matthew 6:31–33, MSG).

- Saying "no" to any temptation toward human striving and busyness requires that we pre-determine our priorities. What and who matter most to you?
- With those in mind, edit your calendar.
- Edit the rooms or storage spaces of your home one-by-one, sharing all that doesn't bring value to your daily life. If you have kids, make it fun.
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Simplify meal time by only having rice and beans all week
  - Simplify down time by disengaging from unnecessary media

.....

"Lord, You are ultimately the one who matters most. Silence all the voices and influences that would pull my attention from You. Help me be content so that I may strive less and enjoy Your presence and provision. Amen."

–Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

















# Open Hearts Lead to Open Hands

He said, “Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give...”

My Aunt Mamie lived in a small Central Texas town. There wasn't much to do there when I visited as a child. Aunt Mamie had no running water and no indoor toilets or bath tub. What I do remember most, though, is that almost every day we would hear a knock at the back door, and we knew it must be a “hobo” who had just gotten off the nearby train and had come to ask for food. My aunt never questioned these people; she simply gave them food. She always had something she could give them, and they'd sit on the back steps and eat. As a child, I began to understand what it meant to have an open heart that leads to an open hand. Our scripture for today, Deuteronomy 15:7–11, speaks of giving to the poor and the needy among us. *“If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard hearted or tight fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should, rather, open your hand willingly, lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.”* (RSV)

But do we do that? Do we give out of obligation or out of love? Do we give grudgingly or freely? Or do we give at all? Almost every day we're asked to give to some cause. How do we determine where to give?

- Start by taking incremental steps toward tithing if you don't already.
- Kids love to give. Help them use their belongings or allowance to bless others.
- Prayerfully give to our partner organizations such as Restore Hope or UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) since 100% of what's given reaches the needy.
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Spontaneously respond to a need or opportunity that comes your way this week. Be adventurous!
  - Don't give money – give of yourself in some way.

.....

“Lord, help me to have the grace to see the ‘least, the last, and the lost,’ and an open heart that will lead to open hands.”

–Rev. Don Johnson, RET







**SATURDAY**  
FEBRUARY 28, 2015

## Matthew 19:16–26

Have you considered obeying God's commands as a way of "giving" to another person?

When you do *not* steal, commit adultery, or lie—what are you giving to another?

How does obeying God's commands help you "love your neighbor"?

How can wealth be a hindrance to following Jesus wholeheartedly? What are the root issues?

*"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."*

—1 Timothy 6:18–19

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# A Conversation with God

I didn't grow up knowing how to pray out loud. My mom's dad was the only one who would pray out loud in our family. Other than the "God is good, God is great..." prayer, I didn't learn to pray out loud until I came to Asbury. Looking back, I can see God was working on my prayer life as soon as I joined Asbury. I joined a small group which met in Stephenie Craig's house just a few houses away. I was amazed and embarrassed to hear how easily these young women could pray out loud, and I couldn't. Then I went to 2nd Saturday and led a bus load of volunteers each month to the food bank. Betty Higgins gave specific instructions on what the leaders were to do and one of them was to pray! How scary that was to me! I started out by reading Bible verses; other times I would ask pastors who were on the bus to pray, but one day I just knew I had to do it. I finally said my first prayer out loud. I thought it was awful. I sat at my dining room table the next 2nd Saturday praying to God to help me not sound like a fool again when I prayed on the bus. I heard God as clear as can be tell me, "You are praying to Me. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks."

It says in Romans 8:26–27 that even when you don't know the right words to pray, the Holy Spirit will pray with you and for you, and God answers. With much prayer comes power. You will notice that the more you pray, the more answers you will see occur on your prayer list. With each answered prayer you'll gain more confidence in your ability to pray.

- Find a "quiet place" where you can be alone with God each day.
- Start each morning reading your Sermon Journal. Daily Bible reading is important to your prayer life.
- Make a list of people and things you want to pray for each day.
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Pray to God as if you are talking to a friend, because that is who you are talking to—a loving Friend who wants a relationship with you.
  - Practice praying "out loud" while you are alone, such as in the car or shower.

.....

"Lord, Fill me with wisdom and direction as I seek Your guidance each day. Help me to clearly hear Your voice in answer to my prayers. Amen."

–Liz Miller, Member





*James 5:13–20***FRIDAY**  
MARCH 6, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

–1 Peter 3:12

How would you describe your prayers? Talk to God about the kind of prayers you would like to have.

*“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”*

–1 John 3:21–23

**SATURDAY**  
**MARCH 7, 2015**

## Luke 18:1–8

*“O Lord, please hear my prayer! Listen to the prayers of those of us who delight in honoring you. Please grant me success today by making the king favorable to me. Put it into his heart to be kind to me.” In those days I was the king’s cup-bearer.”*

—Nehemiah 1:11 (NLT)

Widows were particularly helpless and vulnerable because they had no one to defend their cause. In Scripture, kings, cup-bearers to kings, and Jesus Himself, recognized their need for God and communicated with Him in prayer. No matter who you are—you should pray first, pray often and never give up.

*“Hear me, LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.”*

—Psalm 86:1

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# Whoever Has Ears to Hear

“Put your toys away.” A simple direction that takes only minutes to execute, yet my elementary-age children lose all grasp of the English language when such words are uttered. However, when words such as “maybe we’ll go Disneyland someday” are spoken in the context of a much bigger conversation, their ability to hear and remember is suddenly superhuman. My desire to be heard is shared by our Heavenly Father. God said to Jeremiah, “Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways.” Jesus said to a crowd of followers, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” Paul said to the Roman church, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did.”

We tend to hear only what we want to hear (as in “Disneyland”) so developing the spiritual discipline of listening to God, to ourselves and to others leads to a much more effective faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “It is God’s love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear...Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to us by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work we should share.” Hearing is physiological. Listening is mental, emotional, spiritual. It’s one way we love the Lord with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength and love others as ourselves.

- Set aside 5 minutes each day as you pray and study to listen to God. Don’t ask for anything. Just open yourself to what He might say.
- Set aside a few minutes before each meal to listen to your body and gauge your level of physical hunger. Do you hunger for anything that’s not food?
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Reach out to someone and offer them the freedom and safety to talk while you simply listen.
  - Invite your significant other or kids into conversation. Then let them do most of the talking. It will do wonders for your relationships.

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“Lord, I want to be a hearer and a doer. Help me to listen not with my ears but with my heart, first to You, then to those whom You’ve placed in my path. May my non-anxious listening presence be a gift to someone this week. Amen.”

–Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

*Ecclesiastes 5:1–7***WEDNESDAY**  
MARCH 11, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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By listening, we deny that our perspective is right and true, and we learn to receive God's guidance, direction and correction.



*"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil."*

—Proverbs 3:7

In Scripture, a fool is not the one who can't learn but the one who refuses to learn. A wise person approaches the Lord with fear, reverence and a spirit of humility—recognizing the vast differences between God and humanity.

How do you approach the Lord? Do you leave room for His wisdom and His instruction in your life?

Do you create space for Him to teach you?

Do you listen to Him?

Prayerfully consider what you will do this week to improve your listening. Whatever the Lord brings to mind—put that into practice.





**SATURDAY**  
**MARCH 14, 2015**

## 1 John 4:1–6

Learn to discern! Not every situation you face is a matter of absolute right or wrong—mostly they are simple choices that lead you closer to God or further from Him. Pray for discernment. Ask the Lord to help you make little daily decisions that are good and helpful. Ask the Lord to help you discern when you are being led astray by others—no matter how good their intentions may be. The Lord always knows what is best for you. Always.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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*“True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him, ‘You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court.’”*

—Romans 3:3–4 (NLT)

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Ecclesiastes 5:1-7*

**SUNDAY**  
MARCH 15, 2015

"Are you listening to me?  
Really listening?"  
—Jesus of Nazareth

Handwriting practice area consisting of 25 horizontal lines.

**MONDAY**  
MARCH 16, 2015

## Mark 7:14–23

*“Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew all about people. No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart.”*

—John 2:23–25 (NLT)

How do you think learning to listen to God can be advantageous to your spiritual life? Of all the disciplines we are studying in this series, it is probably one of the hardest to practice. Do you think it worth the effort? Why or why not?

*“Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.”*

—Philippians 4:8–9 (MSG)

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*James 1:19–27***TUESDAY**  
MARCH 17, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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From this week's readings, what do you think characterizes superficial religion? What, then, should characterize God-honoring religion?

*"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

—Matthew 5:33–37

*"The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in obedience to him, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws—that you will listen to him. And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands."*

—Deuteronomy 26:16–18

# Change Your Mind, Change Your Life

Spiritual discipline “aims at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Nowhere is this purpose more clearly seen than in the Discipline of Study. The Apostle Paul tells us that the way we are transformed is by the renewal of the mind...by applying it to those things that will transform it (Romans 12:2). ‘*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is gracious, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things* (Philippians 4:8).’” The Discipline of Study is the primary vehicle to bring us to think about these things. “Many Christians remain in bondage to fears and anxieties simply because they do not avail themselves of the Discipline of Study.” They may be faithful in church attendance, earnest in fulfilling their religious duties, genuinely seeking to worship and obey Jesus Christ as Lord and Master...and “yet the tenor of their lives remains unchanged. Why? Because they have never taken up one of the central ways God uses to change us: study.”

—adapted from Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

- Purchase a chronological Bible or find a chronological order of the books of the Bible online and read it as a narrative. Visualize God’s story as it unfolds.
- If you’re a visual learner, gather or make charts, maps, timelines. Use an index card app on your phone to memorize scripture.
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Really, prayerfully use this journal daily. Answer the questions. Use study notes in your Bible. Write down what you learn for future reference.
  - Begin to study a concept that challenges you: grace, spiritual growth, stewardship, physical health, sharing your faith.

.....

“Transform me, O Lord, by renewing my mind. Be present with me and make Your Word come alive, be interesting and fun to study. Amen.”

—Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

## 2 Peter 3:14–18

**WEDNESDAY**  
**MARCH 18, 2015**

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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By studying, we deny our pride and humble ourselves to learn and grow in both grace and knowledge. Through study, our minds are transformed to think and perceive like Jesus so that we might live according to the way and truth of God. 

*“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.”*

—2 Peter 1:3 (NLT)

Today’s reading warns a lack of understanding can lead to the misapplication and misuse of Scripture, which is dangerous! But ultimately the study of Scripture should help us know Jesus. Have you ever considered the study of Scripture as intimacy with Him?

Prayerfully consider how you can be more studious this week. Whatever the Lord brings to mind—put that into practice.

**THURSDAY**  
MARCH 19, 2015


## Psalm 1

*"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance..."*

—Proverbs 1:5

*"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

—Psalm 119:11

 If you're feeling inspired, use Psalm 119 as a devotional on the Word of God.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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## Deuteronomy 17:18–20

**FRIDAY**  
MARCH 20, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.”*

—Psalm 119:15 (NLT)

Did you know the Lord required the kings of Israel to write out their own copy of Scripture? According to this passage, how would it benefit the king? How would it benefit the king's subjects?

How would such familiarity with the Word of God benefit those for whom you are responsible?

*“Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”*

—Deuteronomy 31:12–13





*2 Peter 3:14–18***SUNDAY**  
MARCH 22, 2015

“You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears.”

—Jesus of Nazareth

**MONDAY**  
MARCH 23, 2015

## Acts 17:10–15

How do you think the practice of studying Scripture can be advantageous to your spiritual life?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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*“He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”*

—Luke 24:44–45

What does this passage teach me about people?

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*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

—Romans 12:2

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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## Acts 18:24–26

**TUESDAY**  
MARCH 24, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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As followers of Christ, we will be life-long learners, but at some point we must also be ready and willing to teach and lead others in the Christian faith. Do you feel ready? Are you willing? Why or why not?

*“Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”*

—Acts 8:30–31

*“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.”*

—Ezra 7:10 (NRSV)

# When You Fast and Pray

Last year, God began challenging me to learn how to let go of my prideful attitudes surrounding my desire for control, perfection and self-sufficiency. It seemed everywhere I turned I was finding messages and situations that were challenging me to give up my pride in exchange for vulnerability and the willingness to trust God's plan for my life and His acceptance of me even when I feel unacceptable.

Fasting has never been an ongoing discipline in my life. I think there are a number of reasons why this was the case but one of the primary reasons was I never understood how missing a meal could help shape me as a follower of Christ. However, this past fall my wife and I committed to fasting a meal a week to focus on prayer for our family and for the church. I'll be honest, it was difficult the first two or three weeks, but soon the fast became an anticipated part of my week. I have had some meaningful time of prayer during these fasts but the greatest blessing of committing to these fasts was unexpected. God has used these fasts to remind me I am not in control, I am not perfect, I am not self-sufficient. He also taught me it is ok to let go because He meets us in our vulnerability.

- There's something about unsatisfied hunger or craving that brings a greater awareness of our smallness alongside God's bigness. What do you use to self-medicate, so to speak, when you're tired or stressed or needing encouragement? Consider letting go of that and instead reaching for God's graceful provision this week.
- Cross Fitness Challenge of the Week
  - Choose to fast from one meal or from all food after dinner one night until the evening meal the next night (skipping two meals). Use that time to pray.
  - Go on a one-day media fast to create a family Sabbath.

•••••

"God, You are the One who sustains our every breath. As we set aside comfort and distraction to see You more clearly, please reveal Yourself to us in new ways. Give us the strength to resist temptation and the wisdom to receive what You offer as You meet us in our vulnerability. Amen."

–Rev. Todd Craig

*Isaiah 58:1–12*

**WEDNESDAY**  
**MARCH 25, 2015**

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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By fasting, we periodically and temporarily deny our basic needs to learn that life is more than food and drink and to be reoriented away from our focus on meeting our needs to meeting the needs of others.



If skipping a meal could help you draw closer to God would you be willing to do it? Prayerfully consider how you will fast this week. Whatever the Lord brings to mind—put that into practice.

**THURSDAY**  
**MARCH 26, 2015**

## Zechariah 7

"Don't be like the hypocrites!"  
 —Jesus of Nazareth

Once again, we'll consider the difference between superficial religion and God-honoring religion. At the time Scripture was being written, fasting was more common—and eventually it became a "show" of religion without the truth of religion. We don't tend to make a big deal out of fasting today, so in what ways might we "fake" our religion or make a show of it?

*"But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously."*

—Micah 6:8 (MSG)

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# Joel 2:12-17

**FRIDAY**  
MARCH 27, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining how keeping the spirit of the law is more meaningful than keeping the letter of the law. How does verse 13 illuminate Jesus' teachings?

How is God characterized in this passage?

Why the sense of urgency?

Whose reputation is at stake?

**SATURDAY**  
**MARCH 28, 2015**

*Matthew 6:16–18*

In Matthew 6 Jesus said, “When you give...When you pray...” and “When you fast.” It seems a foregone conclusion that His followers would be doing all these things. What He was addressing was the manner in which we are to give, pray and fast.

So what does Jesus say about it? You may want to skim through Matthew 6:1–18, or you could just look at His thesis statement in Matthew 6:1.

How does Matthew 6:1, 16–18 help illuminate this week’s readings so far?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Isaiah 58:1–12***SUNDAY**  
MARCH 29, 2015

“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get.”

—Jesus of Nazareth

**MONDAY**  
MARCH 30, 2015

## Luke 4:1–15

Abstaining from food or drink, or some other pleasurable activity for a period of time, is a discipline we can practice to seek God's help in overcoming sin, addiction or some other affliction; to find a solution to a problem or receive an answer to prayer; to quiet our inner-self so we can hear God speak; to satisfy our hunger for righteousness; to prepare for a time of ministry; or to help us worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The ultimate goal in fasting is to seek God's face and to grow in intimacy with Him. Communion with God's Spirit is the number one reason to fast.

How do you think practicing fasting could be advantageous to your spiritual life?

 Holy Week has begun and we'll soon be walking through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as recorded in Scripture—now is the perfect time to “go without” as we reflect on Christ's sacrifice in an effort to prepare ourselves for Good Friday and Easter.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Acts 14:21–28

**TUESDAY**  
 MARCH 31, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”*  
 –Ezra 8:23

*“Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*  
 –Acts 13:1–3

From today’s texts, how is fasting put into proper perspective? How does it line-up with the disciple’s other activities?



*“For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.”*

–1 Timothy 2:5–6 (NLT)

# Better Is One Day In Your Courts Than A Thousand Elsewhere...

We've spent the last six weeks focusing on inward disciplines. These disciplines help us grow spiritually strong. They are "means of grace" that allow us to experience Jesus on a more intimate level. After Easter we will be studying outward disciplines as taught by Jesus during His "Sermon on the Mount." These practices help us know how to treat others and make the best kinds of choices in our daily living at home, school, work or wherever we spend our time.

Today we begin our "Holy Week" readings. This week we'll walk with Jesus through the distress of His final week on earth and the glorious triumph of His resurrection. During this one week between series, we invite you simply but intentionally to focus on Jesus. Focus on Him with the same depth, love and intensity with which He focuses on you every day.

Here is Jesus' invitation to you (adapted from the book, *Jesus Calling*):

"I am God with you, for all time and throughout eternity. Don't let the familiarity of that concept numb its impact on your consciousness. My perpetual Presence with you can be a continual source of Joy, springing up and flowing out in streams of abundant Life. Let your mind reverberate with meanings of my Names: Jesus—the Lord saves, and Emmanuel—God with us. Though I am *Lord of lords and King of kings*, I also desire to be your intimate Friend. Strive to remain conscious of My Presence even in your busiest moments. A person who is open to My Presence is exceedingly precious to Me. I, the One from whom all blessings flow, am also blessed by our time together. This is a deep mystery; do not try to fathom it. Instead, glorify Me by delighting in Me. Enjoy Me now and forever!"

- In all His glory and majesty—Jesus has a human face. In your own, unique way seek to put a smile on that face.

.....

"Dear Father, I praise You and worship You. Sovereign Lord—You alone are worthy! Who am I to be called a friend of the King? Why am I so blessed?! This week I want to be with Jesus—living in Jesus. I want to breathe, sleep, eat, work and play in His company. Help me to think continuously of Jesus. Put His Name, the powerful and holy Name of Jesus, constantly in my thoughts. And one more thing, help me do something this week that will really bless His socks off. Amen."

*Mark 14:1–11*

**WEDNESDAY**  
**APRIL 1, 2015**

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Carefully consider all the people in the scene from today’s reading: List who they are and what their concerns are.

What did you note about Jesus and His concerns? The time of His sacrifice was only a few days away. What do you think He was feeling? How do you think the woman’s anointing ministered to Him?

We tend to think Jesus, being fully God, is above or beyond our acts of kindness toward Him. It probably never occurs to most of us that our loving gestures are received and appreciated by Him on a personal level.

Prayerfully consider how you can bless Jesus in a personal way this week. Whatever the Lord brings to mind—do that for Him.

**THURSDAY**  
**APRIL 2, 2015**

## Mark 14:32–52

*"When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them. 'Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."*

—Mark 14:17, 22–26

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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To "keep watch" is defined as observing with continuous attention, especially to act as a sentinel or for protection. Try giving Jesus your continuous attention this week by keeping His Name at the forefront of your thoughts from now until Easter.



Mark 15:16–41

**FRIDAY**  
APRIL 3, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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The accounts of Jesus’ “trials” before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate are recorded in Mark 14:53–15:15. The Sanhedrin was the religious governing body of the Jews and consisted of the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law. The high priest presided over the council of 71 members, and they were permitted a great deal of authority by the Roman government, although they could not impose capital punishment.



Carefully consider all the people in the scene from today’s reading: What were the various attitudes and actions toward Jesus?

Notice the women were helpless to do anything, but they remained present with Him nonetheless (verses 40–41). How do you think their presence comforted Jesus at His most agonizing hour?

How can you offer your “presence” to Jesus today?

**SATURDAY**  
APRIL 4, 2015

*Mark 15:42-47*

Joseph of Arimathea was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin. What did he do for Jesus?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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Read the passage closely. How risky do you think his actions were?

What does this passage teach me about people?

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How might Easter morning be different, if not for Joseph's act of service?

Choose a way to serve another and purposefully dedicate that action to the Lord.

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

—John 13:15



**MONDAY**  
APRIL 6, 2015

## Mark 16:9–14

Why was Jesus disappointed with the apostles (verse 14)? Prayerfully consider how Jesus would regard your faith (or lack of it).

How is the truth of Mark 16:1–8 reflected in your life?

“We don’t believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true.”

—Dallas Willard,  
*Renovation of the Heart*

“The apostles came up and said to the Master, ‘Give us more faith.’”

—Luke 17:5 (MSG)

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# Mark 16:15–20

**TUESDAY**  
APRIL 7, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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What was the purpose of the “signs” the apostles demonstrated after the coming of the Holy Spirit (verse 20)? Skim through John 15:1–17. As believers in Jesus, what “signs” should we be displaying? And for what purpose (John 15:8)?

We often think of Jesus’ commands simply as rules to be followed, but what difference would it make if we determined to make obedience a way of honoring Jesus—because of who He is and what He means to us?

*“You are my friends if you do what I command.”*  
—John 15:14





**Walk** the  
**Talk**

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***“And this is love:  
that we walk in  
obedience to his  
commands. As you  
have heard from  
the beginning, his  
command is that you  
walk in love.”***

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**2 John 1:6**

# Faith in Action

Every once in a while I need to examine my life and decide if I am walking out my faith in the best way possible. Am I sharing Jesus with my family? Since my coworkers know that I follow Jesus, does my life actually reflect what I say? When I see a stranger, would that person know I have faith in Christ? I hate to admit, more often than not, I find I need to make some changes to show that I indeed follow Christ. That is when I decide to step out of my comfort zone and take some risks, such as find a way to tie grace into my therapy sessions at work, give more money to the church, pay for a random person's car to be filled up with gas, give a gift card to the cashier at Walmart, or volunteer in the youth department, children's department or 2nd Saturday.

James 2:14 says, *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?"*

- How can you ensure your actions align with your words and that your life aligns with that of Jesus?
- Call the person that's been on your mind lately.
- Pray with or read the Bible along with someone around you to help them grow as a disciple.
- Don't be afraid of the big stuff: take in a foster child, go on that mission trip, commit more time or money to the Lord's work through the church.

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"Lord, if I say I know You and yet don't keep Your commands, I'm not walking in the truth. May I never misrepresent You by failing to walk just as Jesus walked. Grant me strength and wisdom to bring You glory in all I say and do. Amen."

—Kori Neely, Member

## Matthew 5:17–20

**WEDNESDAY**  
APRIL 8, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Jesus did not set aside the Old Testament laws; instead, He gave them fuller meaning. As disciples, we are called to integrate His teachings into our lives; to live, do or act in accordance with the way of Jesus; to enter through the narrow gate; to bear good fruit; to build our house upon the rock. In other words, we are called to the way of integrity where our lives reflect or mirror our belief in Jesus. 

Integrity is defined as a state of being whole or undivided.

*"In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."*

—1 John 5:3–5

This week pay attention to your actions at home, school and at work. Are they consistent with your belief in Jesus? Prayerfully consider what you will do to practice integrity in your daily living.

**THURSDAY**  
APRIL 9, 2015

## Matthew 7:1–12

*"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love."*

—2 John 1:6

Compare Matthew 7:12 with Matthew 22:37–40. How do these verses illuminate each other?

In your daily life, do you treat God the same way you like to be treated?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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## Matthew 7:13–23

**FRIDAY**  
APRIL 10, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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“The idea of having faith in Jesus has come to be totally isolated from being his apprentice and learning how to do what he said.”

—Dallas Willard,  
*The Divine Conspiracy:  
Rediscovering Our Hidden Life  
In God*

In what ways does your integrity at home, school or work have to do with entering through the narrow gate? What does it have to do with bearing good fruit?

How is Jesus addressing the issue of integrity in verses 21 through 23?

*“But those who obey God’s word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.”*

—1 John 2:5–6 (NLT)

**SATURDAY**  
APRIL 11, 2015

## *Matthew 7:24–29*

This is probably a familiar passage—do you typically regard it as a platitude, words of wisdom or God’s rock-solid truth? Is this opinion proved out by how you live? Does something need to change?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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Look at verses 28–29. What do you think made Jesus’ teachings stand apart from the “teachers of the law”?

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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**MONDAY**  
**APRIL 13, 2015**

## Luke 6:1–11

*“The sky will disintegrate  
 and the earth dissolve before  
 a single letter of God’s Law  
 wears out.”*

—Luke 16:17 (MSG)

Notice how Jesus “reframed”  
 the issue of healing on the  
 Sabbath (verse 9)? How does  
 this reframing illustrate the  
 law of love?

Why do you think it made  
 the Pharisees so angry?  
 Really think this through: Of  
 what do you think they were  
 afraid?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Luke 11:14–28

**TUESDAY**  
APRIL 14, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“As they approached, Jesus said, ‘Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.’”*  
—John 1:47 (NLT)

What is the risk of having beliefs, words and actions that don’t line up?

# It Starts with Me

How often do we know exactly what is healthy, godly, and biblical, and then lack the will to act? It is common for me to watch far too much TV (enter a long list of God-barriers here) even while the Holy Spirit nudges me to take time to pray, be social or read. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:20 that we must move beyond the righteousness of the Pharisees who “knew” a great deal and talked a great deal. However, they were not walking what they talked, and thus caused much unnecessary conflict. Jesus calls us to follow Him and is careful to note that He is not abolishing the Law, but rather completing the teachings. As we seek to be people of integrity, we fix our eyes on Jesus as our model to ensure that our actions and our words are in alignment when we pray “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Maintaining unity means that when the Spirit prompts me to go to someone and be reconciled or be a peaceful presence during their storm, I must be obedient.

- Wake up 5 minutes early (or more) to wholeheartedly listen to Jesus—nothing “to do” other than listen and receive His peace.
- For one week try reading scripture and praying for unity every time you eat during the day.
- Check in with a friend or mentor each week to keep each other accountable in living out the hard teachings of Jesus.
- Identify one thing this week that God is nudging you to do—and commit to responding to His call.

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“God, You have given us direction and hope. We limit Your impact by living according to our own will; may we have the peace and strength of spirit each day this week to respond to Your love and commands so that your full impact can be felt in our homes, communities and the world. Amen.”

—Ron Gentry, Member and Wesley Foundation Assistant Director at University of Tulsa

*Matthew 5:21–26*

**WEDNESDAY**  
 APRIL 15, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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Kingdom citizens should actively pursue reconciliation to maintain unity. Rather than allowing offense, disagreement or conflict to give birth to anger and contempt and eventually to violence, Jesus’ followers should pursue relational peace wherever and whenever it is possible.



*“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”*  
 —Psalm 34:14

Prayerfully consider what you need to do this week to practice living in unity and at peace with others.

**THURSDAY**  
APRIL 16, 2015

*John 17:20–26*

Do you repeat rumors you hear at school or the office? Do you respond to “hear-say” instead of getting clarity from the source? Do you allow or promote “tri-angling” in your family (when one person pits a second person, sibling or spouse, against another)? Do you grumble about changes at church because they don’t suit you? When something is bothering you, do you give the silent treatment or say everything is “fine” when you know it’s not?

Why do you think our being unified matters so much to Jesus?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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*“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.”*

—Philippians 2:1–4 (MSG)

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# Matthew 18:21–35

**FRIDAY**  
APRIL 17, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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How is seeking unity and living at peace with others an integrity issue for followers of Christ?

How is choosing to forgive an act of peace?

“In the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He emphasized the daily practice of forgiveness as a way of maintaining and sustaining relationships. Just like food, forgiveness sustains our lives in the community. Just as we cannot live without daily bread, we cannot fully live our life in communion with each other and with God without the ability to grant and receive forgiveness.”

—Ce'lestin Musekura,  
*Forgiving as We've  
Been Forgiven*

**SATURDAY**  
**APRIL 18, 2015**

## *Ephesians 4:17–32*

If we know that we have offended someone or if someone has offended us, we should go immediately to that person and attempt to make the relationship right. Though reconciliation ultimately requires the full participation of all parties, we should take the first step. We should be quick to repent for the wrong we have done and quick to confront and to forgive the wrong that has been done to us. We should not make excuses or wait for it to go away because the longer we wait the more likely it will grow into evil thoughts, evil speech or violent action.

What do you think it means to “give the devil a foothold” (verses 26–27)?

Do you secretly enjoy being angry or offended because it gives you something to talk about? Or a reason to “medicate”? Or a handy “distraction” from more important issues? Is it time to find a new hobby?

*“And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.”*

—Colossians 3:15 (NLT)

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Matthew 5:21–26***SUNDAY**  
APRIL 19, 2015

"I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me."

—Jesus of Nazareth

**MONDAY**  
APRIL 20, 2015

## 2 Corinthians 2:5–11



In today's passage, Paul is referring to a church member in Corinth who was disciplined for a serious offense.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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Compare Ephesians 4:26–27 with 2 Corinthians 2:10–11. When we harbor anger and unforgiveness—who are we hurting and who are we helping?

What does this passage teach me about people?

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When we pursue peace and unity—who are we helping?

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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## Genesis 50:15–21

**TUESDAY**  
APRIL 21, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery to be rid of him. To their surprise, they were reunited many years later when Joseph had risen to power in Egypt (second only to Pharaoh) and was in a position to save many people (including his family) during a severe famine. 

How do you think the Lord God regarded to this moment in history?

How does this passage illuminate Matthew 5:21–26?

*"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."*  
—1 John 3:15

*"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*  
—1 Peter 4:8

# Guarding Our Steps

When Jesus takes the definition of adultery even further than the previous Old Testament understanding, it seems He's asking the impossible. In fact, lust can be interpreted to seem harmless: no one else has to know, no physical contact has to happen, and after all, thinking is not as bad as doing. To see a man or woman as attractive is not sinful. To allow thoughts of sexual behaviors or desires to make their home in our heart and mind is sinful, in part because we've moved into coveting a person that is not for us and have lowered that person to an object whose value is in our own potential pleasure. Lust is extremely selfish, and allowing such unhealthy desires and thoughts to rest in our minds and hearts is actually quite harmful. In Galatians 5, Paul writes, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh... For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: *"Love your neighbor as yourself... So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."*

- Unlimited access to media makes maintaining purity of thought challenging. Take the time now to purge all your devices of images, links and apps that encourage lust. Ask your spouse or accountability partner to enact parental controls to help you resist temptation.
- *"God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you"* (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8). Talk with God and spiritual friends about your struggles.
- Do you indulge your desires by committing an "emotional affair," sharing intimate details, drawing strength or comfort from someone other than your spouse, supporting or giving to them in ways you should give to your spouse, daydreaming or thinking about him or her more than you want to admit?
- Take concrete steps to honor your present (or future) spouse today.

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"Lord Jesus, to live with purity in this world that encourages instant gratification of the senses requires a strong will. Forgive me for my failures. Give me the strength to guard my eyes and control my imagination. Amen."

—Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

## Matthew 5:27–32

**WEDNESDAY**  
APRIL 22, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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The “bond of marriage” should not be weakened or diluted. Committing adultery is “double-bonding” with another. Kingdom citizens should not be people who entertain obsessive sexual desires—who purposefully indulge improper fantasies, nor should they be people who treat marriage lightly. Instead, we recognize the power of sexuality, the freedom of purity, and the beauty of fidelity. We cultivate proper desire and direct our sexuality toward celibacy or marital faithfulness.



*“And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.”*

—James 1:13–15 (NLT)

Prayerfully consider how you will remain pure and faithful in your relationships from this day forward. Whatever the Lord brings to mind—put that into practice.



## 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

**FRIDAY**  
APRIL 24, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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If the Lord provides a rule about something, we have to trust Him that it is for our own good. Studies show there are mental, physical and emotional reasons to remain pure before marriage and faithful in marriage, but it seems there are also spiritual implications which we may not fully grasp. If Jesus says, this is what is best for you—then perhaps we simply should take Him at His word.

*“Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”*

–1 Timothy 4:12 (NLT)

*“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”*

–1 Timothy 5:1–2

**SATURDAY**  
APRIL 25, 2015

## Matthew 19:1–12



The mere fact that we do not commit adultery or that we have legal grounds for a divorce does not mean that everything is as it should be in our relationships with others or that everything is as it should be in relation to our sexuality. Though they may not technically violate the law, Jesus teaches that lust and divorce are always destructive at some level – both often give birth to some kind of adultery.

*“So I say to those who aren’t married and to widows—it’s better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can’t control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It’s better to marry than to burn with lust. But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife.”*

–1 Corinthians 7:8–11 (NLT)

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Matthew 5:27–32***SUNDAY**  
APRIL 26, 2015

“Don’t you know that anything that is swallowed works its way through the intestines and is finally defecated? But what comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart. It’s from the heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That’s what pollutes.”

—Jesus of Nazareth

**MONDAY**  
APRIL 27, 2015

## Romans 13:8–14

How does Romans 13:10  
illuminate Matthew 5:27–32?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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Common justifications for sexually immoral behavior are, "My actions aren't hurting anyone," and "We're consenting adults." Immoral behavior always hurts someone. It is always born of selfishness, is contrary to the law of love and demonstrates a lack of integrity for followers of Christ.

What does this passage teach me about people?

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*"Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted."*

—Ephesians 4:30 (MSG)

What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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# Say What You Mean and...

My parents divorced when I was a baby, and I was raised by my dad and step-mom who divorced when I was a teenager. I hated divorce. If you told me then that I would marry a man with two kids and an ex-wife, I would have laughed...a big, sarcastic laugh. But God knew the plans He had for me. God blessed me with a humble and gracious husband. John has taught me, over and over, the value of putting self aside to redeem a relationship. God also blessed me with Melanie (my husband's ex-wife), an incredibly selfless woman – showing me kindness, sharing her sons with me and allowing me to call them my sons as well. She loves our family, never even mentioning the words “half” or “step” or “ex.” And He blessed me with the unwavering love of a step-mom, who taught me how to unconditionally love a child who wasn't my own. I've had to rely on the fruit of the Spirit—pretty much all of them. I've had to be patient and wait on God to provide a way through some things. I've had to practice self-control. And I've had to choose love. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:25–26).

Many of us experience broken families and relationships which have the potential to be a manipulative and destructive presence in our lives. Using integrity in the way we speak to and about others is a vital way to show the love of God in challenging circumstances.

- Resist the temptation to speak negatively about others (spouses, exes, bosses, teachers, etc.) especially in front of kids. It will only make you look bad and compromise your witness.
- When problems arise, remember the big picture and ask if this will matter 10 years from now. What do you need to let go of this week?
- Do you need to clear up any disagreements or confusion for the sake of peace? Do it. And explain that you value the other person over your stance.
- If you tend toward hyperbole or imprecise communication, recognize it as an opportunity for growth and practice saying what you really mean. You might find yourself feeling better understood and more respected as a result.

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“Lord, I thank You for the people You have brought into my life. Teach me to show them Your love. Help me to be humble and put others before myself, showing them grace and forgiveness. Amen.”

–Susie Lye, Member

## Matthew 5:33–37

**WEDNESDAY**  
APRIL 29, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Kingdom citizens speak clearly and simply. We speak the truth in love, and we keep our promises. We do not understate or exaggerate; we do not use speech to control or exploit others. This is the way of honesty.



When we want someone to believe something to be true, when we want people to believe in us, to trust that we will keep our promises, we should not manipulate them by saying something impressive or by appealing to the power or character of someone or something else.

*"But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned."*

—James 5:12 (NLT)

Prayerfully consider how you will practice honesty in your relationships. Ask the Lord to help you be aware of any tendencies to manipulate others with your words.



*James 3:1–12***FRIDAY**  
MAY 1, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.”*

—Proverbs 6:16–19

Why is our choice and use of words so important?









## 2 Samuel 12:1–14

**TUESDAY**  
MAY 5, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*"My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."*

—James 5:19–20  
(see also James 4:17)

Nathan was addressing the king—this was a huge risk for him! Consider also the king's responsibility. Sometimes you may have to act as "Nathan" in another person's life by telling someone the hard thing for their own good. But as a supervisor, organizational leader or parent, you may have to humbly receive the truth from someone who is under you. What can you learn from David in this regard?

*"Take good counsel and accept correction—that's the way to live wisely and well."*

—Proverbs 19:20 (MSG)

# A Glimpse of Jesus

Status quo is nothing to a God who gave everything for us and desires everything from us. Over the years, we've observed couples like Asbury members Basil and Gay James and Giles and Barbara Gere go above and beyond in their service of the Lord. Just as James 2:18 suggests, they have shown their faith in the God of unconditional love and unmerited redemption by what they've done—and it has had a profound influence on us. Thus, when God blessed us with the ability to retire early, we knew we wanted to use the rest (and best) of our lives to bless others. That means we spend a lot of time modeling sacrificial love to our kids and grandkids, partnering with the church and in the community, even helping others discover the joy of serving the Lord through missions. We've been on the receiving and the giving side of the "extra mile" and know how such a gesture, simply doing more than is required, can remind people they are not alone in bearing the burdens of life. It takes faith and trust on our part to give to someone, especially to someone who cannot pay back or give in return. Going above and beyond means we have to believe God can and will provide for us in every way. But Jesus wants us to go a step further still—by going above and beyond not only for those we love, not only for those who can't pay us back, but also for those who offer us insult or injury. Being kind and gracious to someone who is mean and selfish is where the "rubber meets the road" in the Christian walk. No matter what the situation may be, God uses all our "extra miles" to offer a glimpse, if only for a moment, of the abundant life found in Jesus.

- Go the extra mile at home by running errands, doing someone else's chores—volunteering instead of waiting to be asked.
- Return an insult or an injury with an act of kindness.
- Extend grace to another by offering forgiveness or offering an apology.

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"God, You are the One from whom all blessings flow, the source of all truth and all goodness. Open my eyes to an opportunity to do more than my usual this week. Thank you for using me to bless someone else. Amen."

—Jim and Linda Furman, Members

*Matthew 5:38–42***WEDNESDAY**

MAY 6, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Vulnerability is not popular. It comes with a very high risk. Generally, we are called to live our lives in this age in the light and hope of life in the age to come. When kingdom citizens are injured, extorted, or required to do something costly, Jesus teaches us to remain vulnerable rather than return the insult, to relinquish rather than fight, and to sacrifice rather than simply satisfy what is required or requested of us.



Note: To “slap the cheek” was to insult another person. This passage is not addressing abuse or violence. If you or someone you love is being violated, please seek help.

Prayerfully consider how you will practice vulnerability in your interactions with others.

**THURSDAY**

MAY 7, 2015

## Exodus 21:23–36

## Leviticus 24:17–22



The “eye for an eye” law is not to be taken literally; it is also not an excuse for private vengeance but rather it serves as a judicial principle: The penalty is to fit the crime, not to exceed it. Jesus corrected the popular misunderstanding of the so-called law of retaliation by invoking the law of love.

Retribution is defined as punishment that is considered morally right and fully deserved.

Restitution is defined as the restoration of something lost or stolen to its owner.

Retaliation is defined as returning like for like, especially to get revenge.

As you read these passages, notice the concern for making the other person “whole.” The expectation is to respect other people’s property and to treat everyone with dignity.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Matthew 5:38–42***SUNDAY**  
MAY 10, 2015

"To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously."  
—Jesus of Nazareth

**MONDAY**  
MAY 11, 2015

## 1 Peter 3:8–22

Have you ever sought compensation for an insult or injury beyond what was equitable?

Jesus was completely innocent of any wrongdoing, and we know from the Scriptures how He was treated. When we suffer at the hands of another—He understands what we are going through. We are called to follow His example and respond in whatever way leads to peace.

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”*

—Matthew 5:10 (NLT)



## Luke 10:25–37

**TUESDAY**  
MAY 12, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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In this parable, the two religious men demonstrate a lack of integrity. It is the Samaritan who “goes the extra mile.”

How do you respond:  
To a roommate who is constantly “borrowing” your clothes?

To a boss who expects you to work overtime?

To a pastor who asks you to serve or give financially to the church?

When someone cuts you off in traffic?

When being asked to help around the house or with the kids after a long day at work?

When a schoolmate or professor makes fun of you?

*“Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.”*

—1 Peter 3:8–9 (MSG)

# Even When It's Not Within Us

Corrie ten Boom was arrested by the Nazis along with the rest of her family for hiding Jews in their home during the Holocaust. During that imprisonment, she suffered many abuses. Betsie, her sister, died in the concentration camp. Inspired by Betsie's example of selfless love and forgiveness amid extreme cruelty and persecution, Corrie became a missionary, preaching God's forgiveness and the need for reconciliation. One day a man who came to shake her hand after such a talk turned out to be a former prison guard. Only by asking God to love through her did she find the grace to take his hand and offer him Christian forgiveness. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she describes the event. "Even as the angry vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him... Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness... And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives along with the command, the love itself."

Know there will be times that we must love even when that love is not within us. Know that when the love we need is not in us it is still available to us through God. We must pray for forgiveness for ourselves and those who wrong us. We must pray to be a part of God's reconciliation, not a hindrance to it.

- Pray for those who have wronged you or someone you love.
- When God places His forgiveness within you, consider going and passing that forgiveness along.
- Talk with your kids or grandkids about what holding a grudge can do.

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"Merciful God, forgive our inability to forgive and flow Your love and forgiveness through us that we may truly experience Your presence, forgiveness and healing. Amen"

—Rev. Mike Hardgrove

*Matthew 5:43–48***WEDNESDAY**  
MAY 13, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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Jesus' teachings on the law culminate with the command to love our enemies. Like our Heavenly Father, we should love others by acting in their best interest, by promoting their welfare regardless of who they are and what they have done. As citizens of God's kingdom, we are called to love everyone—including our enemies—with the kind of depth that leads to personal sacrifice.



Love is active. It is something that is done rather than merely felt.

Charity—defined as altruistic love and goodwill—is the highest of Christian virtues.

Prayerfully consider how you will practice charity in your dealings with other people. You may not have “enemies,” but you probably have people in your life who present a challenge—those who require extra patience and grace. Do you tolerate them without caring about their welfare?

**THURSDAY**  
MAY 14, 2015

## Luke 6:27–36

Likewise, our acts of love should not be restricted to our neighbors, our family or to those who can and do reciprocate, but they should be extended even to those who attack, oppress and slander us, our communities of faith and our God. Christian love should not discriminate on the basis of race or religion. It should transcend national interests, political ideologies, social preferences and economic affiliations. Like Jesus, our love should be the kind of love that at times may appear unpatriotic and threaten our reputation. This is what it means to be perfect; this is what it means to fulfill the law; this is what it means to live a righteous life that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees—a life of allegiance to God and his Kingdom.

How does Luke 6:27–36 help reinforce Jesus' teachings on unity, purity, honesty, vulnerability and charity?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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**SATURDAY**  
MAY 16, 2015

## 1 Corinthians 13

John Wesley is sometimes credited with saying, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and, in all things, charity." It means that Christians should agree on central beliefs such as the Triune God and the Lordship of Jesus, but allow for various perspectives on non-essentials such as what kind of worship music is preferred. But at all times, in all things, Christians should extend charity or gracious love to others regardless of position or opinion.

How does the law of love put all other laws into perspective?

How is loving your enemy an issue of integrity for followers of Christ?

How are you doing with this?

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*Matthew 5:43–48***SUNDAY**  
MAY 17, 2015

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!"

—Jesus of Nazareth





*Luke 23:32–49***TUESDAY**  
MAY 19, 2015

What does this passage teach me about God and His kingdom?

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What does this passage teach me about people?

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What does it teach me about myself? How should I respond?

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*“And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.”*

—Romans 5:9–11 (NLT)

*“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.”*

—Deuteronomy 32:4





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