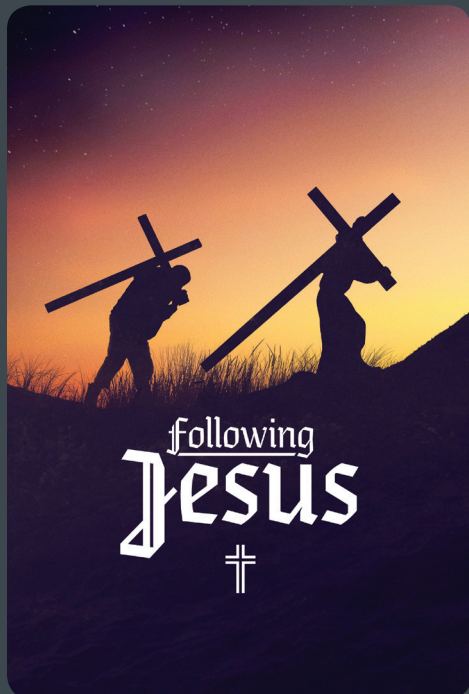
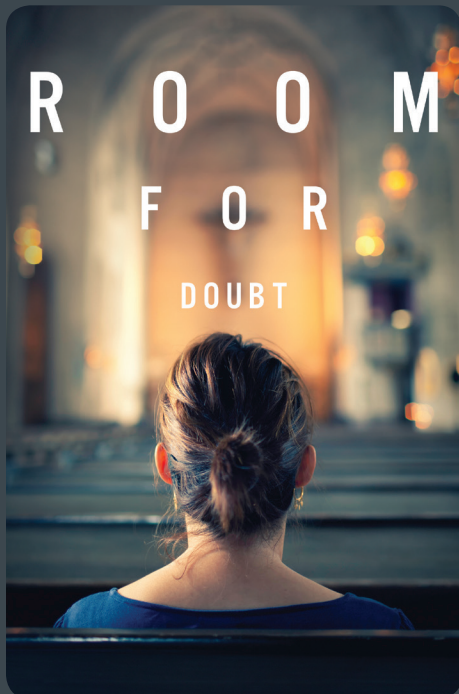


# *Sermon Journal*



February 10–  
March 29



March 30–  
April 26

Asbury  
United Methodist Church



# **Following Jesus**

page 7

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# **Room for Doubt**

page 67



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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**

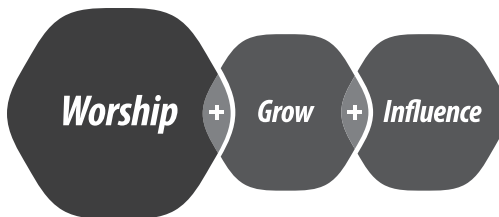
**United with the Body of Christ**

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 available at 9:00 am in the Mason Chapel.
- Every Monday, Celebrate Recovery, Celebration Station and the Landing meet.

## February

- Fri, 2.5–6 IF: Gathering, Asbury's Venue, begins at 7:00 pm  
 Sun, 2.7 Communion in all services  
 Wed, 2.10 Lent begins today. Ash Wednesday service, Sanctuary, 6:00 pm  
 Sat, 2.13 2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish  
 Sat, 2.13-20 Monterrey, Mexico mission team  
 Sun, 2.14 "Following Jesus" sermon series begins

## March

- Thur, 3.3 Q Commons, Asbury's Venue, 7:00–9:00 pm  
 Sun, 3.6 Communion in all services  
 Spring Break missions commissioning  
 Sun, 3.12 2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish  
 Sat, 3.12–19 Spring Break missions and on-site prayer watch  
 Thur, 3.24 Maundy Thursday service, Mason Chapel, 7:00 pm  
 Fri, 3.25 Good Friday service, Sanctuary, 7:00 pm  
 Sat, 3.26 Family Easter event, 10:00 am–1:00 pm  
 Sun, 3.27 Easter Sunday

## April

- Sun, 4.3 "Room for Doubt" sermon series begins  
 Communion in all services  
 Sat, 4.9 2nd Saturday, serving the community, 8:15 am–noonish  
 Sat, 4.16 50+ Marriage banquet  
 Sun, 4.17 Marriage recognition  
 Sun, 4.24 Confirmation service, Sanctuary, 6:00 pm

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# How to Use This 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 studies and cross-references while others may carry on intimate dialogues with Jesus using the Scripture as a springboard for conversation. However your 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 effort into creating these journals 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 our pastors 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 by answering these three questions in your own words: What does the passage teach me about God? What does the passage teach me about people? What does this passage teach me about myself? (These guiding questions may be used every day.)
4. The daily reflections offer insight and can be used for personal application. You may use the blank lines to write or “process” your own thoughts and reflections. Discussion questions have also been provided for small group use.
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 from the sermon.







Following  
**Jesus**  
✝

*by Stephanie Hurd*



# Following Jesus

There's an old story about a street evangelist who was asking people if they were willing to follow Jesus. A passerby had this retort: "I don't know. Where's he going?" Honestly, the question and response are both legitimate. Jesus asked people to follow Him. Some dropped everything and followed without hesitation. Others couldn't (or wouldn't).

Luke 9:46–62 shows a whirlwind of activity:

- The disciples argue about who among them is the greatest.
- The disciples try to stop an unknown exorcist driving out demons in Jesus' Name.
- The disciples get pumped about calling fire down from heaven on the Samaritans (permission denied).
- Jesus' invitation to new disciples is rejected because of family matters.

In the middle of this text is a candid assessment of what it means to follow Jesus. The Master Himself said to a guy who pledged to follow Jesus wherever He went: *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

The next chapter (10:1–24) describes the joy that comes from following Jesus. "Prophets and kings" yearned for but never saw what Jesus revealed to His disciples.

Simon Peter wrestled with the street evangelist's question, too: "Are you willing to follow Jesus?" This concludes John's Gospel: *Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"* (John 21:17–19)

We don't know where following Jesus will take us in this life. My pathway is different than yours. Sometimes we get the short end of the materials stick. Even Jesus sacrificed for His purpose. But He also insisted that life is far more than acquiring stuff: *"For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?"* (Matthew 16:26) Who can forget His words in the Sermon on the Mount, *"Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"* (Matthew 6:25) As the Apostle Paul said about following Jesus: *"I've learned to be content whatever the circumstances."* (Philippians 4:11)

"Why should I follow Jesus?" Because He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the True Vine. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the Light of the World. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. As the Beatles sang, "Money can't buy me love." Materialism won't give you abundant or eternal life. Jesus will. Only Jesus can. That's why I follow Him.

*Tom*

–Dr. Tom Harrison, Senior Pastor

P.S. The new format has been well received so we are continuing with it, and we've added a page of discussion questions each week for small groups.

Following Jesus is both inviting and challenging. We are invited into relationship but challenged in significant ways. These two dynamics working together create an environment for people to grow in their life with God. Following Jesus is an intentional pursuit that takes time, effort and commitment, but it results in the fullest kind of life.

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# Following

Eternal life in God's kingdom is both present and continuous. Following Jesus is also present and continuous. It is not a one-time decision but a daily sacrifice and on-going commitment that begins with repentance and belief. Then, in the context of this life-giving relationship with Jesus, we are challenged to surrender our lives and follow Him.

## Discussion Questions:

John the Baptist and Jesus both preached repentance as the first step to living in God's kingdom. Communal repentance precedes revival, and repentance is the first step in our personal Lenten journeys toward Easter. Why do you think repentance is such an important starting place in our spiritual lives?

Share with the group how you first entered into relationship with Jesus. What does your commitment to following Jesus look like today?

One challenge to following Jesus is not the people or the stuff in our lives, it is our attachment to them. Refer to Paul's words in Philippians 3:7-11. To what in your life are you most devoted? What competes with Jesus for your priorities? What is standing in the way of complete surrender?

Following Jesus is high stakes/high rewards. In what ways do you feel following Jesus is worth the risk?

Now glance at Matthew 7:21-23. What is the danger of deceiving ourselves into thinking we're Christ's disciples when we are not?

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. In what ways is this commandment more about "being" than about "doing"?

How will you increase your level of commitment to Jesus this Lenten season?

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**WEDNESDAY / FEBRUARY 10, 2016**

## **Matthew 4:17, 23, 25**

It is customary for Christians to begin the Lenten season by receiving the imposition of ashes on their foreheads. Ashes represent two important aspects of Lent. First, they remind us of our humanity and consequently, our mortality—we were formed from dust and to dust we shall return (Genesis 2:7, 3:19). Abraham acknowledged this when he interceded for Sodom, *“Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes...”* (Genesis 18:27) Second, ashes demonstrate repentance and sorrow over sins committed. Jesus rebuked the towns of Korazin and Bethsaida for not repenting in sackcloth and ashes and said they would be judged for it (Matthew 11:20–24). On the first day of Lent, we come before God to acknowledge our humanity and repent of our sins. No matter how far along we are in our spiritual journeys, we are still sinners in need of forgiveness (Romans 3:23). It may seem fatalistic, but it is our first step toward the day we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection and the future renewal of all things. Today we remember “what we are” while anticipating what we will someday be.

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: Today is Ash Wednesday on the Christian calendar. This marks the beginning of Lent.

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**THURSDAY** / FEBRUARY 11, 2016

**Mark 1: 1–20**

“Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means ‘spring.’ The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent was a time to prepare new converts for baptism. Today, Christians focus on their relationship with God, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of themselves for others. Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a ‘mini-Easter’ and the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection.”

Your prayerful reflection:

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Source note: <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-lent-and-why-does-it-last-forty-days>; accessed on 12-19-15.













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# Learning

The word for “disciple” in Greek is *mathetes* and means “learner.” Followers of Jesus orient their lives around becoming life-long learners of Him. With the help of God’s Spirit, we can learn, over time, to do the things Jesus did while becoming the same type of person He is. Learning from Jesus is not merely academic—it is also practical and pragmatic and creates the strongest foundation for life.

## Discussion Questions:

What is your honest opinion of Jesus as a teacher?

With what life issues are you currently trying to learn from Him?

What is one thing you have learned from Jesus that you have recently put into practice?  
What was the outcome?

For some of us “learning” is the easy invitation while “doing” is the challenge. For others “doing” is the easy part but taking time to “learn” from Jesus is the challenge. Which best describes you and why?

What are some dangers of “learning” without (or with minimal) “doing” and vice versa?

During this Lenten season, what steps can you take to bring your “learning” and “doing” into balance?

In Scripture, applied learning is compared to “producing fruit” and “yielding a harvest.” Look at Matthew 6:33. How do you think “good fruit” would be a natural by-product of pursuing God?

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**WEDNESDAY / FEBRUARY 17, 2016**

## **Matthew 5:1–2; 7:7–29**

These two scriptures bookend the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus gives criteria for faithful living in God’s kingdom. The Law given by Moses is retained, and further extended and expanded by One greater than Moses. When Jesus finished His discourse, the crowds were “amazed” at His teaching. The knowledge, intelligence and authority of the Teacher makes all the difference for His disciples because what Jesus teaches is not only doable, but powerfully practical. And Jesus ends there, saying, *Now put these words of mine into practice! This is how to enter through the “narrow gate,” how to bear “good fruit,” and how to build on a “firm foundation.”* Jesus knows better than anyone the practices that lead to a good life, so when we want to make improvements why do we look to magazines, blogs, Oprah and Google more than to Him?

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: The preaching text is Matthew 5:1–2; 7:24–27.

**THURSDAY / FEBRUARY 18, 2016**

**Deuteronomy 4:1-14**

Before the incarnation of Jesus and the outpouring the Holy Spirit, God taught His people through the “Law and the prophets.” Deuteronomy is a series of sermons and/or farewell addresses from Moses before transferring leadership to Joshua, his successor. Moses repeats the Laws which God gave to him directly for the people of Israel. The Law served (and continues to serve) Israel in several ways: teaching what God requires of them, establishing behaviors that protect them from harm, creating an environment where all people have dignity, setting them apart from other nations, and providing a life-giving heritage that passes from generation to generation. But the Law is only beneficial when they “keep” it; that is to say, when they “follow” God’s good instructions.

Your prayerful reflection:

Multiple horizontal lines provided for reflection.













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# Practicing

Disciples are learners. Discipleship is the process of learning from Jesus, and then repeatedly putting into practice what we learn. It is only through practice, putting our beliefs into action, that we make progress in our spiritual growth. If we trust Jesus, our Teacher, and truly believe His message—it will show in what we do.

## Discussion Questions:

How willing are you to allow Jesus to multiply Himself through you?

What is the difference between trying to do the right thing and trying to be the right kind of person?

As a group, experiment with “practicing” holiness or Christ-likeness this week. Agree to realistic parameters (days, times, length, etc.) and focus on “being holy” or “being Christ-like” during that time. Be prepared to discuss next time you meet.

Since we are being renewed into the image of our Creator, what automatic responses (old habits of thoughts, feelings and actions) might need to be disrupted to make way for new habits, those that fit with living in God’s kingdom?

The Apostle John, near the end of his long life, said *“This is the message we heard from Jesus...”* As a student of Jesus, how would you finish that sentence? Share your answers, then look at 1 John 1:5 to see how someone with firsthand experience of Jesus did. Now, all things considered—would you change your answer? Why or why not?

Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, used to say, “You are going to be what you are now becoming.” Based on your current daily practices, what kind of person are you becoming? What kind of person do you want to be one, three or five years from now?

What specific thing(s) will you do this Lenten season to improve the practice your faith?



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THURSDAY / FEBRUARY 25, 2016

## Luke 6:39–49

"Jesus gives us urgent warnings about failing to actually do what he calls us to do in his teachings and mentions the specific things that are most likely to trip us up in this regard. Dietrich Bonhoeffer forcefully states, 'The only proper response to this word which Jesus brings with him from eternity is simply to do it.' Remarkably, almost one sixth of the entire Discourse (fifteen of ninety two verses) is devoted to emphasizing the importance of actually doing what it says. Doing and not just hearing and talking about it is how we know the reality of the kingdom and integrate our life into it. This final section therefore concludes with the well-known images of the wise man who builds his house upon the rock (he is the one *doing* the words of Jesus), as compared with the other man, who does not."

—Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: Willard refers to the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' "Discourse." Today's reading is Jesus' similar teaching from a different occasion.













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# Enduring

As followers of Jesus, we must know what threatens our faith and be ready for it. We can expect pressure, but we can also anticipate God's abundant resources. We must be on our guard but not live in fear. Endurance is Jesus' call to stand firm in our life with God, throughout life's challenges. If we don't endure to the end, then the beginning doesn't really matter.

## Discussion Questions:

If your group experimented with the practice of "being holy" or "being Christ-like" last week, discuss those experiences first.

In our culture and in our time, "acknowledging" Jesus before others will look different than it did in the days of Roman rule. It might be as exciting as being baptized. As scary as talking to unbelievers about our faith. As disappointing as missing a sports tournament that conflicts with worship. As humiliating as taking an unplanned pregnancy to term. As difficult as staying in a loveless marriage. As risky as calling what's wrong "wrong" in spite of public opinion. As challenging as trusting in Jesus more than in wealth, possessions, jobs or people. It might make us unprofitable in business or unpopular among our peers.

Share a time that you acknowledged Jesus before others either through words or actions. How would you describe the experience?

Share a time that you neglected a clear opportunity to acknowledge Jesus, either in word or deed, before others. How would you describe that experience?

In 2 Timothy 2:3–7, Paul exhorts Timothy to endure hardships like a good soldier who wants to please his commander, a victorious athlete who plays by the rules, and the farmer who works hard to produce a crop. What do these examples illustrate and how do they relate to your current endurance challenge?

How can your suffering help another?

Refer to Romans 5:3–5. How does daily practice of your faith help prepare you to endure?

According to 1 John 5:1–5, who overcomes the world and how?

















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# Sacrificing

Followers of Jesus are called to a higher mission than to find personal comfort and tranquility in this life. An attitude of sacrifice, alongside faithful beliefs and practices, is an essential characteristic of an authentic, vital Christian life.

## Discussion Questions:

Alex and Brett Harris challenge young people to “do hard things,” in their book by that title. Their message: *Let’s not be a generation of self-centered materialists; let’s discipline ourselves to follow Jesus and do hard things to His glory.* In the forward of the book, Chuck Norris says, “Today we live in a culture that promotes comfort, not challenges. Everything is about finding ways to escape hardship, avoid pain, and dodge duty.”

In what ways is Norris’ statement true for you?

What “hard things” is Jesus calling you to do? Bear in mind they may be small, repetitive, mostly unnoticed and fairly tedious things like being on time, reading your Bible every day, staying in touch with your family, controlling your temper, avoiding unwholesome media and entertainment, acting with integrity, not complaining, doing a chore thoroughly or without being asked, putting down your phone, being patient, praying before you start your day...

Refer to Galatians 6:7–9. What do you think is the cumulative effect of making daily sacrifices, no matter how small?

The old sacrificial system required the life of an animal to atone for sin. Since Christ became the once-for-all atoning sacrifice, what is the new system of sacrifice required of His followers? You may refer to 1 Samuel 15:22–23; Psalm 40:6–8; Psalm 51:16–19; Proverbs 21:3; Jeremiah 7:21–23; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Micah 6:6–8; Matthew 9:13.

As a group, discuss this adage: *A sacrifice isn’t a sacrifice unless it’s a sacrifice.*

What daily sacrifices will you commit to practicing for the remainder of this Lenten season?





FRIDAY / MARCH 11, 2016

**John 15:1–25**

There is a screenplay I want to write. I've been mulling it for several years now, but today I believe it's more honest to say: there is a screenplay I want to have already written. I don't know how to write a screenplay, and I keep imagining it's something I'll figure out in the future—mostly because I know it will take a lot of time and effort. I want the screenplay, not the work of writing the screenplay.

Jesus says His disciples will bear much fruit, which we all want to do. We want to earn that heavenly crown and hear “well done my good and faithful servant,” at the end of life. We want the fruit that comes from being a follower of Jesus, but often we're unwilling to do the work it actually requires. Like me and my screenplay, we want the rewards without the sacrifices.

Your prayerful reflection:











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# Empowering

Followers of Jesus are empowered to do just that—follow Him and be His disciples. Jesus, our Teacher, prepares us for life in God’s kingdom and equips us for every good work that He calls us to do. It is only by being disciples that we become capable of making disciples.

## Discussion Questions:

Open your Bible to Matthew 7:7–27 (we started our series here). Let’s discover three (not so obvious) sources of power God has given us:

When it comes to following Jesus, the first rule of the kingdom of God is to ask. We should emphatically and repeatedly express our desires to know God better and to grow in Christ-likeness. He hears and responds generously.

Second, we are to put Jesus’ words into practice (which first requires us to learn what they are). We may do so imperfectly at first, but Jesus will meet us in our efforts. He is where His words are.

Third, we decide. We understand it will be costly and challenging and, knowing that, we harness the power of decision. We make an intentional choice to be life-long students of Jesus.

These three working together give us a solid foundation, one built on the rock—so that as we face life’s difficulties our strength and power is “structural,” a part of our being—not a remote storm shelter that we must run to in times of trouble.

What, if any, is your personal experience with the power of prayer?

If you could you receive power from the Holy Spirit to help you do one thing (especially a hard thing) in the daily practice of your faith, what would it be? Have you asked for His help in that matter?

How does decisive and intentional discipleship form a bridge between initial faith and a life of obedience and fulfillment in God’s kingdom?









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**SATURDAY / MARCH 19, 2016**

## John 12:12–36

When Jesus raised Lazarus, who had been dead four days, back to life—He created the biggest stir to-date. When Mary anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume—Jesus said it was to prepare Him for burial. Now many Passover pilgrims were openly and triumphantly welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem as the long-awaited King of Israel. This surge in Jesus' popularity frightened the religious leaders because the political unrest would put the Jews at risk with Rome. It was the anointing that moved Jesus' betrayer to action. It was the raising of Lazarus that moved the crowds to action, which in turn, moved the religious leaders to action. Jesus was hailed as King but five days hence, He would be dead—and He knew it. Jesus had to make every word count: *anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow Me. It means doing hard things, but it is the only way to gain eternal life. It is the only way to produce lasting fruit.* There is no other way.

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: Palm Sunday, which we celebrate tomorrow, commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and begins our Holy Week observances. The day is also referred to as Passion Sunday as it marks the commencement of Jesus' journey to the cross. The word "passion" comes from the later Latin word "passio" which means "suffering, enduring" and refers to Jesus' suffering leading to and including the crucifixion.







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# Transforming

Because of Jesus' resurrection, we have the capacity for true transformation. The entire Christian life is one of transformation! Followers of Jesus change and grow as we progress from one stage of our life in God to the next, until the moment we are gloriously transformed from death to life and made perfect in every way.

## Discussion Questions:

One definition of spiritual growth is, "the dynamic process whereby the Word of God is applied by the Spirit of God to the heart and mind of the child of God, so that she or he becomes more like the Son of God."

How is being content with "receiving salvation" while neglecting the work of transformation a cheapening of God's grace?

Do you view your life with God as dynamic? Why or why not?

In what ways are you more like the Son of God today than when you first believed?

Why do you think transformation is an important precursor to us permanently joining in life with God in the world to come?

Why do you think transformation of our hearts and minds is more important than transformation of our outward behaviors?

How does following Jesus, learning from Jesus, practicing what we learn, enduring in our practices, making daily sacrifices and being empowered by Jesus necessarily lead to transformation?

Under what circumstances might transformation fail to happen?

**WEDNESDAY** / MARCH 23, 2016

## John 20:1–23

Mary Magdalene was always so tender and attentive to the Lord's needs. He was gone, and now His corpse was gone too, and she couldn't do this one last thing for Him, properly anoint His body for burial. Jesus being crucified was the worst thing imaginable, and suddenly, the situation had gotten worse. I wonder if it was her loving care of Jesus that made Him choose Mary to be the first eyewitness to the most incredible, most miraculous, most blessed event in the history of the world—or was it because she was just always “there”? I imagine the twinkle in Jesus' eye as He asked her, “Who are you looking for?” Then leaning forward to bring Mary into His gaze and gently speaking her name. Then Mary crying out, and Jesus scooping her into His arms and spinning her around. Mary holding Him as though He might disappear if she let go. Mary, afraid it was a dream. I imagine Jesus laughing—as happy to see her as she to see Him. *Mary! You're squeezing so hard. You don't have to hang on to me—I'm not going to the Father yet!* And Mary got to tell the disciples “the” news. She was the first to witness Jesus' transformation from death to life, and to become transformed herself—from disillusioned, devastated and profoundly sad to overjoyed and forever changed.

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: The preaching text is Matthew 28:1–10

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**THURSDAY / MARCH 24, 2016**

## **Matthew 26:1–56**

Sometimes, most times, we don't know when transformation is happening because it happens by degrees. We are transformed by what we believe because those beliefs inform our decision making. We are transformed by our thought life—if a seed of a thought is planted and nurtured, it grows into action—for good or for ill. We are transformed by our prayers; they allow God to direct our hearts and lives. We are transformed by our experiences; growth most often comes from failures and hardships. We are transformed by the sacrifices we make and by acts of obedience, no matter how big or small. We are transformed by our habits because they have cumulative effects. Day by day we are being transformed—the question is, to what? Our ultimate transformation—our “glorification” depends largely on our daily transformation—what we call “sanctification” which is why following Jesus is such an important thing to do.

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: Today is Maundy Thursday (a.k.a. Holy Thursday). It is the first of the three days of solemn remembrance of the events leading up to and immediately following the crucifixion of Jesus. The English word “Maundy” comes from the Latin *mandatum*, which means “commandment.” On the night He was betrayed, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and then gave a new commandment to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34).

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FRIDAY / MARCH 25, 2016

## Matthew 27:27–54

One afternoon when my daughter, Sophia, was 3-years old, she sat at the kitchen table with her paper and markers. Out of the blue she asked, "Mom, what does sin look like?" "HMMMM. That's a good question," I responded, not sure what to say. "Well, I know it's black," she said without looking up. "Why do you ask?" I inquired. "I'm drawing a picture of Jesus on the cross," she answered as she continued to color. We had often talked about how Jesus, who was perfect and without sin, took all the sins of all people throughout time on Himself when He hung on the cross. A minute later she presented her picture; she had drawn a black satchel hanging by its strap, looped over the crossbeam on Jesus' left side. "I put all the sin in a bag to make it easier for Him to carry," she said. Reflecting on this story makes me wonder if Jesus reconciled our sins one-by-one or as a collective whole. It makes me wonder if I could be as thoughtful toward Jesus as Sophia had been that day, and make my sin easier for Him to carry—not by putting it in a bag, of course, but by actually sinning less.

Your prayerful reflection:

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Note: Today is Good Friday on the Christian calendar. It is the day we commemorate Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross.











R O O M

F O R

DOUBT

by Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

# Room for Doubt

In an age of CGI (computer-generated imagery) and Photoshop, almost anything can be made to look true or real, so our default response is to question everything. Throw in awareness of a few centuries of political posturing, religious propaganda and unholy wars, and it's not surprising we would doubt that truth or good or God even exist. Skepticism has been conditioned into us, so it's a struggle to wrap our minds around stories like those of people walking through a sea after an unseen force held back the waters, talking animals, or a flood covering Earth for 40 days. They're just fantastic, as are stories of medical miracles, upwards of 5,000 people being fed with only a little bread and fish, prison doors being flung open and a man raising himself from the dead after three days. These things should cause us to raise our eyebrows in question.

"Unfortunately, in many religious circles, there exists an unwritten rule. Pretend. Act like God is in control when you don't believe He is. Give the impression everything is OK in your life when it's not. Pretend you believe when you doubt; hide your imperfections; maintain the image of a perfect marriage with healthy and well-adjusted children when your family is like any other normal dysfunctional family. And whatever you do, don't admit that you sin," observes Mike Yaconelli in *Messy Spirituality*. Phillip Yancey shares, "As a child I attended a church that had little room for inquisitiveness. If you doubted or questioned, you sinned. I learned to conform, as you must in a church like that. The danger of a church like that—and there are many—is that by saying, 'Don't doubt, just believe,' you don't really resolve the doubts."

## Doubting Well

Asbury is not a church "like that."

First, as Yancey points out, we would be hard-pressed to find "a single argument against God in the older agnostics (Bertrand Russell, Voltaire, David Hume) or the newer ones (Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris) that is not already included in books like *Psalms*, *Job*, *Habakkuk* and *Lamentations*. I have respect for a God who not only gives us the freedom to reject him, but also includes the arguments we can use in the Bible. God seems rather doubt-tolerant, actually." God encourages questions.

Second, we want to empower you to doubt well. By that we mean that your doubts would serve you, motivate you and lead you toward truth and understanding rather than lead the opposite direction. Doubt isn't a sign of spiritual or mental weakness, it's a sign of spiritual integrity and depth. Worshipping, witnessing or serving in the midst of doubt doesn't make you a hypocrite, it makes you faithful. We don't want you to fear your doubts but to use them. Invest energy in them, being just as eager to prove as to disprove, just as open to mystery as to mastery of the details, just as willing to believe as to not believe.

Third, in order to receive maximum benefit from this series, we must examine our own ways of thinking. Do we focus on thinking or on doing? Form or on function? Do we prefer linear

conclusions based on concrete information or circular, interrelated abstract reasoning? For example, if we were to discuss the famed “burning bush” at which Moses encountered God, would you want to take it to a lab for scientific analysis? Or would you conceive of the bush as a way to get Moses’ attention and point to something beyond the bush? Throughout this series, we will be faced with controversy and mystery. If it were all black and white and certain, there would be no room for faith—and no adventure.

### **Dear Doubter**

“I would say to those who are experiencing doubt, good for you! There is a blessing coming your way. Come join us in a mysterious journey. The key is that we stay engaged and ask questions because if you refuse to address your doubts through prayer, study, worship and fellowship with believers, you’re in danger of remaining married to your doubts,” says Asbury’s Rev. Charlie Ryser.

Doubts are one of the most obvious things that people inside and outside the Church share. We all have questions that haven’t been answered yet, so regardless of where we are in terms of belief or faith, we’re all in this together.

–Rev. Gloria McGee-Denton

“A man may be haunted with doubts, and only grow thereby in faith. Doubts are the messengers of the Living One to the honest. They are the first knock at our door of things that are not yet, but have to be, understood. . . . Doubt must precede every deeper assurance; for uncertainties are what we first see when we look into a region hitherto unknown, unexplored, unannexed.”

–George MacDonald



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# Doubt and the Bible

Author Philip Yancey says, "I admit that I'm at times a reluctant Christian, plagued by doubts and still recovering from bad church encounters. I'm fully aware of all the reasons not to believe. So then, why do I believe? In my own days of skepticism, I wanted a dramatic interruption from above. I wanted proof of an unseen reality, one that could somehow be verified. However in my days of faith, such supernatural irruptions seem far less important, because I find the materialistic explanations of life inadequate to explain reality.

"I've learned to attend to fainter contacts between the seen and unseen worlds. I sense in romantic love something insufficiently explained by mere biochemical attraction. I sense in beauty and in nature marks of a genius creator for which the natural response is worship. I sense in desire, including sexual desire, marks of a holy yearning for connection. I sense in pain and suffering a terrible disruption that omnipotent love surely cannot abide forever. I sense in compassion, generosity, justice, and forgiveness a quality of grace that speaks to me of another world, especially when I visit places, like Russia, marred by their absence. I sense in Jesus a person who lived those qualities so consistently that the world couldn't tolerate him and had to silence and dispose of him. I could go on and on. In short, I believe not so much because the invisible world impinges on this one but because the visible world hints, in the ways that move me most, at a lack of completion."

As we wrestle with doubt and the Bible, and the notion that seeing is believing, allow Yancey's words above to inspire you to use the Bible as a lens through which you can see things in new ways, and consider these along the way:

Observe your use of the four Wesleyan sources of understanding: Scripture, tradition, experience, reason.

How much of what you believe has actually been seen or proven to you?

Are you attracted to the Jesus represented in these readings? Why or why not?

*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

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**WEDNESDAY / MARCH 30, 2016****John 20:24–31**

Thomas was vulnerable, honest and assertive in naming his need, reminding us to ask for help from God and from others as we wrestle with our own doubts. He didn't obstinately refuse to believe; he just wasn't able to believe yet. When Jesus appeared, He gently met Thomas *in the midst* of his doubt rather than scold or berate. Presented with the evidence, Thomas became a believer in the resurrected Jesus. Fully aware that the rest of human history would be asked to believe without the luxury of seeing, Jesus spoke a special blessing over those who are able to do just that. Verse 31 tells us the goal of this text: to present us with evidence so we, too, may believe and have greater life. Interestingly, the word translated as "doubt" in this text is related to the verb *apisteo*, suggesting someone who is "faithless" or an "unbeliever," and demonstrating that Jesus speaks to believing and unbelieving alike.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*

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 THURSDAY / MARCH 31, 2016

## Hebrews 3:7–15; 4:12–16

People take three common approaches to doubt: antagonistic refusal, disengaged blasé, genuine curiosity. What words in today's text describe Israel's response to God? What warnings and advice are offered? Notice the urgency: "today if you hear God's voice speaking to you, do not harden your hearts," "now is the time," "whatever God says to us is full of living power," "so let us come boldly." If you're anti everything that has to do with Jesus, decide now to open yourself to new possibilities. If you're spiritually lazy, invest your own energy and don't allow your church or others to do your thinking for you. Pastor Dick Read explains, "Doubt is the starting point of faith. Doubt leads to rejection when the doubter chooses not to 'put to test' his or her doubts. Many times, doubters choose to become idle in their doubting and, frankly, just lose interest. They therefore never develop faith, nor do they deliberately disbelieve. On the other hand, every person of faith began with doubt at some point."

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

FRIDAY / APRIL 1, 2016

**Acts 17:1–34**

While in Greece, Paul quoted respected poets and schools of thought when talking with a mixed crowd of Jews, God-fearing Greeks, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, using what they knew and accepted to introduce something new. With Jews, Paul referenced Scripture as proof of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus because what we know as the Old Testament was a source of authority and objective truth for the Jews. The Bereans dug into Scripture, searching for things they may have missed, and tested the new information in light of what they already held as correct. Setting the Bible aside for a moment, what do you know to be true and certain? How do you know? Now hold those truths against what the Bible says on those things. Most people find the teachings of Jesus and lifestyles of His followers to be in keeping with the values they already hold dear, which is a great starting place when addressing doubt and the Bible.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*“When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I’ll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you’ll find me.”*

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**SATURDAY** / APRIL 2, 2016

## **Matthew 16:13–17**

Thursday's reading in Hebrews urged us not to procrastinate in addressing our doubts but to allow others to serve as sounding boards, voices of experience and insight, teachers and mentors. Yesterday's reading taught us to dig into the Bible so we're really sure about what it says and to take stock of what we hold true as a foundational for greater understanding. Today's text shows us that God will work through those things, but will also speak directly to us in the form of questions, ideas, desires and inclinations, offering aha-moments and clearing the fog, planting ideas that seem small and insignificant but that can grow into major turning points in our lives. Take time to articulate your doubts and uncertainties, list the things that just don't add up and ask God (yes, even if you're not sure about Him) to help you.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*



**MONDAY / APRIL 4, 2016**

## **John 9:1-41**

Brennan Manning tells of a man who says this of Jesus, “Three years ago I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces; they dreaded the sight of me. But now I have given up drink. We are out of debt. Ours is a happy home. My children eagerly await my return home each evening. All this Christ has done for me. This much I know of Christ!” When Jesus healed a blind man, the Pharisees didn’t want the story of his healing to be true. They summoned him, interrogated his parents, questioned his character and credibility, argued with him, coerced and threatened him, yet he claimed to know only one thing: I was blind but now I see! A person’s entire world can change for the better as a result of an encounter with Jesus. When addressing doubt and the Bible, we must ask if we want it to be true or false, if we’re willing to believe. Are you blind to the blessings and good that are credited to Jesus or do you see them as evidential proof of His compassion and love?

Your prayerful reflection:

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*“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*

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**TUESDAY / APRIL 5, 2016**

## **Matthew 11:1–15**

Like anyone facing death, John questioned his life's work. He had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and joyfully exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" But what if he were a false prophet, leading people astray because he'd been mistaken? Could this imprisonment be God's punishment? John was plagued with doubt. If he were wrong, everything he'd done and said was in vain—and he was a fool. Just as He did with Thomas, Jesus answered John's question with evidence: lives saved and forever changed for the better and, remarkably, good news given to the poor. The proof wasn't just the miracles. It was also the hope and unconditional love offered to those most in need. It is one thing to doubt the details of Bible stories like Noah's ark and Jonah's survival in the belly of a big fish, but it's another to discount all the intangibles found therein. Consider which gets greater weight in your mind.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*



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# Doubt and The Resurrection

The thing the disciples least expected was for Jesus to rise from the dead—they had no context for this in their experience. He appeared to them transformed yet recognizable, almost ordinary but a little extraordinary (a physical body that could be mistaken for a gardener, but one that could appear behind closed doors). An empty tomb and eyewitness accounts confirm it was not a vision or spiritual experience or delusion—it was something new.

Why is it such a big deal? If Jesus was raised from the dead, then He really is who He claims to be and everything He said and taught becomes credible. Then our sins really do matter and we really do have hope of eternal life by believing in Him. Other worldviews will not allow for a resurrected Jesus because it interferes too much with their goals and their preferred ways of living. Denying the resurrection makes easier to indulge the self with a shrug and a “YOLO” (you only live once) because *“If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”* (1 Corinthians 15:32)

As you study this week, ask yourself these questions:

Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus? How about the future resurrection of believers?

What evidence carries weight for you?

If asked, how would you explain your position to someone who disagreed with you?

In what ways is it unfashionable to believe in right, wrong and resurrection in your sphere of influence?

Consider these thoughts by Yancey: “The great divide separating belief and unbelief reduces down to one simple question: Is the visible world around us all there is? Those unsure of the answer to that question live in the borderlands. They wonder whether faith in an unseen world is wishful thinking. Does faith delude us into seeing a world that doesn’t exist, or does it reveal the existence of a world we can’t see without it?”

*“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*







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**SATURDAY / APRIL 9, 2016**

## **Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1–31**

Saul was one of those Pharisees who hated Jesus and His followers. He heard Stephen's account of God's relationship with Israel through history and their continued unwillingness to yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit in keeping the Law and receiving the Messiah (Acts 7:1–53), then Saul approved of the horrific killing of Stephen as a means to shut him up and dissuade others from saying similar things. Saul burst through doors and dragged men and women from their homes because they believed in Jesus. Saul terrorized and brutalized—until Saul encountered the resurrected Jesus for himself. The skeptic no longer doubted but believed. The foe became a friend. The enemy became an ally. What a transformation!

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*



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**MONDAY** / APRIL 11, 2016

## 1 Corinthians 15:1–27

I sat on our porch; my wife was upstairs dying [of stomach cancer]. . . I knew if God were to come to me, I'd ask only one question, 'Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed? And I think God would reply by asking gently, 'Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?' I think He'd keep coming back to the same question until I got His point. It was a horribly emotional time for me, but I couldn't get around the fact that the resurrection is the answer for her suffering. I still worried; I still wondered what I'd do raising four kids alone. Losing my wife was the most painful experience I've ever had to face, but if the resurrection could get me through that, it could get me through anything. It was good for AD 30, it was good for 1995, and it's good beyond that. If there's a resurrection, there's a heaven. If Jesus was raised, Debbie will be raised. And I will be someday too. Then I'll see them both.

–adapted from an interview with Gary Habermas, PhD, DD, as retold by Lee Strobel in

*The Case for Easter*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

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**TUESDAY** / APRIL 12, 2016

## **Romans 6:1–11**

We're back to the same question we had at the beginning of this week: Why is the resurrection such a big deal? Jesus answered it when He told His disciples that the truth would set them free, that He was indeed the way, the truth, the life, that He is the Resurrection and the life and those who believe in Him will never really die. 2 Peter 3:9 explains, *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* If the resurrection is true, we have hope of a better life before and after death. "At the end of the day, I'm a better guy believing in Jesus. I know what I was before, and I know what I am now. If I'm wrong, I won't ever regret the life I've lived because of Jesus," says Glen Grusendorf, Director of Recovery Ministries at Asbury.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*



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# Doubt and God's Goodness

"I hear from many suffering people who ask me how God must feel about what they are enduring. I point them to Jesus. We know exactly how God feels because God gave us a face, and we can see Jesus comforting a widow who lost her only son, healing even the servant of a Roman occupying soldier, restoring health to the blind, the crippled, those with leprosy. At the same time, we get a graphic image—like an ideograph—of what kind of life we should live, a life like Jesus." Philip Yancey goes on: "If the church does its job, people don't torment themselves wondering where God is. They know the answer. God becomes visible through people who live out the mission that Paul expressed so well: 'Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.'"

"C. S. Lewis referred to the 'megaphone of pain.' By its nature, physical pain interrupts our daily routine and forces us to pay attention to an urgent demand of the body. If I have something in my eye, I simply must take care of it. Perhaps suffering does the same thing in a broader context. Take the September 11 tragedy in the United States. That event had profound effects in our nation. People flocked to church because they needed comfort, and answers. We gained a new kind of hero: firefighters and policemen who gave their lives on behalf of others. We became aware of our interdependency on the rest of the world, and were ministered to by the leaders of so many countries who offered support. That same pattern can happen in families, in groups, in churches, when suffering strikes. Like a megaphone, suffering interrupts life and turns our attention to ultimate things. Some people ignore the megaphone, and some pay attention," offers Yancey.

As you consider the relationship between doubt, suffering and God's goodness this week, remember that God can handle your questions, your sadness, your anger. They're appropriate and healthy responses to brokenness. Pay close attention to your attitudes and emotions. Follow your thoughts to see where they go and observe what unhealthy patterns might be perpetuating your doubt of God's goodness.

*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

WEDNESDAY / APRIL 13, 2016

## Mark 9:14-24

"When my eighteen-month-old daughter was diagnosed with cancer, I was unprepared for the pretending of my Christian friends... 'I'm sure God is doing this for a reason. God can heal your daughter if you just have enough faith. Even if she dies, she will be better off.' I remember answering these people, 'I hope God is not doing this. I don't believe God promises to heal my daughter.' I could not, would not pretend anymore. Was I confused about exactly where God was? Of course. Did I have serious questions about my faith? Yes. Was I desperate, depressed, angry, resentful? Yes, I was all those things. I only wish others could have given me the space to be honest and that they could have been honest too... Even today, if you were to ask me why my daughter lived, I would have only one answer: 'I don't know.' I watched a lot of children Lisa's age die during the same period that she was ill, and for the life of me, I don't know where God was. I cannot pretend the mystery of God away."

—Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality*

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*

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**THURSDAY** / APRIL 14, 2016

## John 11:17-44

A sick child. The death of a good person. A hate crime. An earthquake. They all make us recoil. Twice, accusations were hurled at Jesus by those who had put their faith in Him: if only you had been here, this wouldn't have happened! They thought He should've prevented the pain, but instead He let nature run its course. Did they believe any less than the father in yesterday's reading? Did Lazarus himself hope for healing until the end? Are our relationships with the Lord tied to answered prayers? It's natural to ask where Jesus is in the midst of pain, and we have that answer in today's text. Jesus saw people mourning, and He mourned with them. He saw them weeping, and He wept with them—and for them. We see God Himself moved with empathy and compassion, present in a time of need, giving life in place of death not only to Lazarus but to all those who had come to offer comfort and walked away with faith.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

**FRIDAY** / APRIL 15, 2016**Job 1:1-22**

Job is one of those texts that doesn't answer the "why" question or offer much on how God redeems suffering. In fact, while it makes God look powerful, it doesn't make Him look good. That is hard to wrap our minds around and challenges us to consider our responses to our own trials or those of others. "If we didn't deal very well with Job, we probably won't deal well with Jesus Christ. The mystery of why there are thorns on the rose eventually becomes a question of who God is. We can glibly say that God is good, God is merciful, kind and faithful. But a great many people on earth say, 'I don't have any evidence for that. Maybe you do, but I don't.'...And even in America, for all our wealth, there are myriad individual lives of suffering and poverty. Were we honest, maybe many of us would admit we do not have a lot of conviction about God's goodness either...in brutally honest moments they're not sure they believe or feel it. They may want to. That's a beginning, a work of grace, and one should not dismiss it," (Richard Rohr, *Job and the Mystery of Suffering*).

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*

**SATURDAY / APRIL 16, 2016**

## 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10

Remember Paul the doubter and enemy of Jesus? Of the three types of suffering (natural/physical, moral/criminal, penal/consequential), Paul experienced them all. Paul examined his suffering and concluded that it had value and purpose. First, it set him apart from false teachers who would never endure such hardship for a message they didn't really believe. Second, it demonstrated his faith, grew his character and prepared him for greater challenges. He sought relief, but instead received a tremendous ability to empathize with sufferers and victims, deep humility and greater grace. Just as with so many prophets and with Jesus before him, the evil deeds that were intended for harm, God in His infinite wisdom and love, used for good. Some would define a blessing as something good. Paul would define a blessing as anything that draws us closer to God.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

SUNDAY / APRIL 17, 2016

**Mark 9:14-24**

Sermon Notes:

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*“When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I’ll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you’ll find me.”*

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**MONDAY / APRIL 18, 2016****Romans 5:3-10; 8:26-39**

When you find yourself doubting God's goodness, consider this, "Some of us actually believe that until we choose the correct way to live, we aren't choose-able, that until we clean up the mess, Jesus won't have anything to do with us. The opposite is true. *Until we admit we are a mess, Jesus won't have anything to do with us...* Jesus is attracted to the unattractive. He prefers the lost ones over the found ones, the losers over the winners, the broken instead of the whole, the messy instead of the un-messy, the crippled instead of the non-crippled," (Yaconelli). Eugene Peterson adds, "When we sin and mess up our lives, we find that God doesn't go off and leave us—he enters into our trouble and saves us." 1 John 3:8 clearly states *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work"* and Romans 5:10 points out that God acted in love, even for His enemies.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*





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# Doubt and Imperfect People

As we address our doubts in regard to religion and the Church, Christians and hypocrites, it's helpful to avoid hyperbole and sweeping generalizations and instead talk about these things at their most basic level. That means we reduce the conversation to doubt and imperfect people. Romans 3:10 points out the shared state of those who believe and those who don't, "*There is no one righteous, not even one.*" Bring many imperfect people together and the flaws are multiplied and magnified, tempting us to focus on those flaws and to pretend we don't have them ourselves. Unfortunately, imperfect people have inflicted so many wounds that the Church itself has become a stumbling block in our path to knowing God.

For example, the morally upright citizens of the day felt threatened by Jesus whereas the moral losers and social rejects were attracted to him. The Church today has exactly reversed that pattern. This bothers us on a very deep level. But—we can't have it both ways. The only way the Church is going to look clean and shiny is if those inside the church get their act together, keep their act together and keep all the not-yet-perfect people out—and many churches are still trying this. On the other hand, if the Church engages the people Jesus did, the Church becomes a bunch of moral failures and difficult people, but then continues to receive pressure to get their act together so they look like *real* or *transformed* or *mature* followers who represent Jesus well.

As you study this week, we invite you to again monitor your emotions, memories and thought patterns to see what they tell you about yourself.

*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

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**WEDNESDAY** / APRIL 20, 2016

## **Titus 3:1–11**

Paul's instructive letter to Titus reminds us there are standards of behavior and systems of accountability within healthy Christian community, but there is always a measure of grace and the memory that everyone started somewhere on their journey. In the midst of admonitions of how to do life together, Paul held up Jesus and the fact that no one is accepted or saved because of the good things they do but simply because of the loving, merciful nature of God. Inspired by the goodness of God, what is the good to which you think Christians should devote themselves? Why?

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you'll find me."*

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**THURSDAY** / APRIL 21, 2016**Matthew 14:22–33**

Yancey asks, "Why doesn't the church look more like Jesus? Why are so many people content to live just like everyone else except that on Sunday they put on uncomfortable clothes and sit in an uncomfortable seat for an hour?" Because doing what Jesus did, loving like Jesus did, walking like Jesus did is just plain hard. As a fisherman, Peter knew how to read the winds and navigate the waves, and he respected the danger of the sea. Nevertheless, emboldened by his faith, he climbed from safety to try something new, made some progress and moved closer to Jesus. The impossibility of what he was doing and the possibility of failure crashed into his consciousness, and he began to sink. Was this success or failure? Christians start and stop, slide forward and backward, sidestep one barrier just to slam into another all the time. Only people who don't get it think the Christian life is boring.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

**FRIDAY** / APRIL 22, 2016

**Romans 7:14–8:8**

Slowly read verses 18b–19. Prayerfully consider how this plays out in your own life, listing the good that goes undone and the evil that gets done. Would you rather be held accountable for your actions or your intentions? In what ways can you apply that measure to others? Paul was truly contrite and repentant, not just for his failures but for his inability to exert control in his own life. His struggle clearly proves that even though the sin nature remains for believers, continual submission and turning to the Lord frees them from being enslaved to the inclinations of the sin nature.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen.  
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**SATURDAY / APRIL 23, 2016**

## **Luke 5:27–32; 19:1–10**

At 3:30 in the morning, the door of the diner suddenly swung open and, to my discomfort, in marched eight or nine provocative and boisterous prostitutes. Their talk was loud and crude. I overheard the woman beside me say, “Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’m going to be 39.” Her “friend” responded in a nasty tone, “So what do you want from me? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing ‘Happy Birthday?’” “Come on,” said the first woman. “Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that’s all...I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?” [We threw her a surprise party the next night in that diner.] As we came to the end of our singing with “happy birthday, dear Agnes, happy birthday to you,” her eyes moistened. Then, when the birthday cake with all the candles on it was carried out, she lost it and just openly cried...Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, “What do you say we pray?” I prayed for Agnes, for her salvation, that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her. When I finished, Harry leaned over the counter and with a trace of hostility in his voice, he said, “Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?” I answered, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.” Harry waited a moment and then almost sneered as he answered, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was, I’d join it. I’d join a church like that!”

—adapted from Dr. Tony Campolo, *The Kingdom of God is a Party*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*





**TUESDAY** / APRIL 26, 2016

# Matthew 23:1–39

These are the most impassioned statements Jesus makes—followed by Him weeping over Jerusalem—showing that He spoke from a place of deep and genuine love for the very men He criticized. Somewhere, a lot went wrong. The Pharisees were expert lay leaders who interpreted and adhered rigorously to the Law, good guys who fasted and tithed. They should have been humble, compassionate and loving like Jesus, but they were the opposite. They were hypocritical and indifferent to the burdens they placed on others. Through their proud and self-righteous teaching, the Pharisees made it impossible for those they taught actually to learn the Bible’s truths and come to God. They didn’t know the heart of God, nor did they allow Him to access or change theirs. When people outside the Church doubt those inside the Church, these attitudes and behaviors are often to blame.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*“When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I’ll listen.  
When you come looking for me, you’ll find me.”*









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