

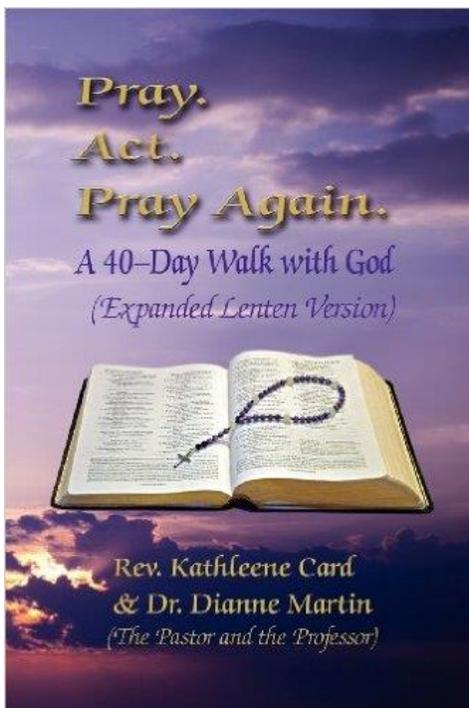
Pray. Act. Pray Again: A 40-Day Walk with God

(This year our class will be on Zoom on Thursdays at 10 am—let me know if you want to join.)

2021 Proposal: The Annual On-Line Lenten Study based on this book:

This year Lent begins on February 17, 2021. Our Lenten Study is designed intentionally to help readers and journal writers to go deeper in their Lenten participation each year by learning from past inspirations and the shared responses of others.

Introduction: For the next 40 days of Lent, can we explore what it would mean if we truly decided to obey the Great Commandment to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?



Our Foundational Scriptures are Joel 2: 13, Deuteronomy 6.5 and Matthew 22.37-40.

Joel calls us to “Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.” (NRSV)

This traditional Ash Wednesday Scripture reminds us that God’s character is *merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relents from punishing.* This is a good place for us to start a Lenten journey.

We also might want to ask, what does God expect from us? If we consider God’s command in Deuteronomy 6.5 to “love the LORD our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might,” we can see specifically how God wants us to respond.

Finally, Matthew describes what *loving the LORD our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our*

might look like: when he says, we must “love our neighbor as we love ourselves.”

* Based on the actions encouraged (or more correctly commanded) by these Scriptures, it makes sense to embrace using the *Daily Examen* where we reflect prayerful on the events of the day in order to detect God’s presence and discern God’s direction for us. Through times of quiet reflection, meditation, prayer and journaling we are invited to examine our day-to-day actions. The question we might consider to underscore this is, “Can I bring to my community, my family, my relationships, and my affiliations a person who is *merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and relents from punishing?*”

* Our book has designed prayers from the Scriptures as if they are personal conversations with God. We encourage the reader to write his or her own prayers, too. God wants to hear from you!

Levels of Participation

Level 1: This is the easiest level. You can work at your own pace with the 7-WEEK HANDOUT. If you include the book *PRAY. ACT. PRAY AGAIN*, you may want to read some of the additional daily prayers. This Level is a personal experience—especially if this is the first time you have tried praying intentionally. Responses are not expected but are always welcomed. Prayer should never be a burden. I have enjoyed praying and listening for God’s responses most of my life.

Level 2: In this level, I encourage you to read daily the scriptures from our book, *PRAY. ACT. PRAY AGAIN*, and/or the daily insights I will send beginning on Ash Wednesday for the next forty days. Sending feedback from what you are learning and experiencing *is not necessary, but welcomed*. I want to stress that working at your level of comfort is important. Think of this as the time you spend with God, a very dear friend, who knows you and loves you and looks forward to your visits.

Level 3: This advanced level involves focusing on reading the scripture to help discern *what kind of actions God might be suggesting for you*. (If you want to work at this level, decide how frequently you want to communicate with me, and we can work on how we will communicate.)

Level 4: This Level is new this year. For quite some time, I have been keeping a daily prayer journal. I created my own process based on a model I found in the late 1980s. I have tweaked that form; made it my own; and suggest, if you participate at this level, that you work on *establishing your personal style of recording prayers*.

The acronym I use is the following.

First I ask, “What is my **PART** today?”

So before I even get out of bed, I try to remember to ask myself four questions:

What can I **PRAISE** about God today?

What do I need to **ADMIT** needs work in me this day?

What do I want to **REQUEST** God to help me with today?

For what do I want to give **THANKS**?

Here’s an example of how I might answer these questions:

I **PRAISE** God for the beauty of creation I see out my window everyday.

I **ADMITTED** my need to stop procrastinating and write this study.

I **REQUESTED** inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

I **THANKED** God for the joy I feel when I think of my six grandchildren.

This Study Has Four Goals.

Goal 1: To provide a vehicle for personal reflection during Lent that will help to deepen individual relationships with God within a Beloved Community. I will provide information through emails, social media, and /or my web page.

Goal 2: To invite people to use multiple methods of communication: the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogging, email, (possible conference calls if I can figure out how to do that) and other methods.

Goal 3: To encourage people to record what they are learning systematically so they can see their own personal growth. If you participated last year in this study, you have a head start. Look at what you wrote last year, and see what new insights you may be discovering.

Goal 4: To form a Beloved Community. This is the groundbreaking part. How could we join together to encourage establishing a community that commits to being, *“gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.”* You see I feel strongly God does not want us to hate or to be taught to hate. If God wants us to love even those we find unlovable, how can we pray and act in a way that is *gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing?* John 14.15-16 explains that God will send an Advocate to help us. John says: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”* At this Level, I want us to seek the will of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within a “Beloved Community.” God’s love never fails. Jesus’ life shows us how to live. When we pray, act and keep praying to discern what God’s love is calling us to do, The Holy Spirit inspires us as individuals and as communities. If we honor God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength **together**, there is no limit to what we might be empowered to do.

If you want to participate at Levels 2-4, I ask you to write an introductory statement (it can be one sentence) about yourself that I can share. I will set up a private page for those on Facebook. Our website is prayactprayagain.org. I am 70 years old—so using the social media tools is a learning experience for me. As we break new ground together, I hope we can discover new ways to shine God’s eternal image into the world using 21st Century tools.

Remember: our guidelines are suggestions. Take what feeds your soul. Let me know if there is a way you see that might improve how people can participate. Thank you so much. Thank you for even considering joining this journey. Be blessed, and know you are perfectly made in God’s image.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God (These words have been chosen from the suggested Scriptures to help us focus on how God is personally involved in every life.)

Week 1: The Agony in the Garden

- Day 1. Known (Ash Wednesday)
- Day 2. Released
- Day 3. Provision
- Day 4. Rescued
- 1st Sunday**

Garden accounts in the 4 Gospels: "...the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak..."

- Matthew 26:36-56
- Mark 14: 32-50
- Luke 22: 39-53
- John 18: 1-12

Focus Verse: Day 1 – Known by God *(Adapted from Psalm 139 (A Psalm of David)). Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You understand my thoughts from afar. You scrutinize my path and are intimately acquainted with all of my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, Oh Lord, you know it all! Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? You formed my inward parts and created me in my mother's womb. I give thanks to you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. In your book were written ahead of time all the days ordained for me, even before one of them passed. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in your everlasting way. Amen*

Because the divine became fully human, we know that He fully comprehends all aspects of our human frailties, especially our propensity to sin. There is nothing that we can hide from Him, and yet He loves us anyway.

Study Questions:

1. Reflect on what it means to be truly known by God to the core of your being. Does this knowledge influence your attitude as you approach Him in prayer?
2. What do the prayers for this week tell you about the nature of man? What do they tell you about the nature of God?
3. What is your personal response to being known, released, chosen and rescued by God?

Day 1 Focus: Known. God knows you and loves you. Who in your life is a person who knows and loves you and is always glad to see you or hear your voice?

Level 1: Choose a time during the week when you will stop and allow God's love to touch you. What will work for your schedule? Do you have time in the morning? Is there a break in the day that would work? My experience is that I need to be intentional in scheduling things that are important. You can read, pray, and/or reflect. If you want to share anything you are learning about yourself or your relationship with God, send me an email. You can use our book as a prompt, or any other devotional or Bible. Breathe deeply and know you are loved.

Level 2: Begin reading the daily messages in the handout or in the book, *Pray. Act. Pray Again.* Choose a time during the day that you will try to use as your appointment with God. My experience is that when I clear away the noise of the world and settle into a time of prayer and meditation, God can get my attention. All last night I kept waking up and thinking about how we might bring God's love into the world. Then I felt a gentle nudge—knowing our word for today is “Known” and how God knows us and loves us and what that means.

Level 3: After you have observed Level 1 & 2 it is now time to think about what it is that you are being called to do. The message I heard last night in preparing for this journey was that I am to love others as God loves me. Before I can do that I have to know God loves me. God's love is not pendant upon what I do or if I do something well. God just loves me. And God wants me to love the other in that same way.

Level 4: So today I Praise God for caring deeply for all of God's creation. I admit I need support to love the way God loves. I ask for the Holy Spirit to inspire and instruct me. Then I thank God for the privilege of being a part of a community that will reflect God's love into the world.

Day 2 Focus: Release Your Inner Power (Consider setting a timer, to make it easier.)

Level 1: (5 minutes) **Breathe** deeply and inhale God’s love. Sit quietly dwelling on the breath, length, height and depth of God’s love. Throughout the day, pause and thank God for your lungs.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1, then after **Reading** the daily scripture take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest: **“Adapted from Ephesians 3:14-21.** *For this reason I bow on my knees before You Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth derives its name, that You will grant to me according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in my inner self; so that Your Son Christ may dwell in my heart through faith, and being rooted and grounded in love, I may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Your love, which surpasses mere knowledge, that I may be filled up with all Your fullness. Now by You who are able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than I ask or imagine, according to the power that works within me, to You be the glory in the church and in Your Son Jesus Christ to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **Write** down what you discern that God is calling you to do. Personally, I cannot stop thinking about the horror of the shooting in a school in Florida yesterday. I think, what does it mean to “Pray. Act. Pray Again.”? My focus is landing on the word “Act.” While I know the power of prayer helps us more than we can imagine—it is also how we “act” after we pray that shines God’s Light into the world. I know we need to “act” to protect the innocent. These are the words that touched my heart after reading this Scripture: “*You (God) who are able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than I ask or imagine, according to the power that works within me.*” I know God is working within me, and I want to discern how God will empower me to help others.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) At level 4 we seek to become a **Beloved Community**. We take seriously our responsibility to discern how God wants us to act. The summary in N. Graham Standish’s Book *Becoming a Blessed Church* on pages 232-233 describes **Four Principles of Discernment** for groups seeking God’s will:

1. We need to be **grounded in Scripture**. This requires us to engage in the reading of Scripture, participating in Bible Studies, regular devotional reading and listening to sermons. Many churches now have online services—which I find really helpful in rural NH. Whatever your faith tradition, it is a good idea to find a weekly service of worship or devotional practice (where you go physically or you observe online.) Churches, Synagogues, Mosques, Support Group meetings—be creative.¹
2. We need to **listen for God’s voice**. God will give us messages in many ways—through special events, poetry, bumper stickers—the list is long. However, not all messages are from God. Standish advises being “discriminating and somewhat

¹ I am an Ordained United Methodist Pastor, however, I feel God speaks to everyone, and so I work diligently to include everyone. While I understand God through an Orthodox and Trinitarian Christian Tradition, I respect that God’s image is implanted in everyone.

skeptical. The true voice of God will resonate with you.” This is where a Beloved Community can be helpful. Trusted holy friends are priceless.

3. We need to **clarify what we hear**. This is crucial, and we need to be careful. False preachers, teachers, and prophets are “deceived by their own pride.” If God is talking to you, God is also talking to others, too. God will not pit us against each other. Standish asserts that if something is coming from God, “it will be affirmed by others who are seeking to determine God’s will.” This is what has inspired me to create Level 4 so that we can come together as a Beloved Community seeking God’s will.
4. We need to **follow God in faith**. This is the most difficult and yet most important step in forming a Beloved Community. All the human peccadilloes—doubts, reluctance, and/or trepidations will haunt us. But if it is God calling us to do something, “the impossible will become possible.” God will find a way if God wants something to happen. So I thank you for joining this online Beloved Community as we seek to follow God’s call to action.

Day 3 Focus: The Disciple's Prayer (Provision)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) Sit quietly in a different spot today. Be conscious of your **breath**. In the Lord's Prayer, we ask for "our daily bread." Pause occasionally today to thank God for all the ways God supports us. Consider what it means to know we are enough and we have enough.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1, then after **Reading** this daily scripture adaptation take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest: ***Adapted from Matthew 6:9-13. My Father in heaven, holy is Your Name. I am so grateful that Your kingdom has come through Your Son Jesus and that Your will is being done here on earth as in heaven. Provide for me the exact measure I need today to be able to carry out Your will – my measure of food, shelter, finances, patience, faith, kindness, wisdom, peace of mind, discernment, strength, healing, truth, and love. I thank You that You have forgiven all of my sins and ask that You will give me the empathy and love to forgive anyone who sins against me today. I claim Your protection from the temptations and schemes of the evil one. I acknowledge with deep reverence Your kingdom and power and glory forever. I boldly pray this prayer in the Name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen***

A wise mentor once asked me if I knew I was enough. It really bothered me for days. What was she trying to tell me? I was working so hard to do my best. Then I realized she was telling me I did not have to improve—she wanted me to see my own worth. I want to share with you what she shared with me—namely that you are precious to God just as you are. We do **not** earn God's love.

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **Write** down what you discern that ***God is calling you*** to do.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) At level 4 we are seeking to become a **Beloved Community**. We take seriously our responsibility to discern how God wants us to act. When I was growing up, during Lent we were expected and/or encouraged to "give up something." The practice of fasting is useful and can help us to establish discipline. If you have decided to fast during Lent, I would love to hear what you are doing and what you are learning from that discipline. If you want to learn more about fasting, I recommend the chapter in Richard Foster's book on fasting, *Celebration of Discipline*. He describes how spiritual fasting is not about gaining political power or attracting attention to a good cause (p. 48-49). He stresses that fasting can help us to see "[h]ow easily we begin to allow nonessentials to take precedence in our lives. How quickly we crave things we do not need once we are enslaved by them." (p. 56) What stood out to me this morning from this prayer is how it addresses everything that is essential. It focuses on needs, not wants.

We are just beginning this journey together. My plan is to begin introducing each person in this group next week. I want to share your insights and seek to find what God is placing on our hearts that might move us to action. Please take time in the next week to send me an introductory description of yourself that I can share as we form a Beloved Community that seeks to reflect God's love on earth as in heaven.

Day 4 Focus: Rescued

Level 1: (5 Minutes) On this forth day when you take your seat notice if your **breathing** slows down. Your body may be remembering that this is a time to relax and reflect. Think about how God—knows, releases, provides for, and rescues us. Take time to remember when you have been helped unexpectedly. Be thankful.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1, then after **Reading** this daily scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Psalms 5, 6, 13. *Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my groaning. Be gracious to me, Oh Lord, for I am pining away; heal me, O Lord, for my soul is greatly dismayed. I am weary with my sighing; every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears, my eye has wasted away with grief. How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long will I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will the enemy exalt over me? Please consider and answer me, O Lord, my God. Return, O Lord, rescue my soul and save me because of Your loving kindness. I trust in Your loving kindness. In the morning I will pray to You and eagerly watch. In the morning You will hear my voice. My heart rejoices in Your salvation. I sing to You Lord, because You always deal with me bountifully. Amen.*

The phrase that speaks to to me today is, “**my soul is greatly dismayed.**” Every time I see the survivors of the violence in Florida, I weep. I want to join hands with every adult I know and create a circle of protection around every child and teacher on this earth. My prayers are anointed with tears and my hands and feet want to rush into action. I hear the pain, the layers of distrust, the consequences of neglect, the long-term lingering damage to survivors, and the misplaced anger that will be awakened all over the world. I believe that God weeps with all of us, and I trust that “*The Lord, will rescue our souls and save us.*” I have seen God’s *loving kindness* heal. I trust that God will reveal to us what we need to do. My prayer is that the voice of God in our hearts is strong enough to break through the noise of the crowd that would rather blame and shame than walk the walk of creating a Beloved Community that is a safe place for world-weary warriors “to beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” A Beloved Community where we have decided we shall not lift up sword or utter a violent word—where we will not teach people how to go to war any more. Where peace beyond understanding is strengthened by a love so strong it rescues, rather than eliminates, and it heals rather than hurts.

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **Write** down what you discern that God is calling you to do.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) As we form a **Beloved Community**, we will affirm that God knows, releases, provides for, and rescues us. This is not a God that leaves us on our own. How do you think we can decide we shall not lift up sword or utter a violent word? How can we show that embracing God’s commandment to love will make us stronger than waging war?

If you have the time and the inclination I invite you to email a little description about yourself, and/or reflections on what you are learning to share with the group. I will explore

the possibility of a conference call for those who would like to participate. Ideas and suggestions and critiques are welcomed. God bless you on this Holy Lenten Journey.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God**Week 2: The Scourging at the Pillar**

The scourging at the pillar is a mournful event that serves as a reminder of the horrors Jesus suffered for love of you. Jesus is taken before the High Priest, accused, beaten, and insulted. Then He is taken by the Jewish leaders to Pilate, because only he can impose the death penalty. Even though Pilate can "find no cause in Him", yet to appease the Jews, he orders Jesus to be scourged. Jesus as the Lamb of God offers His suffering for the sins of all humanity. The prophesy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins."

Scourging: Scourging used a whip with 7 leather strips. To make the suffering greater and the damage more serious, two small lead balls were sharpened and tied to the ends of each leather strip so that they would cut deeply into the flesh. There was a team of 6 executioners. One executioner stood on either side of Him so that Jesus; entire body, front and back from His neck to His feet, was covered with lashes. The two executioners alternately swung their whips with the force of their entire bodies. When they tired, a second and then a third team took control of this barbarous torture. The Jews were required to limit the scourging to 40 lashes, and in order to be strictly correct they limited the scourging to 39 lashes. But the Roman soldiers were in control of Jesus and they had no interest in being strictly correct. Scourging had the potential to kill the victim, because of the violence that was inflicted. The art of the torture was to bring someone close to the point of death, without having Him expire.

Through the prayers this week, consider how much God loves us—and what our response to this love might be.

- **Day 5, Monday:** *We are Reconciled.*
- **Day 6, Tuesday:** *We are Forgiven.*
- **Day 7, Wednesday:** *We are Joyful.*
- **Day 8, Thursday:** *We Praise Our Great God.*
- **Day 9, Friday:** *We Step Out in Boldness.*
- **Day 10, Saturday:** *We Commit to Follow God's Plan.*
- **2nd Sunday in Lent**

Focus Verse: Day 10 – Follow God's Plan (*Adapted from Proverbs 16: 1-4,7, 9*) *My Lord, I acknowledge that so many of the plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue comes from You. All my ways seem clean in my own sight, but You weigh my motives. I hereby commit my work to You Lord and trust that my plans will be established according to Your will. You have made everything for its own purpose...When my ways are pleasing to You Lord, You will make even my enemies at peace with me...as I plan my day, I know that You will direct my steps. In the holy name of Jesus I pray, Amen.*

In keeping with the introspective focus of Lent, this week we look to Proverbs to reflect upon our own inner motives and hidden agendas that contrast so sharply with the purity and innocence of Jesus as He was accused, beaten and insulted for our sake.

Day 5 Focus: To be Reconciled by working through God's Power and not my own.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) Yes, before praying we pause to notice how we are **breathing**. In a world that has a very short attention span, pausing sometimes needs to be relearned. So as we pause for 5 minutes, can we ask God to place on our hearts any area of reconciliation that we need to address, and then can we ask God how to approach this?

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1, then after **Reading** this daily scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Colossians 1:9-29. *For this reason I pray all the time for both of us to ask that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may walk together in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please God in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing our knowledge of God; strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might to attain steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Although we were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, Christ has now reconciled us through Christ's death in order to present us before God as holy, blameless, without reproach, and complete in Christ. For this purpose we labor, striving according to God's power, which works in a mighty way within us. Amen.*

Today when I read, "*For this purpose we labor, striving according to God's power, which works in a mighty way within us,*" I need to be reminded constantly that God does work in us, and while "free will" allows me to venture out on my own, I can freely choose to stay close to God.

Level 3: (15 minutes) In the weekly study guide, (which is located in our book, if you do not have the book, and would like a study guide let me know) the weekly focus is on how Jesus was beaten before he was crucified. This is an extremely difficult focus for me. I think causing pain to another person is one of the most horrific acts we do as human beings. One of the themes of atonement is that Jesus wanted to take the pain that we inflict on others into his own self rather than blame or shame. Jesus wants us to be reconciled with God AND WITH EACH OTHER. After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what it means to know *God loves us that much.*

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) I think it is worth repeating that a **Beloved Community** will affirm that God invites us to practice reconciliation. God showed us through the life of Jesus that weapons of death and violent words are not God's way. Where in your life or in this world do you see anyone absorbing pain in order to allow someone else to be reconciled and free of shame? Is this a quality you value? Why or why not?

I am still asking for a little description about you, and/or reflections on what you are learning to share with the group. I will post some of the comments later today. Still exploring the possibility of a conference call for those who would like to participate. Ideas and suggestions and critiques are welcomed. God bless you on this Holy Lenten Journey.

Day 6 Focus: To Know I am Forgiven Allows Me to Forgive

Level 1: (5 Minutes) By now, if you have been stopping to notice your **breathing** each morning, you may be noticing it at other times during the day. Good deep breathing can help us physically, spiritually and mentally. Forgiveness is one of the more difficult things for us to do. However, the act of forgiving ourselves can be the most difficult. There is much literature on this topic—but the most convincing argument to me about needing to forgive ourselves is that we will only forgive others when we learn to forgive ourselves. There are no perfect people. Sit quietly and know you are forgiven. Breathe in God’s grace; let that grace purify your being.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Psalm 25. *To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You I trust. Make me know Your ways, O Lord. For You I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, Your compassion and Your loving kindness, for they are everlasting. Please do not remember the sins of my youth or my present transgressions. According to Your loving kindness, instead remember me as Your child. Give me the compassion to forgive others as You have forgiven me. For Your goodness sake, Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down how you feel about the act of forgiving.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) At seventy the statement, “*Please do not remember the sins of my youth or my present transgressions,*” makes me smile. However the follow up statement, “*instead remember me as Your child,*” surprises me. Children are usually assumed to be innocent. I remember being taught that there was an age of reason—and that before that age we were unable to know right and wrong. The metaphor of Adam and Eve in the garden has always intrigued me. I read it differently from most interpretations. For me—when God tells Adam and Eve not to “eat from the Tree of Good and Evil,” I have always wondered if what God means is that we are not capable of understanding evil and therefore we will always be captured by it and unable to grasp it or control it but still be attracted to it. So asking to be remembered as a child is like asking for our innocence back. When I think of my own mistakes—of words I wish I had not said, or things I wish I had not done—I see that the process of maturing will always involve mistakes and risks—but all of this is necessary for growth. So accepting that I will try and fail as many times as I will try and succeed is to be fully human. The need to forgive is NOT something we do once. The need to forgive is more like breathing; we will always need to do this and we probably will need to practice deep forgiveness often until it is a reflex response.

Day 7 Focus: To Know I am Reconciled and Forgiven, is to be Joyful

Level 1: (5 Minutes) What brings you joy? As you sit down today, **breathing** deeply and letting the fact that God wants us to know reconciliation (being in a right relationship with God and others) and forgiveness—take the time to remember what brings you joy. Joy is a kind of “delight” that brings a sense of wellbeing. Who in you life do you call a joyful friend?

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Colossians 3:12-17. *And so, as one who has been chosen by You Lord, help me to be holy and beloved. I ask for a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Help me to bear and forgive others, just as You have forgiven me, Lord. And beyond all these things, I ask to be clothed in love, the perfect bond of unity. I ask for Your peace to rule in my heart, for this is the reason I was called to be part of the church. May I be thankful in all things. Let Your word richly dwell within me with all wisdom, so that I may be filled with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and singing with thankfulness in my heart. Whatever I do, let it all be in Your name, Lord Jesus, I will give thanks through You to God the Father. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down all the joy-filled people you know.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) When I read this request: “*I ask for a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience,*” I remember why I love the season of Lent and why I look forward to this time every year. For me the Lenten season makes me take a yearly inventory. I ask myself—how much joy have I tried to spread? When have I shown, “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience?*” I think it is wise to **ask myself these positive questions first**. It helps me to remember my context at the time. Then I can examine “*when have I been cold, cruel, arrogant, harsh and/or impatient.*” It is important for us to see that we have a full range of emotions. Then we can readjust how we respond rather than be held hostage to old reactions that produce behaviors that do not bring joy to anyone.

Day 8 Focus: God's gift of Love is exceedingly great.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you sit quietly today, let images of people you love come to mind. Think about the ways in which you let them know you love them, and the ways in which they love you. Contemplate how much God loves you and your loved one. What does it mean to know you are loved completely by God and by others?

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Psalm 145. *I extol You, my God and King. I bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I bless You and praise Your name forever and ever. Great are You, Lord, and highly to be praised. Your greatness is unsearchable...and I tell of Your greatness. You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in loving kindness. You are good to all, and Your mercies are over all Your works. All Your works shall give thanks to You, Oh Lord...You sustain all who fall and raise up all who are bowed down. All eyes look to You...You are righteous in all Your ways and kind in all Your deeds. You are near to those who call upon You in truth. You fulfill the desire of those who revere You; You hear my cry and will save me. I know You keep me among those who love You...my mouth will speak praise to You to bless Your holy name forever and ever. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what you feel God is calling you to do.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) My sister told me a wonderful story about her granddaughter. It seems that the family was growing quickly and as the grandchildren increased the granddaughter was concerned that her Grandmother was going to get worn out loving them all. The beauty in the story to me was not that the granddaughter was worried about her portion of love—it is rather that the granddaughter was worried her Grandmother might be burdened by having so many grandchildren to love. The wonderful thing about love is that it is not a burden. We each have an unlimited capacity to love. However, to appreciate this we will need to know that we are “lovable.” Rev. Peter Gomes said he always preached the same sermon—his theme was “Jesus Loves Me!” So will we celebrate first that God loves us, and second that we can choose to love if we accept God’s unlimited grace? Do we understand that real love is not a burden? Will we choose to love?

Day 9 Focus: God's Promises and God's Light help us to be bold.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you pause to **breathe** deeply today consider what you are learning during this Lenten Season. When we pray and take the time to rest for even five minutes to contemplate, our actions can be more focused and thoughtful and eventually even bolder. Thinking things through promotes mature responses. Sharing ideas in a Beloved and Safe Community helps us to clarify and strengthen our resolve. When two or more are gathered to discern God's direction, we can experience miracles.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Psalm 18:28-50. *I praise You, Lord, because You light my lamp and illuminate my darkness. Your way is blameless and Your word is tried. When I take refuge in You, You are my shield. You gird me in strength, and keep me from sin. You make my feet like hind's feet and set me on high places. You enlarge my steps under me so my feet don't slip. You train my hands for battle. You give me the shield of Your salvation. Your right hand upholds me. Your tenderness makes me great. You gird me for battle and deliver me from contentious people. You are my rock and my salvation! I sing praises to Your name for Your deliverance and Your loving kindness forever. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** when you have felt the Holy Spirit's inspiration to be bold.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) This morning as I was walking in the bright sunlight, I was astonished at the beauty of God's masterpieces—the freshly fallen snow, the clear, brisk winter air, and the magnificent Mount Monadnock were all reminders of God's creative gifts to us. I truly believe with God's help, we can be bold and make a difference. While today's prayer is very specific about how we obtain strength when we have faith in God, the words, "*Your tenderness makes me great,*" stood out to me. The virtue of tenderness is often overlooked. However, when we stand our ground and acknowledge that we are not alone—that God is with us in all of our trials—we can embrace tenderness because succeeding does not all depend upon us alone. A huge part of achieving a worthwhile goal comes from being able to persevere in the face of opposition. Understanding that God is always with me gives me strength to be both bold AND tender. How about you? What inspires you to be both bold and tender? Have you seen boldness and tenderness work together to produce miracles?

Day 10 Focus: Commit to following God, because God is always with us.

Level 1: (5 Minutes)?

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Proverbs 16:1-4, 7, 9. *My Lord, I acknowledge that so many of the plans of my heart belong to me, but the answers should come from You. All my ways seem clean in my own sight, but You weigh my motives. I hereby commit my work to You, Lord, and trust that my plans will be established according to Your will. You make everything for its own purpose...When my ways are pleasing to You Lord, You will make even my enemies at peace with me...as I plan my day, I know that You will direct my steps. In the holy name of Jesus I pray, Amen*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what you believe God wants you to do.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes)

Second Week Saturday Summary

Through God's grace we are **Reconciled** or made right with God and each other.

Being **Reconciled** allows us to know we are **Forgiven**.

Reconciled and **Forgiven** we are **Joyful**.

Reconciled, Forgiven and **Joyful**, we know the greatness of God's **Love**.

Reconciled, Forgiven, Joyful and **Loved**, we are empowered to be **Bold**.

Reconciled, Forgiven, Joyful, Loved and **Bold**, we **Commit** to forming a **Beloved Community** by the power of God who is able to do through us exceedingly and abundantly more that we can think or imagine.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God**Week 3: The Crowning with Thorns**

Christian writers associated thorns with the Fall of Man, following God's pronouncement to Adam that "thorns also and thistles shall [the ground] bring forth to thee" (Genesis 3:18). They have also seen a shadow of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, which was averted by the appearance of a ram caught "by its horns in the thicket" (Genesis 22:13) — i.e., with thorns around its head. Like Jesus, the ram subsequently became a substitutionary sacrifice. The likeliest intent of the Roman soldiers was a cruel parody of the civic crown worn by the emperor. This crown was a military decoration presented by soldiers to those who had saved the lives of Roman citizens, and had become imperial regalia since Augustus, who in his time was hailed as "Savior of the World". The irony in this symbolism will not be lost to the Christian.

Pilate asks, "Are You a king?" Jesus answers: "I am a King, but My kingdom is not of this world." The soldiers place an old purple robe on Jesus in mockery of His claim to be a king. They fashion a crown out of thorns, and forcefully press it down upon His head. In His bound hands they place a reed, as a scepter, in mockery of His kingship. Kneeling before Him in derision, they spit on Him, and cry out: "Hail, King of the Jews!" Taking the reed from His hand they strike Him on the head, driving the thorns more deeply into His scalp. Pilate brings Jesus before the people, hoping His pitiful sight will soften them: "Behold the man!" Their response: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Jesus submitted to this terrible humiliation to make reparation for human pride.

Through the prayers this week, consider how this painful humiliation endured by Jesus shows the depth of God's mercy on us and on the whole world.

- **Day 11, Monday:** *We Share Comfort.*
- **Day 12, Tuesday:** *We Gather Wisdom.*
- **Day 13, Wednesday:** *We Take Action.*
- **Day 14, Thursday:** *We Exalt God.*
- **Day 15, Friday:** *We Seek Instruction.*
- **Day 16, Saturday:** *We Surrender Fear*
- **3rd Sunday in Lent**

Focus Verse: Day 16 – Surrender Fear (Adapted from Psalm 27)

Lord, you are my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear. You are the defense of my life, whom shall I dread? When evildoers come upon me, they stumble and fall. Though a host encamps against me, my heart will not fear. Though war arises against me, in spite of this, I shall be confident. Only one thing do I ask of you, Lord, that I shall seek and dwell in Your house all the days of my life, to experience Your peace as I meditate in Your temple. For in the day of trouble, You will conceal me in Your sanctuary and hide me in Your secret place. You will lift me up on a rock so that my head will be lifted up above my enemies. I will offer my praise with shouts of joy. I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord! Amen

As we consider the quiet courage of Christ as He submitted to the humiliation of mockery and false accusations, we focus on Psalm 27 describing David's courage as he was surrounded by enemies. In both examples their total trust in God as their rock and salvation gave them the strength to endure.

Study Questions:

1. Reflect on a time when you felt overwhelmed by a particular circumstance or surrounded by enemies. What was your reaction?
2. What do the prayers for this week tell you about the nature of man? What do they tell you about the nature of God?
3. What is your personal response to sharing comfort, gathering wisdom, and seeking instruction from God?
4. Can you identify barriers in your own life that prevent you from turning fearful situations into situations that exalt God?

Day 11 Focus: We Share Comfort.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) On my walk today my heart was deeply saddened. I had read the lesson in PRAY. ACT. PRAY AGAIN. (p. 130) about how the soldiers mocked Jesus when they crowned him with thorns, and I found myself weeping. My tears confused me, until I realized that the mocking and disbelief in God continues. As you rest for 5 minutes today think about what it would mean if we gave to God the respect God deserves. Think of the comfort we could share on earth as in heaven by respecting God and all of God's creation.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from II Corinthians 1:1-24, 13:11. *Blessed be You, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all comfort. You comfort me in all my affliction, so that I am able to comfort those in affliction with the same comfort I receive from You. For just as I sometimes share in the sufferings of Christ, so also my comfort is abundant through Christ. If I am comforted by God, it is my job to share in comforting others. My hope in You is firmly grounded, knowing that when I share with the suffering of others, we are sharers in each other's comfort...Finally, Dear Lord, help me always to rejoice in order to be made complete, be comforted, and be like-minded so that I can live in peace and be Your comfort to my Christian brothers and sisters. I claim You, the God of love and peace, in my life and walk. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what you feel God might be calling you to do.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) When I was writing this devotional today, my sister called to say she was going to visit a friend who is Jewish and was mourning the loss of a loved one. The family was observing a period called *shiva*, (SHIH-vah), and she wondered if I knew what sitting "*shiva*" required. I have a book that I recommend highly. It is edited by Arthur J. Magida and entitled, HOW TO BE A PERFECT STRANGER: A GUIDE TO ETIQUETTE ON OTHER PEOPLE'S RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES. I think every family should have one. The book describes how we can honor others who follow different faith traditions, by participating respectfully in other people's religious ceremonies. My sister and I talked about what it means to sit with someone during a mourning period. I believe strongly that we need to be fully present to each other in difficult circumstances. Her call reminded me that to *claim God's of love and peace in our lives* requires us to walk the walk. Who in your circle of influence is comforted by your presence? Who comforts you?

Day 12 Focus: We Gather Wisdom.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you stop briefly today to rest and **breathe** deeply, focus on the word **wisdom** and what images that word brings to mind.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Psalm 19:7-14. *Lord, Your law is perfect, restoring my soul. Your testimony is sure, bringing wisdom to my foolishness. Your precepts are right, causing my heart to rejoice. Your commandments are pure, bringing enlightenment to my eyes. Reverence for You endures forever; Your judgments are true, altogether righteous. I am not able to discern my own errors, so I ask You to forgive me of hidden faults and keep me from presumptuous sins. I thank You that through Jesus Christ I am acquitted of all my transgressions. I ask that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what this scripture is showing you.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) The part of our prayer today that stood out to me was, *“I am not able to discern my own errors, so I ask You to forgive me of hidden faults and keep me from presumptuous sins.”* Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone can be presumptuous. God is the only one who does not make mistakes. In a Beloved Community, the only example of perfection is God, and the only direction that is completely wise comes from God. As a truly Beloved Community that takes seriously the Great Commandment, we must speak the truth with love to each other and seek God’s wisdom that is greater than human opinions. When we can be humble enough to admit that we can be wrong and/or presumptuous, we can be open to hearing the truth from others. Humility and valuing another person enough to consider that she or he might have a part of a truth that we have missed is essential. Remembering that God will not pit us against each other will help us to see that discord as “not from God.” It will mean taking the time to unpack where the discord is clogging the peace. It is messy and requires all of the virtues—with an abundance of patience and humility—but it is worthwhile to discover how the Holy Spirit will give each of us a piece of the whole that will help us to live on earth as in heaven. (I saw *BLACK PANTHER* last night and it would be great fodder for a discussion about what a Beloved Community is meant to be.)

Day 13 Focus: With God's Wisdom, we are moved into Action.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) Each day the cue to **breathe** deeply is probably becoming a new habit. Today as you sit quietly reflect upon any actions you have felt inspired to carry out when God's wisdom touches your heart.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from I Peter 1:13-22. *Dear Lord, I pray that You will gird my mind for action, help me to keep sober in spirit, help me to fix my hope completely on the grace brought to me through the revelation of what Jesus Christ has done for me...Give me the power not to be conformed to former wrong thoughts and acts done in my ignorance, but like the Holy One who calls me, become holy in ALL of my behavior, conducting myself with reverence during my time on earth, knowing that I was redeemed at a very high cost with the precious blood of Christ...Fill me with the knowledge and assurance that I have been born again with the imperishable seed through the living and abiding Word of God to carry out Your will and actions in a hurting world. I ask for all of this in the holy name of Jesus. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what action this prayer might be prompting you to begin.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) Approaching my 71st birthday, when I hear that Peter prayed to "become holy in ALL of his behavior, conducting himself with reverence during his time on earth," I am encouraged. I remember all the times Peter got it wrong, but nevertheless persevered, and I know there is hope for me. Reverence is a word that we really need to explore in 2018. What do we revere these days? The life of The Reverend Billy Graham is being celebrated today. Not everyone agreed with him—but many people of all walks of life revered him. His career spanned a large breath of time and while many things changed during his life—one constant for him was maintaining his personal integrity and teaching that God loves everyone. Where other people of fame gave into many temptations that tarnished their work, Billy Graham embraced humility and avoided pitfalls by staying as close to God as he was before he rose to international prominence. Through friends I got to meet Reverend Graham a few years ago, and even though his presence was striking, his manner was warm and welcoming. He treated us all with reverence. He had just lost his wife, and he talked about her with a tenderness that touched our souls. I want to live out my days on this earth reverently. As I have been writing this study and reading your responses, the Holy Spirit is showing me that other people want this kind of reverence in their lives, too.

Day 14 Focus: Joy is contagious and inclusive.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, think about the people and places in your life that bring you joy.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern what word or phrase catches your interest:

Adapted from Zephaniah 3: 14-20. *I Shout for Joy. I rejoice and exalt with all of my heart. Lord, You take away Your judgments against me; You clear away my enemies. I fear disaster no more! I am not afraid because You, Lord, are in my midst like a victorious warrior. You bring exultation and joy. You are quiet in Your love. Here are Your promises, Oh Lord, which I claim today. You save the lame and gather the outcast, You turn shame into praise and renown, You bring everyone in, and You restore fortunes before our eyes. I sing praises to Your holy name. Amen*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** down what brings you joy?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) My greatest joy comes when I can participate enthusiastically in the lives of family and friends. The part of the prayer today that touches my heart is how God wants to “*bring everyone in.*” I remember as a child walking through my neighborhood praying for the people in every home. Joy, it seems to me, unites us—and celebrates each person’s success. In my video today I mention how my grandson was the ring bearer at a family wedding with me—and we both wanted to do the best job to honor the bride and groom. When you think about joy—I wonder if you, too, feel a sense of inclusive reverence. Would love to know what brings you joy!

Day 15 Focus: Jesus' Instructions bring comfort, wisdom, reverence & joy.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, focus on Jesus as a teacher who is merciful, slow to anger, abounding in love and relents from punishing.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to discern how this description of a teacher might differ from the one you had as a child.

Adapted from Psalms 25, 32, and 143. *Dearest God, Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation. Teach me the way in which I should walk, for to You I lift up my soul. Instruct me and counsel me with Your eye upon me. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God. Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground. The more I trust in You, Your loving kindness will surround me, and I will shout for joy to be among the upright of heart. Amen*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about the best teacher you ever had?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) Sometimes an improperly trained teacher can do more harm than good. This is not meant to be critical of teachers—teachers are only as good as the teachers who instruct them. However, in my research about how we learn, I was astounded by the way Dr. Amen explains how different our brains can be. One size does not fit all.

He describes a 24 year old who could never complete a class. The parents of this young man were sure he was just lazy. With proper evaluation and an established intervention plan, this same young man went on—not only to complete classes—but also to become a doctor. The rub for him was that traditional learning methods shut his brain down. His father was deeply sad when he discovered that his son had a medical problem—not a lack of motivation. (Amen, CHANGE YOUR BRAIN, p. 181) Listen again to the way the psalmist in our prayer is describing God's teaching techniques: "*Instruct me and counsel me with **Your eye upon me**. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God. Let Your good Spirit lead me on **level ground**. The more I **trust** in You, Your **loving kindness** will surround me, and I will shout for joy.*" God's **eye is upon us**, and God's Holy Spirit will lead us to **level ground**. The Scripture tells us repeatedly that when we **trust** in God, the Spirit instructs us with **loving kindness**. Which teachers were masters in your life and reflected a loving kindness that helped you to learn? How do you reflect God's loving kindness to others so that you can teach others about who God truly is?

Day 16 Summary of Week 3.

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, focus on how a Beloved Community can share **Comfort**, gather **Wisdom**, act **Reverently**, exalt God **Joyfully** and seek God's **Instruction** without any **Fear**.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to surrender any fears you may have to God:

Adapted from Psalm 27. *Lord, You are my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? You are the defense of my life, whom shall I dread? When evildoers come upon me, they stumble and fall. Though a host encamps against me, my heart does not fear. Though war arises against me, in spite of this, I am confident. Only one thing I ask of You, Lord, that I seek and dwell in Your house all the days of my life, to experience Your peace as I meditate in Your temple. For in the day of trouble, You conceal me in Your sanctuary and hide me in Your secret place. You lift me up on a rock to raise my head above my enemies. I offer my praise with shouts of joy. I sing, yes, I sing praises to the Lord! Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** whatever makes you fearful?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) Third Week Saturday Summary

Third Week Saturday Summary

A Beloved Community embraces God's Loving Kindness when

We bring **Comfort** by being fully present to each other,

Bringing **Comfort**, we share God's **Wisdom**

Sharing God's **Wisdom**, we act **Reverently**

Acting **Reverently**, we experience **Joy**

Filled with **Comfort, Wisdom, Reverence and Joy**, we **Learn** God's Ways

Comforted, Wise, Reverent, Joyful, and Informed by God's teachings,

we surrender **Fear**.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God**Week 4: Mary Endures the Unjust Accusations against Jesus**

When Jesus sees His mother, His pain is multiplied as he sees that His pain is causing untold anguish. He is disfigured with blood and sweat, with dust and spittle. It is hard to imagine the grief felt by Mary as she witnessed these terrible events.

As a contrast, consider the Song of Mary (Magnificat) when she finds she was chosen to be the mother of the Son of God:

From **Book of Common Prayer**:

**My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
 For he hath regarded : the lowliness of his handmaiden.
 For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.
 For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is his Name.
 And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.
 He hath shewed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the
 imagination of their hearts.
 He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble
 and meek.
 He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty
 away.
 He remembering his mercy hath helped his servant Israel : as he promised to
 our forefathers, Abraham and his seed forever.**

Through the prayers this week, consider what we might learn from the mother of Jesus and how she responded.

- **Day 17, Monday: We Love Fervently.**
- **Day 18, Tuesday: We Wait Patiently.**
- **Day 19, Wednesday: We Resist Evil.**
- **Day 20, Thursday: We Trust Fully.**
- **Day 21, Friday: We Abide in Faith.**
- **Day 22, Saturday: We Face Troubling Times.**
- **4th Sunday in Lent**

Focus Verse: Day 18 – Wait on the Lord (*Adapted from Psalm 27:1, Psalm 33, 20-22*) *My soul waits for You, Lord. From You I gather strength and trust. Yes, I wait for You, Lord. You are my help and my shield. My heart rejoices in You because I trust Your holy name. I ask for Your loving kindness to be upon me, Lord, as I have waited for You. Amen*

Sometimes the most difficult action is to wait. It means that we have to trust in God, to continually look to him for help and to be in a state of expectation that He will act on our

behalf. It is particularly hard to wait when we witness terrible things happening around us and wonder whether God will ever bring justice to the world.

Study Questions:

1. Have there ever been times in your life when you have seen a loved one treated unfairly. How have you responded?

2. What do the prayers for this week tell you about the nature of man? What do they tell you about the nature of God?

3. What is your personal response to waiting on the Lord, and abiding in His love? How can we exercise fervent love in the face of evil and trouble?

Week 4 of Lent**Day 17 Focus: Our Fervent Love Glorifies God**

(Monday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) Our focus for this week is on how Mary, the mother of Jesus, endures seeing her son unjustly accused and eventually executed. When you sit today to rest for five minutes, reflect on how quickly uninformed judgments and mob rule can destroy a person's reputation. Ask God to show our Beloved Community how to be patient so we do not we rush to judgment of others.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to concentrate on the part that speaks to you today.

Adapted from 1 Peter 4:7-11. *Dear Lord, I ask to be of sound judgment and sober spirit in order to keep an open link with You through prayer. Above all keep me fervent in my love for others, because Your love covers a multitude of sins. Help me to be hospitable to others without complaint. Help me to recognize and acknowledge that each one has received a special gift and help me to encourage others to employ their gift in serving one another so that all will be good stewards of Your manifold grace. I pray that when I speak, let me speak utterances pleasing to You; when I serve, let me do so by the strength that You supply, so that in all things You may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer and marking the part that speaks to you, **write** about your thoughts.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) You may have noticed that the prayers in our book are written in the first person, and our emphasis is on each person forming a personal relationship with Jesus. This year I am trying to expand the concept by opening up the relationship to include forming Beloved Communities that understand how God wants us to love and will not pit us against each other. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked frequently about forming Beloved Communities. Certainly in 2018, forming this would be a worthy goal. So when I read, *"I pray that when I speak, let me speak utterances pleasing to You; when I serve, let me do so by the strength that You supply,"* I am convicted. It is so easy to be critical of people with whom we disagree. What can we do to show God's fervent love to the world? How can we be united even if we see the world differently? How can we help people like Mary who watch their loved ones endure cruelty at the hands of ill informed and impatient people? What kind of restorative work could we do if *"when we spoke, we only uttered words that were pleasing to God; and when we served, we did so by the strength that God supplies"?*

Day 18 Focus: When we wait patiently, we are protected from rushing into calamity.

(Tuesday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, try smiling. Think of times when you were patient, and if none come to mind, think of a time when you saw someone be patient. Does a patient person help you to slow down?

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, be patient. Do not rush to discover what words from this scripture inspire you. **Adapted from Psalm 27:14, Psalm 33:20-22, Psalm 130:5- 6.** *My soul waits for You, Lord. My soul waits, and in Your word I do hope. My soul waits for You more than those who watch for the morning -- Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. From You I gather strength and trust. Yes, I wait for You, Lord. You are my help and my shield. My heart rejoices in You because I trust Your holy name. I ask for Your loving kindness to be upon me, Lord, as I wait for You. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about the word or phrase that inspired you.

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) Waiting is difficult. I read recently that one of the more irritating stress points for people happens when someone “cuts in front of a group that has been waiting patiently.” Then I remember a woman in a Bible Study I was leading. She talked about being in a check out line at the grocery store where a woman behind her was making all kinds of unkind remarks about how slow the teller was. The woman from our group turned and said, “I can see that you are really stressed, why don’t you go next in front of me.” The woman who was stressed was surprised, but she became quiet and gladly swapped places. Later a man in the same line behind our classmate asked why she let that rude woman in front of her, and she replied, “I really am not in rush, and she obviously was. She may have had a sick child or a meeting that was important. I just wanted to be kind.”

We had a robust discussion that night about “taking our turn,” but I left thinking the woman who allowed someone to go in front of her was consistently kind and did not put herself first. Her character was peaceful beyond understanding. I have a mug that a dear friend gave me with the verse from Jeremiah 29.11, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” It is my “go to” cup in the morning. The words that inspired me from this scripture today are: *“I wait for You, Lord. You are my help and my shield. My heart rejoices in You because I trust Your holy name.* What actions can we practice as a Beloved Community to show we do trust in God and in God’s timing? When has waiting made a difference in your life?

Day 19 Focus: God's eternal grace gives us the strength to resist evil.

(Wednesday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, let God's grace permeate your entire body.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to consider how God's Grace will strengthen us as individuals and as a Beloved Community.

Adapted from I Peter 5:6-10. *Help me, Lord, to humble myself under Your mighty hand, that You may exalt me at the proper time. I cast all my anxiety upon You, because You care for me like no one else can. I ask to be of sober spirit on the alert. I know that my adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But with Your power I can resist him, firm in my faith, knowing that all Christians in the world are experiencing temptation and suffering. Even if I must suffer for a little while, I know that You, the God of all grace, who calls us to Your eternal glory in Christ, will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish me. I claim all of this with a joyful heart in the name of Jesus. Amen*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about what humility means to you?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes) Humility is tricky. If you win the award for being the most humble—does the award negate the action? I mean if we strive to be the most humble, isn't that a bit audacious? Humility is the ability to say—"God, I need help." Then, when help comes, I need to accept it. Have you ever been strengthened by God or by another person in such a way that you were humbled, perfected, confirmed, and strengthened beyond what you knew you were able to accomplish? Have you ever witnessed God's grace empower an entire Beloved Community?

Day 20 Focus: We can trust our hearts to God.

(Thursday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, focus on your ability to trust that God loves you—just as you are.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes to respond to this prayer personally and collectively.

Adapted from Psalm 28: 6-9. *Blessed is the Lord, because You hear the voice of my supplication. Lord, You are my strength and my shield. My heart trusts in You and I am helped. Therefore my heart exults and with my song I thank You! You are my strength and a saving defense to Your anointed. By Your grace continue to bless the people of Your inheritance and be my shepherd forever. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about when you have experienced being able to trust God and/or others?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes)

Day 21 Focus: Prevenient grace abides in us always.

(Friday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, focus.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes.

Adapted from I John 4:7-21. *Dear Father, help me to love others, for love is from You and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. If I cannot share Your love, then I do not know You, for You are pure love. I believe in faith that You sent Your only begotten Son into the world so that I might live through Him. In this is love, not that I loved You, but that You loved me first and sent Your Son to be the propitiation for my sins. I therefore confess that Jesus is Your only Son, that You abide in Him and He in You. I have come to know and believe the love, which You have for me through Jesus. Thereby give me the power to love my brother as fervently as You have loved me. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes)

Day 22 Focus: God is our strength and our shield in troubling times.

(Saturday)

Level 1: (5 Minutes) As you **breathe** deeply today, focus.

Level 2: (10 minutes) Do Level 1. After **Reading** the scripture adaptation, take 5 minutes.

Adapted from Psalm 37. *Dear Lord, give me the strength and wisdom not to fret because of evil doers, not to be envious toward wrongdoers for they wither quickly like the grass. Instead I trust in You, Lord, to do good. I delight myself in You, Lord, and You give me the desires of my heart. I commit my way to You, Lord, and trust only in You. You bring forth Your righteousness as the light and Your judgment as the noonday. I rest in You, Lord, and wait patiently for You. I will not fret because of the men who carry out evil schemes. I cease from anger and forsake wrath. Fretting leads only to evildoing. I claim the promise for myself that those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land. You, Lord, establish my steps, and I delight in Your way. If I fall, I shall not be hurled headlong because You, Lord, are the One who holds my hand. The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. You are my strength in time of trouble. It is only You, Lord, who helps me and delivers me. Amen.*

Level 3: (15 minutes) After pausing to breathe and reading the Scripture prayer, take 5 minutes to **write** about?

Level 4: (30-60 minutes)

Day 22. Strength in Time of Trouble

Adapted from Psalm 37. Dear Lord, give me the strength and wisdom not to fret because of evil doers, not to be envious toward wrongdoers for they wither quickly like the grass. Instead I trust in You, Lord, to do good. I delight myself in You, Lord, and You give me the desires of my heart. I commit my way to You, Lord, and trust only in You. You bring forth Your righteousness as the light and Your judgment as the noonday. I rest in You, Lord, and wait patiently for You. I will not fret because of the men who carry out evil schemes. I cease from anger and forsake wrath. Fretting leads only to evildoing. I claim the promise for myself that those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land. You, Lord, establish my steps, and I delight in Your way. If I fall, I shall not be hurled headlong because You, Lord, are the One who holds my hand. The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. You are my strength in time of trouble. It is only You, Lord, who helps me and delivers me. Amen.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God***Week 5: Carrying the Cross***

John 19:17: They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

Jesus is condemned to death by crucifixion and is forced to carry the cross to the place of execution. The suffering of Jesus is intense as the cross is laid on His bruised and wounded back and shoulders. Weak and exhausted from loss of blood, lack of food and rest, Jesus falls three times under the cross.

Through the prayers this week, consider what it means to “take up the cross, and follow Jesus”.

- ***Day 23, Monday: Never Separated***
- ***Day 24, Tuesday: Follow the Straight Path***
- ***Day 25, Wednesday: Bear the Other’s Burden***
- ***Day 26, Thursday: Claim Spiritual Healing***
- ***Day 27, Friday: Claim Heavenly Treasure***
- ***Day 28, Saturday: Open a Wise Heart with Sweet Words***
- ***5th Sunday in Lent***

Focus Verse: Day 23 – Never Separated *(Adapted from Romans 8:31-37)*

In the name of Jesus, I claim this mighty prayer in my own life: If God is for me, who can be against me? You who did not spare Your own son, but delivered Him up for my sin, how will You not also through Jesus freely give me all things and protect me through all circumstances? Who can bring a charge against me as one of Your elect? Only You can justify! What is able to separate me from Your love? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No! In all of these things I overwhelmingly conquer through Your love. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, or depth, nor any created thing, is able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord. Amen.

As we imagine the loneliness of Jesus struggling under the weight of the cross when He took the long walk to Calvary, we are forced to consider the cost of that walk to God. Not sparing His own Son, but delivering Him up for our sin, God endured this pain so that we would never be separated from His love. It is difficult to comprehend the extent of such love. Reading the prayer from Romans reminds us that nothing can come between us and that love.

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God**Week 6: Receiving Help from Strangers**

And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

Fearing that Jesus might die on the way, the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross behind Jesus. As we imagine Jesus, who had the power of the universe at His disposal, who could have stopped the crucifixion at any point, becoming naked, exposed, and vulnerable, having to rely on the help of an unwilling stranger, we start to understand the huge price He paid for us.

Note: The *Cyrenian Jews* had a synagogue in Jerusalem, where many went for annual feasts. Tradition states Simon's sons Rufus and Alexander became missionaries; the inclusion of their names in *Mark 15:21* may suggest that they were of some standing in the Early Christian community at Rome. It has also been suggested that the Rufus mentioned by Paul in *Romans 16:13* is the son of Simon of Cyrene. Some also link Simon himself with the "men of Cyrene" who preached the Gospel to the Greeks in *Acts 11:20*.

Through the prayers this week, consider what it means to totally humble ourselves and leave all pride at the cross of Jesus.

- **Day 29, Monday: Endure**
- **Day 30, Tuesday: Speak the Truth**
- **Day 31, Wednesday: Go toward Transformation**
- **Day 32, Thursday: One Last Cry**
- **Day 33, Friday: Claim the Love of Jesus**
- **Day 34, Saturday: The Lord Keeps His Own**
- **6th Sunday: Palm Sunday**

Focus Verse: Day 29 – Endure *(Adapted from James 1)*

Dear Lord, today I ask for endurance when my faith is tested, knowing that endurance will have its perfect result, that you may find me complete, lacking in nothing for You. If I lack wisdom, please provide me with knowledge of Your ways. If I lack in faith, remove my doubts. If I lack humility, instruct me to be humble. Bless with me with perseverance, so that I may receive Your crown of life. I know that every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father, with whom there is no variation or shadow. Help me to be quick to hear, slow to speak and even slower to anger, in all humility to receive Your word implanted in my soul. My desire is to be a doer of Your word, not merely a self-deluded hearer, so that I may receive your full blessing in my life. I ask all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

It is often difficult for us to accept help from others. In our pride we want to be the strong, independent ones who offer help to weaker ones. The focus verse from James reminds us to endure our circumstances in humility and to persevere when we are tested in order to have the perfect result in our lives intended by our loving God.

Study Questions:

1. Have there been times in your life when you had to rely on the kindness of others, even strangers? How were you able to deal with those circumstances?

2. Have there been times in your life when you felt you could only cry out to God?

3. What do the prayers for this week tell you about the nature of man? What do they tell you about the nature of God?

4. What is your personal response to allowing God to transform you? Are you able to present yourself as a living sacrifice to His will, whatever that may be? What impedes you from letting go of your own will in order to be “kept” by God?

Pray. Act. Pray Again. A 40-Day Walk with God***Week 7: The Crucifixion***

The hands and feet of Jesus are nailed to the cross in the presence of His afflicted mother and other devoted followers. Jesus says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He tells the man crucified with Him, "This day you will be with Me in paradise." He cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He thirsts. Then, finally He says, "It is finished," and "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." The side of Jesus is pierced with a lance. His body is taken down and placed in the arms of His mother.

Note: This punishment began by subjecting the sufferer to scourging. In the case of our Lord, however, his scourging was rather before the sentence was passed upon him, and was inflicted by Pilate for the purpose, probably, of exciting pity and procuring his escape from further punishment (Luke 23:22; John 19:1). The condemned one carried his own cross to the place of execution, which was outside the city, in some conspicuous place set apart for the purpose. Before the nailing to the cross took place, a medicated cup of vinegar mixed with gall and myrrh (the sopor) was given, for the purpose of deadening the pangs of the sufferer. Our Lord refused this cup, that his senses might be clear (Matt. 27:34). The spongeful of vinegar, sour wine, posca, the common drink of the Roman soldiers, which was put on a hyssop stalk and offered to our Lord in contemptuous pity (Matt. 27:48; Luke 23:36), he tasted to allay the agonies of his thirst (John 19:29).

The accounts given of the crucifixion of our Lord are in entire agreement with the customs and practices of the Roman in such cases. He was crucified between two "malefactors" (Isa. 53:12; Luke 23:32), and was watched by a party of four soldiers (John 19:23; Matt. 27:36, 54), with their centurion. The "breaking of the legs" of the malefactors was intended to hasten death, and put them out of misery (John 19:31); but the unusual rapidity of our Lord's death (19:33) was due to his previous sufferings and his great mental anguish. The omission of the breaking of his legs was the fulfilment of a type (Ex. 12:46). He literally died of a broken heart, a ruptured heart, and hence the flowing of blood and water from the wound made by the soldier's spear (John 19:34). Our Lord uttered seven memorable words from the cross, namely, (1) Luke 23:34; (2) 23:43; (3) John 19:26; (4) Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34; (5) John 19:28; (6) 19:30; (7) Luke 23:46.

Through the prayers this week, consider what it means to ask, "God our Father, by the merits of the crucifixion and death of Jesus, have mercy on me and on the whole world. Amen."

- *Day 35, Holy Week Monday: Full Confidence in God*
- *Day 36, Holy Week Tuesday: A Thankful Heart*
- *Day 37, Holy Week Wednesday: Focus on the Good*
- *Day 38, Maundy Thursday: God's Armor Revealed*
- *Day 39, Good Friday: Seek God*
- *Day 40, Holy Saturday: It is Done – Empowered!*

- **Easter Sunday: The Way, the Truth and the Life**

Focus Verse: Day 40 – Empowered *(Adapted from Ephesians 3: 20-21)*

Now according to You who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than I ask or imagine, according to the power that works within me, to You be the glory in the church and in Jesus Christ to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

The final prayer in our 40-day journey expresses the source of the power we now claim as a result of our redemption at the cross. It is a joyous declaration that our God is able to do more than we can even imagine by the activation of the power released at the cross by Jesus Christ and now residing within each believer. We acknowledge our own responsibility to claim our empowerment daily as we walk through life with the risen Christ at our side.

Study Questions:

1. Has there been an instance in your life when you have experienced the power of God working through you? How can you access that power daily in your life?

2. What do the prayers for this week tell you about the nature of man? What do they tell you about the nature of God?

3. What is your personal response to knowing that God will meet all of your needs if you focus on the good and maintain a thankful heart in all things?

4. Praying the warrior's prayer daily (Day 38) has been found by many people to be very effective in resisting evil. What impact do you think praying this prayer for yourself and the world each day might have?

5. The final challenge for this study is to consider what it means for your own life to claim the resurrection power and know that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.