

*40 Days  
of Journeying  
With Jesus*

A LENT DEVOTIONAL

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# Day 1

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 6-13

We start the Lent devotional with someone who truly got it. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, actually understood. In fact, she understood more than the indignant disciples who tried to stop her from “wasting” the perfume on Jesus. She, perhaps, understood that Jesus wouldn’t be with them much longer.

Her response to Jesus’ imminent death is beautiful. She worshipped him. Not a casual, what’s-next-on-the-agenda worship. But an extravagant worship where she didn’t count the cost. It was a reverential worship, an extraordinary worship, perhaps even an irrational worship. She didn’t look at the clock or her wallet or at people around her who were wagging their fingers in judgement. Instead, she looked at Jesus. She allowed him to fill her vision and eclipse everything else around her. She worshipped like no one was watching.

## *Bringing It Home*

What is my response to Jesus’ death on the Cross? Am I offering Him a sacrifice of worship and praise? Or is my sacrifice this season of Lent geared more for my own benefit?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Help me to worship in a way that truly takes all of me. Help me love you with not just my words but with all my soul, my mind, my strength and my heart. Let me never be content with lukewarm worship, but let me burn with the flame of faith set aglow by a deep reverence for you. Amen.

# Day 2

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 14-16

In complete contrast to Mary from yesterday's devotional, stands Judas. One of them is known for her extravagant worship; the other for his treacherous betrayal. Mary didn't count the cost of worship and spent her money on expensive perfume. Judas, on the other hand, focused on counting his thirty pieces of silver. One was sold out for Jesus; the other was a sell-out.

Yet, I don't believe that Judas was motivated solely by his love of money. He was, instead, prodded by his fear of man.

All circumstances pointed to the fact that the death of Jesus was imminent. Even Jesus himself said so! Judas feared for his future and he feared for his life. The new kingdom that he was expecting Jesus to usher in was disintegrating. He focused on the power of the rulers, instead of dwelling on the power of the One who delineated authority to those rulers. He allowed the tangible to edge out the eternal. .

## *Bringing It Home*

Where is my focus today? What motivates my actions? Is it fear of man or faith in God? Am I willing to put everything on the line for Jesus or am I towing the line for earthly authorities?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, I know I can easily be swayed by the fear of man. I often subscribe to the false idea that people control my circumstances, rather than a sovereign, loving God. I pray that I will give you your rightful place on the throne of my life. I pray that faith – not fear – will drive my decisions. Amen

# Day 3

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 17-19

Jesus' disciples prepared for the Passover meal. As we read these verses, let's look at three simple things they did in preparation: 1. They came to Jesus 2. They asked Jesus and 3. They obeyed Jesus.

This season of Lent, we too are preparing for the day when we remember Jesus as our sinless Passover Lamb. But are we attempting to prepare on our terms or on his? Is our preparation during Lent merely dedicated to outward trappings - or are we waiting on Jesus, listening to him and following in obedience?

This season of preparation, let's first come to him divested of our own agendas. Let's wait on him in humility. Let's listen to his voice. And, most importantly, let's not be just hearers, but also doers of the Word. The disciples "did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover." How are you and I preparing?

## *Bringing It Home*

What am I "giving up" for Lent? Is it something that God has convicted me about? Is my preparation more external than it is internal? Am I waiting on God and am I prepared to come to him on his terms?

## *Lean In*

Father God, Sometimes it's so easy to fall back on routine and ritual when it comes to Lent. We unthinkingly give up one thing or another, assuaging our guilt to quickly don a slightly self-righteous mantle. I pray for a renewed vision this Lent. Help me to come to you in true humility and allow you to prune me as you will. Amen.

# Day 4

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 20-25

I can picture the scene. In fact, most of us can see it vividly as the Last Supper is an oft-repeated piece of art in many Christian homes. The men in the painting have beards and wine goblets and wear robes. One of them looks more malevolent than the others. Of course, the mean one is none other than Judas.

Jesus shared that last meal with his betrayer. He gave Judas every opportunity to repent. In fact, Jesus called out his sin without sugar-coating anything. But Judas remained hard hearted and unrepentant. He sidestepped conviction with the words, "Surely, you don't mean me Rabbi?"

Judas refused to acknowledge his sin. He refused to allow conviction to penetrate through the layers of prideful self-preservation.

Maybe we don't willfully betray God, but we persist in some sinful patterns? Do we allow conviction of sin to break us?

## *Bringing It Home*

What's God convicting me about? In which areas of my life am I making excuses and not allowing his voice of conviction to change me?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Show me areas where my sin is habitual, where it has gone unnoticed because of years of making excuses. Give me the power to change. Give me a heart that's soft and pliable and open to your conviction. Amen

# Day 5

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 26-30

Growing up in a formal church setting, the communion liturgy included the verses we just read. On communion Sunday, our pastor would wear a more elaborate cassock. His voice would be more lyrical than usual when he read the verses.

Thinking back, in my 8-year-old mind, communion meant a longer service and a later lunch (groan!)

Kidding aside, having participated in communion after communion, it sometimes becomes another ritual. But when we look back at that first communion that Jesus shared with his disciples we see just how powerful it was.

Jesus spoke of his death. He spoke of when his body would be bruised and broken. He spoke of his blood being spilled. And then he gave thanks.

Jesus gave thanks when he spoke of his death.

That's our God. His cross is an invitation of grace to a hurting and helpless world.

That's why communion is also called Eucharist, meaning "thanksgiving". We accept the gift of His grace. All we do in exchange is express our gratitude. We don't need to clean up our act. We don't need to jump through hoops. We don't need to work for our salvation.

The Last Supper is a great reminder that all we have to do is receive that free gift of salvation with a humble and grateful heart.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I ever feel like I have to work for my salvation? What gets in the way of simply accepting Jesus' free gift? Do I look at the sacrament of communion as a chore and a ritual or do I see it as a powerful reminder of the grace of God?

# Day 5

## *Lean In*

Lord Jesus, I sometimes get immune to the immensity of your grace. When I stop to ponder that Last Supper, I'm struck by the fact that you gave thanks for the bread and wine that represented your body and your blood. Thank you for your sacrifice. It's something I'll never be able to fully grasp but something that I receive with a heart of thanksgiving. Amen

# Day 6

## Dwell On [Matthew 26: 31-33](#)

Good Ol' Peter. He was such a loyal friend. He was so full of enthusiasm and zest for the kingdom of God. Never would he have imagined that he would turn his back on his closest friend and teacher, Jesus. Peter was in denial of his impending denial.

In verse 33 of Matthew 26 we read Peter's words: Even if the others fall away on account of you, I never will.

He is so sure of himself and his sense of loyalty.

And that's where the problem lies. Peter was, perhaps, depending on his own ability to stand strong in the midst of pressure.

It brings to mind the warning in [1 Corinthians](#) where Scripture predicts this fallacy of self-assuredness: If you think you're standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

What if instead of responding to Jesus' prophecy of his denial with a "Me? No Way!" Peter had humbly said, "Me? Really? Can you show me how I can stay strong because on my own I'm really, really weak."

Vulnerability before God is a safe place. It's the first step in growing in faith.

## Bringing It Home

Am I sometimes bombastic in my faith assuming that I won't ever fall? Am I willing to be vulnerable before God and ask him for supernatural strength in my faith walk because on my own I absolutely cannot make it through?

## Lean In

Father, I don't want to do life without depending on you. In you I live and move and have my being. I can't stand firm unless I'm standing on the Rock that is higher than I. Thank you for being my Rock. Amen

# Day 7

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 36-38

The scene in today's reading shifts from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane. The mood gets heavier and more somber. Jesus calls three of his closest disciples and summons them to pray with him.

While I've mulled over Jesus' tribulation in the garden before, I've never dwelt on the fact that he invited his friends to grieve with him and pray with him.

It's not like the God of this universe needed them. It's not like he didn't know they would be catching up on naps instead of praying.

Yet, by sharing his sorrow with them, Jesus was clearly demonstrating that it's okay to share your heart's burdens with others. Just because you have God in your life doesn't mean you have to be poised and stoic and invulnerable. It's okay to say, "Hey, would you mind coming along with me for this?" and give someone else the opportunity to pray with you and for you.

Jesus displayed a beautiful openness in inviting his closest disciples to come alongside him.

No, we don't depend entirely on our loved ones. Nor do we act like faith erases them from the picture.

## *Bringing It Home*

What am I trying to handle alone today? Has God shown me specific people I can share my heartaches and my dreams with? Am I willing to be invited into another person's burden, even if it means sacrificing my time and my pursuits?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Help me grasp the fact that asking for help or asking for prayer does not chip away at my faith. Help me to be humble enough to invite people I trust to come alongside me on my faith walk. Amen

# Day 8

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 39

Today's reading is just one verse. Yet, those few words are heavy with emotion. We see Jesus alone in the Garden of Gethsamane, crying out to his Father.

In the rawness of emotion, Jesus cries out, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me..."

He is doubled over in anguish. We see his humanness. He is about to face unbounded physical torture. But worse than that, he knew that he would experience an isolation like never before – when his Father would turn his face away as Jesus took on the depravity and sin of the world.

And then he continues to pray. "Yet, not as I will, but as you will."

It was a moment when the human and the divine come together in one of the greatest acts of love and obedience.

He who knew no sin would become sin so that we might be the righteousness of God. Unbounded grace. Underserved favor.

No condemnation now I dread. Jesus, and all in him, is mine.

## *Bringing It Home*

What's my response to Jesus' obedience to God the Father? What's my response to his anguish in the garden? Do I fall on my knees in worship before a God who knew the torturous journey that lay ahead and yet determined to follow through? Do I allow it to become a personal revelation for my life?

# Day 8

## *Lean In*

Sweet Jesus, I cannot begin to understand that moment in the Garden of Gethsamane. You were alone in the dark of the night. But it was nothing compared to the isolation you would experience on the Cross. Yet you chose to walk in obedience. You demonstrated your love for a hurting humanity by simply saying, "but as you will." I bow down in awe. Amen

# Day 9

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 40-41

"Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" This was the question Jesus poses to his closest disciples as they dozed off instead of praying with him.

I don't see Jesus as being annoyed by their lethargy. His question ran deeper. He knew that these moments in the Garden of Gethsamane were crucial. It would be a time of preparation through prayer. Preparation for the intense challenges that lay ahead.

"Watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation," he warns the three disciples whom he had called with him.

We know what comes later. When the going got tough, the disciples scattered like the wind. I can't help but wonder: what if they, like Jesus, had wrestled in prayer till they came to a point of complete obedience and surrender? Would they have been able to stand their ground when Jesus was arrested?

Jesus knew just how fragile their faith could be. And he gave them – and gives us – the armor of prayer to guard against that fragility.

## *Bringing It Home*

What is my instinctual response in the face of pressure? Do I spend time in prayer to prepare for my daily battles? Do I go in fight or flight mode? Or do I stay in faith mode, depending on God to see me through?

## *Lean In*

Father God, help me never to discount the power of prayer. Help me carve out time to spend at your feet, wrestling with you in prayer so I gain the spiritual mettle I need to face challenges. I need that alone time with you to prepare so I don't fall into temptation. Amen

# Day 10

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 42-44

Three times. The same prayer. Jesus of course knew that each time his Father had heard him. They shared a closeness that is not humanly comprehensible. The Father and the Son were part of the Trinity, the one and the same God. So, why did Jesus go to the Father three times to say pretty much the same thing?

Perhaps it was to show us that we need to persist in prayer till we experience the rest that only he can give. Jesus did. He poured out in prayer what was pressing down on his heart. And once he found his place of joyful surrender, he got up and followed through in absolute obedience.

Like Jesus, we too have the privilege of pouring out our hearts in persistent prayer. It's not about twisting God's arm to get what we want. It's about learning to yield to him more completely. And like Jesus, we rise from our knees knowing that God has heard us and that ours is the victory.

## *Bringing It Home*

What is pressing down on my heart today? Am I taking it to God in prayer? Am I experiencing his rest? Am I moving forward in obedience?

## *Lean In*

Father God, Thank you for the incredible privilege of calling out to you in prayer. Thank you for Jesus' example of coming to you persistently. Help me to persevere in prayer till I experience the peace and that inner strengthening at the very core of my being. Amen

# Day 11

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 45-50

It was the greatest betrayal – a sinless man being handed over to a death sentence by someone who claimed to be his friend and follower.

But, in all of this, what really blows my mind is Jesus' statement to Judas as he came accompanied by a mob of angry, misguided men. Jesus simply says, "Do what you came for, friend."

He calls Judas "friend." I don't believe that Jesus was using that term lightly. That's a God of love. The Bible says in Romans that, while we were still his enemies, God reconciled us to himself through the death of his Son. The Message Bible puts it like this, "when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son."

Jesus calls us his friends, even while we continue to sin against him. Let's see that as a call to praise him for a love that we'll never fully comprehend.

## *Bringing It Home*

How do I see my role in the narrative of reconciliation? Do I feel like I bring some element of righteousness to the deal that "helps" my case? Or, do I know that it's all about a gracious God accepting a sinner as a friend?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Your Spirit nudges me to repent, your love compels me to come broken before you, your Son redeems me through his death on the Cross. Help me to never ever take any of that for granted. Amen.

# Day 12

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 50-56

The stillness of the night was broken. The peace that swept over the Garden of Gethsamane was trampled upon. A mob of angry men, carrying torchlights and weapons, came with one agenda: arresting the Son of God.

There was a scuffle and one of the disciples lobbed off the ear of a soldier. There were virulent questions posed to Jesus. The mob then "grabbed Jesus and arrested him."

In the midst of this chaos, stands Jesus – a perfect example of power under control. He shows us what meekness truly is.

It's not weakness. Like Jesus says, he could easily have summoned angels to come to his aid. Yet, he chooses not to.

Despite what the outward circumstances look like – a bunch of fishermen and their teacher intimidated by a large group of armed men – Jesus was in perfect control over the situation. The Almighty, Sovereign God was demonstrating that true power is displayed in laying down your rights for a bigger purpose. Jesus was willingly laying down not only his rights, but his very life.

## *Bringing It Home*

In what ways can I demonstrate meekness? Can I lay down my rights when it's for God's glory?

## *Lean In*

Saviour God, What is man that you're mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him? You loved us enough to lay down your rights. You loved us enough to be subject to brutal indignities and torture. You demonstrated perfect power through your meekness. Help me to lay down my rights in the light of your sacrifice. Amen

# Day 13

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 56

In one fell swoop, the disciples all vanished. They fled for their lives.

Looking back from a 21st century perspective, it's easy to assign those disciples labels of being cowardly or being deserters. But are we any different from them?

What caused them to split? They panicked when the pressure mounted and they lost sight of the eternal. The visible and the tangible filled them with dread. This, after all, was not how things were supposed to turn out, they probably reasoned. Their teacher and their Lord, whom they had followed for three years, had promised a new kingdom. An arrest by an angry mob was not in the script.

We, too, allow circumstances to get too big and God to become small. We fear the unknown. We make hasty decisions instead of trusting a God who is always on time.

## *Bringing It Home*

What do I do when I'm faced by the unknown? Do I give into panic? Or do I buckle down and trust what I know to be true of God?

## *Lean In*

Father, I ask that you replace my fear of the unknown with a deep trust in a sovereign God. I ask for a closer walk with you, so that faith edges out fear and I learn to walk in victory. Amen

# Day 14

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 57-67

Within a span of a few hours, Jesus experienced the pain and injustice that no one should have to go through. Especially not the only sinless man who ever lived.

He was betrayed by Judas, arrested by a mob, deserted by his disciples, denied by Peter, paraded before a court that plied him with mocking questions and false accusations. He was attacked, blindfolded, spat upon, slapped and struck with fists. And all of this happened before he carried that cross to Golgotha.

We do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with us. Jesus was tested and tempted in every way – and yet was without sin.

When we are going through tough times, it would be shallow to proclaim that “God doesn’t understand.” Because He does. He went through every physical, spiritual and emotional battle there was – and came out victorious.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I sometimes feel like God just doesn’t “get” it? What do I need to remember in those instances? What can I praise God for today?

## *Lean In*

Jesus, You went through every form of suffering for my sake. Thank you that today you sit at the right hand of the Father and you intercede for us. Thank you that you do understand. Amen

# Day 15

## *Dwell On* Matthew 26: 69-75

Today, we read the familiar story of Peter's denial. Each time he is asked whether he knew Jesus, Peter grows more vehement in his rejection of him.

Peter who had earlier professed that he would lay down his life for Jesus is now scared off by a servant girl.

When the rooster crows, Peter remembers – the conviction in his heart is immediate. He weeps bitterly.

While the passage doesn't mention it, Peter becomes the first great voice of the gospel.

Underneath his mistake were the arms of Jesus. Peter allowed the conviction of sin to strike him and he allowed the forgiveness of sin to lift him up again.

I think of the verse: though he stumble, he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with his hand (Psalm 37: 24). That was Peter. And that was his faithful God.

Our smallest goof-ups and blunders and our biggest, darkest sin – none of it is beyond God's redemption.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I sometimes feel like God can't forgive me of a certain sin? Do I feel like even if God forgives me, I can't forgive myself? What if God is telling me that the slate is wiped clean and that he has put a new spirit within me?

## *Lean In*

Father God, Thank you for your grace and forgiveness. I don't deserve the second, third, sometimes hundredth chance you give me. You are faithful and you lift me out from the ashes and put a new song on my lips. Amen

# Day 16

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 1-5

What a dark passage. The verdict is delivered. Jesus is bound and taken away. And, all of a sudden, Judas is filled with remorse over what he has done.

He tries to assuage his guilt by returning the 30 pieces of silver. He tries owning up to his sin – but he confesses to the wrong people. In quelling his guilt, he makes a huge blunder – he doesn't seek forgiveness from a God of grace. He tries to “fix” his sin on his own terms. He decides to take things into his own hands. Including his very life.

Remorse and regret over sin are only starting points. True brokenness and confession before God is where forgiveness – and the ensuing freedom – lies. The Bible says that when we confess our sin God is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A sinful life is just a life waiting to be redeemed.

## *Bringing It Home*

Am I trying to fix my failures on my own terms? Am I coming to God with a brokenness over my sin? Do I remember that the depravity of my sin can never surpass the depth of God's grace?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Help me remember that I can never fix my sin problem. Help me remember that I can't ever exhaust your grace, however extensive my mistakes may be. In repentance and rest is my salvation. Amen

# Day 17

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 6-10

I've always read the section about the chief priests buying the potter's field in passing. Recently, though, the ludicrousness of it struck me. It's almost laughable just how misguided and skewed the chief priests' thinking was.

They didn't want to put the blood money in the treasury for it was "against the law." Instead, they used it for a real estate investment. The chief priests are classic examples of what it means to follow the letter of the law, but continue life with an unrelenting hardness of heart.

They were concerned about appearing righteous but didn't really care about being made righteous. They preferred distraction over contrition.

Sometimes, we just want to check off all the boxes that make us appear a certain way. We don't allow God to address the root of the problem or to change us from the inside out. The enemy loves to keep us in this bubble of delusion so we don't fall on our knees before God.

## *Bringing It Home*

In which areas am I simply playing along to the world's standards and living in misguided self-righteousness? Am I more concerned about how my actions look on the outside or how I can be changed on the inside?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Help me take the time to be in your presence and allow your light to shine into my life. Reveal to me areas where I can change by the power of your Holy Spirit. Help me never to hide my sin under layers of distraction, busyness or foolish acts of self-righteousness. Amen

# Day 18

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 11-14

The One who is our Defender did not defend himself. The One who is our Intercessor did not speak up for himself. The One who is our Shield and our Fortress did not try to protect himself

He chose to be vulnerable so we could have the victory.

Pilate stands before the most unlikely King, torn between what he should do and the pressure from the crowd outside. The Roman governor goes back and forth between the belligerent mob and Jesus. He seems agitated.

In contrast, Jesus stands in perfect regality. He knows exactly what is going to happen and he is unflinching in his decision to go through with it.

In the gospel of John, Pilate asks Jesus, "Don't you know that I have the power to either free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus is completely at ease when he responds, "You have no power over me if it were not given to you."

Jesus rested in the sovereignty of God. Even though he was fully man, he didn't allow doubts and fears to assail him nor did he try to talk his way out of the trial. Instead, he trusted that his Father was in perfect control. He saw the big picture. The really, really big picture. He saw things from an eternal perspective – and yielded his life for us.

## *Bringing It Home*

Am I resting in God's sovereignty? Or do I fear for my future? Do I allow God to be my Defender or do I feel the need to constantly defend myself?

# Day 18

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the example of Jesus who was silent before authorities. Thank you that he shows us what it means to trust in your sovereignty and rest in your promises. Thank you for the best gift of all – eternal life in Jesus. Amen

# Day 19

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 19-24

The scene of Pilate washing his hands in front of the crowd is etched in our cultural mindsets. Pilate knew in his heart – and through his wife's warnings – that Jesus was innocent of the charges against him. But there was little he could do to convince the angry mob to let Jesus go. He tried and tried again. And, finally, he bailed. But not without first attempting to absolve himself of responsibility.

He was a powerful man in a powerful position. Pilate knew that putting his foot down – and doing the right thing – would put his position and power in jeopardy. So, he chose the path of least resistance; he played a 1st century neutral Switzerland and did not take a stand for Jesus.

In the pursuit of power, prestige and position, there are casualties - the most significant of which is our character.

## *Bringing It Home*

In which areas of my life do I need to take a stand for Jesus? Where does the world take more priority over worship? Is God revealing some area of my life where I've been "neutral?"

## *Lean In*

Lord, I'm sorry for the times where I've been lukewarm in my faith. Help me not to let my reputation or my position or my sphere of influence take precedence over my faith. Amen

# Day 20

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27:27-31

Sometimes, we just need to stop awhile and let the hard truth sink in. Today's passage doesn't require explanations or key takeaways. It requires deep, soulful reflection on all that Jesus endured for me. It requires that I don't brush away the brutality of that day 2000 years ago. It mandates that I allow the Holy Spirit to chisel away at the hardness of my heart.

Some 200 soldiers gathered around the Son of God with the sole intent of humiliating and torturing him.

Did you read that they had him flogged? It wasn't an ordinary whip. Pieces of metal and bones were attached to it. Many convicted felons died when being flogged as their flesh was literally torn to shreds.

Did you read of how they struck him on the head again and again? With a staff. On his head. Again and again.

Did you read of how they mocked him? After parading him in a scarlet robe, they pushed down a crown of thorns on his head. They called out hateful words and spat upon him.

Today's passage doesn't require explanations or key takeaways.

It requires deep, soulful reflection on all that Christ endured for me.

## *Bringing It Home*

Have I become casual in my reflection of Christ's suffering? Do I allow the hate and hurt of that day to change who I am and Whose I am today?

# Day 20

## *Lean In*

Lord Jesus, I can't begin to understand the torture and humiliation that you went through on my behalf. But my heart responds in thankfulness. You are altogether perfect and lovely. Amen

# Day 21

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 32

He is mentioned only in passing. And yet he is mentioned by name in the Bible: Simon from Cyrene.

While he was forced by the Roman soldiers to carry the Cross, did he also, eventually, willingly decide to help Jesus?

In carrying Jesus' Cross, Simon from Cyrene became the last person to aid Jesus. He unwittingly modeled Jesus' teaching that whoever wants to follow him, must take up their cross. In this case, it may not have been Simon's cross, but it nevertheless cost him something. He was probably ridiculed and jeered at. He perhaps got a lashing from the Roman soldiers. The cross was, of course, heavy and the road, long. Yet, he walked with Jesus. And Jesus walked with him.

In being the last person who helped Jesus, Simon is remembered through posterity.

Undoubtedly, Simon's life must have been forever altered. Simon saw Jesus up close, broken and bruised, yet putting one staggering foot in front of the other. And not uttering a word in protest.

There was no way he was going to walk away from that encounter, unchanged.

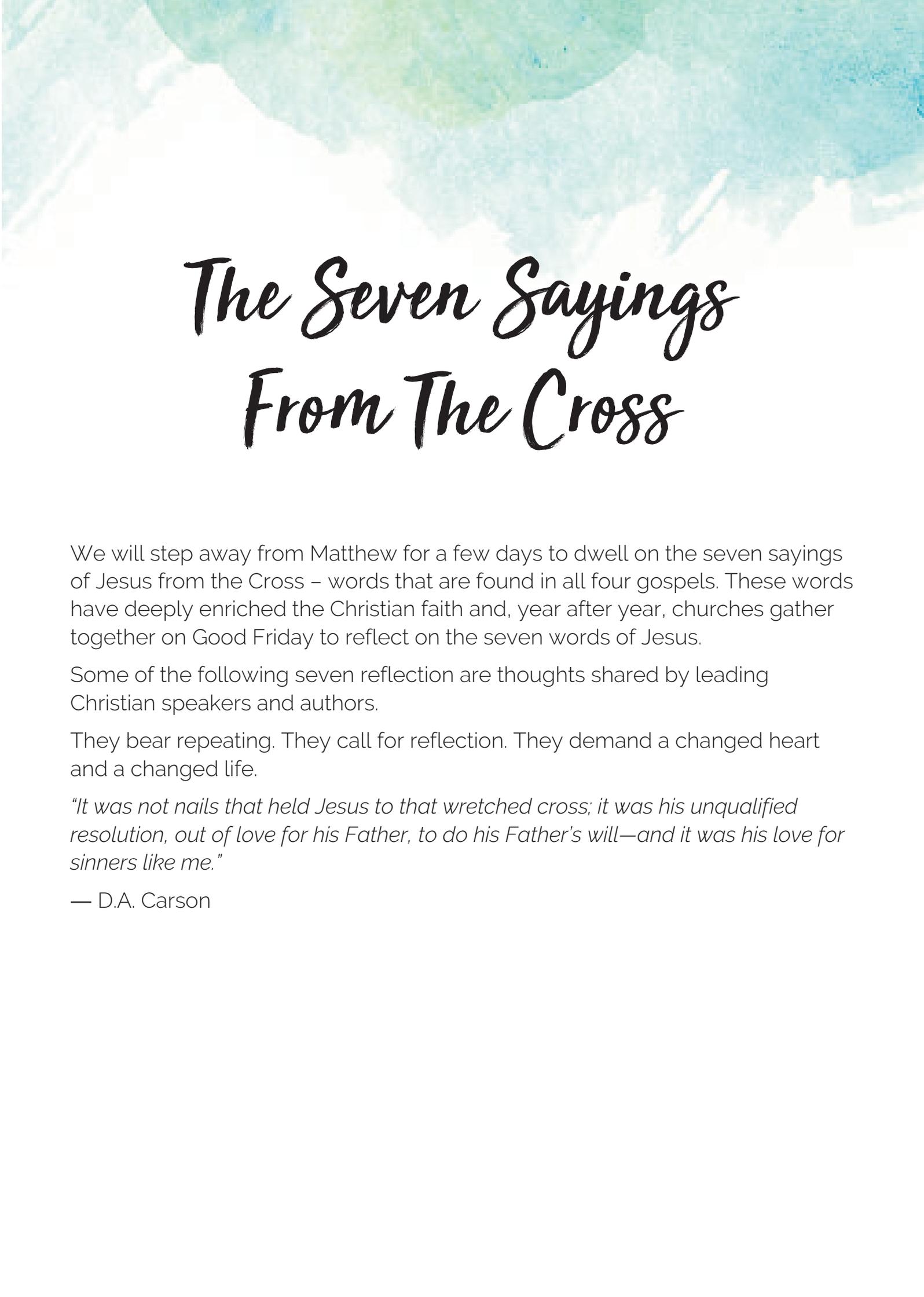
## *Bringing It Home*

Am I willing to be pulled into a narrative that's much larger than what I'd planned? Am I willing to carry my cross and follow Jesus down unexpected paths? Do I trust him to walk alongside me?

# Day 21

## *Lean In*

Jesus, I stand amazed at your fortitude and your grace as you walked that road to Golgotha. Even at that juncture, I believe you gave. You gave Simon a chance to have a deeply personal encounter with you. You wove his story into your bigger story. You changed the life of a non-descript visitor to Jerusalem by including him in the narrative of the greatest love story in history. Amen



# The Seven Sayings From The Cross

We will step away from Matthew for a few days to dwell on the seven sayings of Jesus from the Cross – words that are found in all four gospels. These words have deeply enriched the Christian faith and, year after year, churches gather together on Good Friday to reflect on the seven words of Jesus.

Some of the following seven reflection are thoughts shared by leading Christian speakers and authors.

They bear repeating. They call for reflection. They demand a changed heart and a changed life.

*"It was not nails that held Jesus to that wretched cross; it was his unqualified resolution, out of love for his Father, to do his Father's will—and it was his love for sinners like me."*

— D.A. Carson

# Day 22

## *Dwell On Christ's First Saying In* Luke 23: 34

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Even as the nails were being driven into his hands and feet, Jesus was saying these words. With every blow of the hammer pounding into his fists.

Were the Roman soldiers sorry? Did the Pharisees express any remorse? Did they offer an apology?

No.

Yet, Jesus offers forgiveness. Unilateral forgiveness or one-sided forgiveness. He didn't need them to be sorry or ask for forgiveness.

He showed us what it means to give up your rights. Even your right for retaliation.

In doing so, he dies free from resentment. He said the words aloud to show us what it means to release people from a hold of anger and, in turn, release ourselves from the pressure cooker of bitterness.

## *Bringing It Home*

Whom do I need to release in forgiveness just as Christ has forgiven me? Am I willing to let go of my right to retaliation? Am I trusting God to vindicate me and my cause?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, I know I can easily be swayed by the fear of man. I often Father God, I don't deserve the forgiveness that you offer so freely through your Son. I pray that you will help me give up my right of being right, and my right to retaliation. Help me know that when I release people in forgiveness, I am, in fact, releasing myself to live a fuller, freer life. Amen

# Day 23

## *Dwell On Christ's Second Saying In* Luke 23: 43

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The thief on the cross next to Jesus heard his cries asking for the forgiveness of those who were nailing him.

He knew that there was something different about the man who hung next to him. We don't know the turning point, but the thief says to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

That word "kingdom" is key. The thief and certifiably "bad guy" recognized that the man who was bruised and beaten and hanging on a wooden cross was the King.

He put his faith in this unlikely ruler.

And Jesus accepts this convicted criminal in an instant. Jesus gives up his right to social correctness. He lets go of any notion of what is socially acceptable or considered morally upright.

The thief put his faith in Jesus. And Jesus exchanged the thief's filthy rags with robes of righteousness. No transaction fee charged. No questions asked.

## *Bringing It Home*

Am I holding on to some obnoxious sense of what is "socially acceptable" to God? Do I subconsciously write off some people as "beyond redemption"? What can I do to truly grasp that salvation is a free gift for ALL who believe?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the reassuring words of Jesus to the thief. They weren't just empty placebos. Jesus sealed the promise he made with his blood. Thank you that he let go of the sense of social correctness in order to display his grace. Help me to do the same. Amen

# Day 24

## *Dwell On Christ's Third Saying In* John 19: 26-27

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

As Jesus hung on the cross, his sayings, thus far, have been others' focused. He asked for forgiveness for his crucifiers. He welcomed the thief into the kingdom. And in today's reading, he takes care of his mother, Mary, and his disciple John.

Even in the torture and humiliation, Jesus did not focus on himself. He wanted to make sure his mother would be taken care of. (It's a well-established fact that Mary's husband, Joseph, had died by then). Jesus wanted to give his beloved disciple John the important role of caring for Mary.

Even from the cross, Jesus let go of that which was close to his heart: his mother and his close friend.

## *Bringing It Home*

What or whom I am holding on to too tightly? Is God convicting me of letting go of someone or something and trusting Him for that submission?

## *Lean In*

Father, I know I cling too much to certain people and certain ideas of how life should be. Yes, it's sometimes scary to let go but help me remember that I'm releasing those things or people to the God who sent his one and only Son to Calvary for my sake. Amen

# Day 25

## *Dwell On Christ's Fourth Saying In* Matthew 27: 46

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

That cry of dereliction is something we will never fully grasp. It was a cry within the being of the Triune God.

As I've heard it explained, Jesus was so marred by the sin of the entire world past, present and future, that God, the Father, had to turn his face away from his beloved Son. As I see it, he could not bear to see the depravity of the world taken on by the holy blemishless Lamb of God.

This is the only time Jesus address the "Father" as "God." I don't think we'll ever know the dynamic of that moment. But, in those words, the utter desolation Jesus experienced comes through plainly. Jesus experienced the wrath that we deserved by bearing our sin. Jesus gave up his right of intimacy with his Father.

This was the reason he wept and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Yet, beneath it all, is the fact that Jesus endured the Cross, scorning its shame for the "joy set before him."

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I allow the loneliness and abandonment of the Cross to take hold of my heart?

# Day 25

## *Lean In*

Jesus, I'll never be able to understand that exact moment when in the darkness you uttered that cry of dereliction. But because of that loneliness you experienced I will never have to walk alone. I'm accepted because you were forsaken. I'm forgiven because you were condemned. Amazing grace, how can it be? Amen

# Day 26

## *Dwell On Christ's Fifth Saying In* John 19: 28

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said,

Jesus hung on that wooden beam, struggling for breath. He knew the end was near and he cried out in physical agony, "I thirst."

Why?

There could perhaps be deep theological reasons. Maybe he was referring to his soul's yearning for people come into the kingdom.

I think, though, at this point, he was just crying out with parched lips and expressing his humanity. Yes, he was fully God. But, he was also fully man. He bore the torture in his flesh. He suffered as a human in order to free all humanity.

He who is the Living Water now expresses his desperate thirst.

Jesus accepts his need for a drink. He lays down his right to be invulnerable in order to reach a hurting humanity.

## *Bringing It Home*

Am I acting like I have it all together? Do I realize that being vulnerable doesn't make me weak? Do I go to the spring of Living Water in order to pour into the lives of others?

## *Lean In*

Jesus, I stand in awe of you even as I remember just how vulnerable you became for my sake. That you – the Living Water – would express your thirst in order that I may identify more fully with you. You suffered as a man. You experienced every blow, every lash, every nail as a man. I fall down in awe. Amen

# Day 27

## *Dwell On Christ's Sixth Saying In* John 19: 30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Those three words – It is finished - are a declaration of victory

Jesus uses a rather unusual sentence syntax. Correct grammar would have been: It has been finished.

Yet, Jesus deliberately compromises his grammar to declare that the effect of his sacrifice is for all time. He is for today. His sacrifice is for now, as much as it was for then.

Jesus had completed the mission he had come for. It was completed to perfection. He had poured out his life even unto death. He made it possible for a sinful humanity to have an eternal relationship with a Holy God.

Nothing needs to be added to it. No good works. No more sacrifice. This was the greatest victory in the human race. Victory over sin and death.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I believe that I have victory over sin because of the Cross? Or do I somehow feel like I'm not strong enough to withstand the tides of depravity that the world brings in? Do I cling to the Cross not only for salvation but for daily triumph over sin?

## *Lean In*

Father God, Sometimes, I fall into habitual sin. I forget that you have won the victory. Help me grasp that "it is finished." All I do is accept that gift and rest in what you have accomplished. Amen

# Day 28

## *Dwell On Christ's Seventh Saying In* Luke 23: 46

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The closing statement. It was not bombastic. It was not an "I have done it" proclamation. It was not a theological discourse.

It was a Son's simple trust in a good, good Father. It was Jesus showing us what it means to trust God 100 percent. It was Jesus showing us how he laid down his right to live. It was Jesus showing us how to die.

Dr. William Barclay writes, "Jesus died with a prayer on his lips. 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' This was Psalm 31: 5 with one word added: Father. It showed that after his cry, 'My God, my god, why has thou forsaken me?' Jesus was now back to addressing God as 'Father,' re-establishing intimacy within the Trinity.

He died in perfect peace commending himself to the One who he knew best.

## *Bringing It Home*

What is God asking me to commit to Him? Am I trusting an unknown future to a known God?

## *Lean In*

Father God, Thank you for the intimacy with his Father that Christ displayed in that very last moment on the Cross. Thank you for the peace with which he breathed his last – the peace that is readily available for all who believe. Help me trust you for tomorrow and for all eternity. Amen

# Day 29

As we wrap up the section on Jesus' sayings from the Cross, let's spend a few minutes in the lost art of Christian meditation.

This is not an emptying of the mind. Nor is it repetitive mumbo jumbo. This is about meditating on the Word of God. It means dwelling on and dwelling in that Word as it we hide it in our hearts. This is not a new-fangled, mystical asceticism.

This is what David spoke about in the Psalms when he said "blessed" is the one who "delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2)

Today, spend a few minutes going over the last words of Jesus that we read in the last seven meditations.

Listen to or sing aloud this hymn written by Isaac Watts:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

# Day 29

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, I think on these words: "Did e're such love and sorrow meet?" Never has there been, and never will there be, such a poignant yet powerful melding of love and sacrifice. Calvary was a historical benchmark. Never let me lose sight of the depth of your sacrifice in sending Jesus as the Perfect Passover Lamb who redeems me forever. Amen

# Day 30

## Dwell On [Mathew 27: 51](#)

What a dramatic moment. The curtain of the temple was torn into two.

The curtain – that separated the Holy of Holies from the worshipers – was a heavy piece of fabric. According to historical accounts, it was 45-60 feet long and about 4 inches thick. This was not a flimsy strip of material. And it split from top to bottom.

The tearing of the curtain was supernatural and it pointed to the fact that Jesus' death gives us - a broken and sinful humanity - the right to come into the Holy of Holies and have a relationship with God.

Maybe we should ask ourselves what kinds of curtains or veils we hide behind. What stops us from entering into an intimate communion with God?

Could it be that my past is too murky? Or that I first need to get things in order? Could the curtain be that I'm still in love with all things worldly?

We need to believe that the curtain has already been torn. [Hebrews 10:19-20](#) says that the faithful enter into the sanctuary by the "blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the veil, that is, through his flesh."

Jesus' flesh was torn so all could enter that innermost sanctuary.

As long as we want to keep the curtain closed, we will never be able to see the beauty of the Lord.

## Bringing It Home

What keeps me from coming into the Holy of Holies? What curtain do I hide behind? Am I approaching the throne of grace with confidence?



# Day 30

## *Lean In*

Father God, Thank you that you so loved the world that you gave your only Son. Thank you that he became the veil that was torn so we could enter into the Holy of Holies. Amen

# Day 31

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 54

The magnitude of Jesus' crucifixion was reflected in nature. Darkness covered the land, the earth shook violently, rocks split.

There was no way anyone who witnessed this could have put all these signs down to coincidence. Nature was echoing the utter devastation of the moment.

The centurion and his cronies gasped in terror, finally recognizing that Jesus was the Son of God.

But recognizing that fact and putting one's faith in Jesus are two entirely different things. In fact, even Satan recognizes that Jesus is the Son of God. What you do with that acknowledgement is what determines your life here and forever.

Nature testifies to the glorious power of God. In Romans 1, Paul writes: For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Let's not stop at exclaiming, "Surely, he was the Son of God." Let's say with delight that surely he is my God.

## *Bringing It Home*

What am I doing with my knowledge of God? Is it changing the way I live?

## *Lean In*

Gracious God, Sometimes, I get caught up in head knowledge. It doesn't translate into heart knowledge. I don't allow your truth to change me. Forgive me for being callous and careless about your Word. Amen

# Day 32

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 57-60

Here is a rich, powerful man making his entrance into the narrative. Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the ruling council. He probably had everything going for him: wealth, power, prestige and influence.

Yet, he put everything on the line for Jesus. He risked his reputation. He came forward at a time when it was still perilous, when he could still have been ridiculed, even punished. Yet, Joseph of Arimathea didn't make excuses. He expressed his love in action.

There may come a time in your life and mine when we're called to step out of the shadows and do something brave and big for God. It may involve a risk that you'd never imagined you'd take. But when God calls you, he equips you.

## *Bringing It Home*

What is God asking of me today? Can I hear his voice over the cacophony in my life? Am I willing to take a big step out of my comfort zone for him?

## *Lean In*

Father, Help me to remember and be emboldened by the fact that your grace is sufficient for every situation. I'm sometimes more comfortable hiding in the shadows, reticent in my faith, preferring not to take a risk. But you didn't call me to be comfortable. You called me to take up my cross and follow you. I pray that your Spirit will convict and empower me. Amen

# Day 33

## *Dwell On* Matthew 27: 62-66

One dead man, eleven disciples who had disappeared from the scene, and a couple women who hung out in the background. Somehow, this motley group posed a threat to the powerful chief priests, Pharisees and, even, Pilate.

Insecurity flooded them as they took extra measures to secure Jesus' tomb. But we all know how that turned out. When God decrees that the tomb is empty, the tomb will be empty.

Nothing can thwart God's plans. No weapon formed against us can prosper. God keeps his promises. Right from Genesis, there are more than 300 prophecies about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. And he fulfilled every one of them.

God keeps his Word. Nothing can get in his way.

## *Bringing It Home*

Where is my focus today? Is it on my dead-end circumstances, or on my God who rose from the dead?

## *Lean In*

Mighty God, Often, I tend to get disillusioned by closed doors and dead ends. My eyes see what is in front of me: the powers that be getting more powerful at the expense of others. But help me to believe that all things work together for the good of those who love you and who have been called by you. You're a God who keeps his Word. Amen

# Day 34

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 5-6

The empty tomb.

Death could not keep him down. He is risen. Our God conquered sin and death.

I reflect on the words of the song, "In Christ Alone"

There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand  
That same resurrection power is at work in us today!

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I believe that Christ's resurrection power is at work in me through his Holy Spirit? What does that mean for my life?

# Day 34

## *Lean In*

Almighty God, You defeated the grave and conquered sin. Once and for all. Teach me to live in the light of your sacrifice and in the power of your resurrection. Amen

# Day 35

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 1-8

And we thought women's empowerment was a recent phenomenon.

I believe that God was a proponent of equal rights from the very moment he created Adam and Eve (equal status but distinct roles). But in today's passage, we see how God takes societal norms and dismisses them with a wave of his hand.

It was not coincidental that the women were the ones who discovered the empty tomb. It was God ordained. It was God saying to us that women are valuable to his kingdom. It was God taking the world order and turning it upside down.

Culturally, women at the time were to remain in the background. But God restores them to their rightful role as important participants in his kingdom. He gives the women at the tomb the significant commission of being his first witnesses.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I see myself and other women as being a key part of God's kingdom on earth?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the place of honor you've given women in your Word. Today, it seems like women are fighting to be heard and seen and acknowledged. But I thank you that you see us, you hear us and you empower us with important work for your kingdom. Amen

# Day 36

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 5-6

The angel greets the startled women at the empty tomb. When I dwell on the angel's words, deeper truths resonate with me.

The angel is not simply there as a greeter at an exhibit. I love his insightful comment, "I know you're looking for Jesus."

In some way, aren't we all? We are all seekers on the journey of life. Some of us have found Jesus but still have a ways to go to discover him more. Some of us are yet to discover the sweet joy of knowing him.

Either way, the answer lies in the empty tomb. He is the resurrection and the life for all who seek Him.

The angel invites the women to "come and see." Every seeker discovers Jesus through a personal experience. It has to be a one-on-one transaction: my sin for his forgiveness. I have to come to Jesus, just as I am, without one plea, but that his blood was shed me.

## *Bringing It Home*

Where am I on my journey of seeking God? Do I need to "come and see?"

## *Lean In*

Father, Thank you for putting that God-shaped vacuum in my heart. Nothing I have and nothing I do can fill that void. So, I simply come to Jesus. Amen

# Day 37

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 8-10

The women couldn't believe what they had seen. Or rather, what they had not seen. There was no body in the tomb. The angel told them that Jesus has risen. Could this be true? They ran to tell the disciples, a mixture of excitement and fear coursing through their veins.

That's when Jesus meets with them. The women weren't at the perfect point in their faith. Scripture notes that they were still afraid. But Jesus met with them right where they were. He didn't wait for a time when their faith-o-meter was cranked up all the way. He met them while they were still wrapping their minds around all they'd experienced.

All the women could do in response was to fall before Him in worship.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I feel like I need to have a perfect life and perfect faith before I can have a real relationship with Jesus? What is my response when Jesus meets me at my point of need?

## *Lean In*

God of Grace, I come to you in worship because you meet me right where I am. You know my heart and you know I'll never get things 100% right. But that's why you sent your Son to die for me – because all of us have sinned and fallen short of your glory. Amen

# Day 38

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 11-15

The greatest cover up. That's what the enemies of Jesus sought to do.

They came up with a devious scheme, bribed the soldiers and spread rumors through a vast and powerful network.

And, yet, despite their influence and their wiles, it was the greatest irony – the chief priests and their cohorts through their deceptive plan were inadvertently accepting that the tomb was empty.

People can try all they want to hide the truth or run from it. But God has the last word. He is the sovereign, all knowing, all powerful God. His truth prevails. His truth sets us free.

The only way we can know the truth is not just the overwhelming evidence that the resurrection was historically accurate. The only way we can be fully convinced of the truth is a personal relationship with Jesus.

## *Bringing It Home*

Do I try to hide from the truth through my busyness or through distractedness?  
Do I have a personal relationship with Christ that convinces me of the truth?

## *Lean In*

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your sovereignty. Despite the corruption and perversion of the current world system and the powers that be, you reign victorious. Your truth will prevail. I can trust you and lean on you always. Amen

# Day 39

## Dwell On Matthew 28: 16-20

The passage we read is titled, "The Great Commission." While that's an appropriate header, I don't know if it fully encapsulates Jesus' call to the disciples.

We often think of this passage as a call to share the good news, extrinsic to our daily lives. And while that's true, it's also a call to serve and a call to give of ourselves. It's a natural extension of our life in Christ.

The Desiring God website puts it like this: "When our life in him is healthy and vibrant, we not only ache to keep sinking our roots down deep in him, but also to stretch our branches out and extend his goodness to others."

The author also refers to "disciplemaking" as more than just speaking the truth. It is also life-sharing, as Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" ([1 Thessalonians 2:8](#)).

Personally, I love the more comprehensive coverage. It's not an excuse to stop us from sharing the gospel. It's an extension of why we do it and how we share.

## Bringing It Home

Who is God placing on my heart with whom to share his truth? Am I sharing myself with others and allowing the gospel to be an extension of my life in Christ?

## Lean In

God of love, I thank you for your grace toward all sinners. Especially a sinner like me. Thank you that I get to share the good news out of the abundant joy and peace you've poured into my life. I'm blessed to be a blessing. Amen

# Day 40

## *Dwell On* Matthew 28: 19-20

As someone who writes for a living, I know that opening sentences and closing sentences have to rock. They have to carry impact. The gospel of Matthew ends with this line from Jesus: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Perhaps, at first glance, it may not seem like the most impressive or memorable line. Yet, Matthew chooses to end the book with it, thus speaking to its significance.

The disciples were going to be facing intense persecution over the next few months. And Jesus was assuring them that he would be right there with them, to the very end.

Physically, Jesus would be ascending to the Father. But he would send the Holy Spirit who would indwell the disciples forever.

That was a promise for the disciples. And it's a promise for us today. Jesus is always with us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Always and forever.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.

## *Bringing It Home*

In which situations do I need to remember that Jesus is with me? How will that change the situation? Or, how will it change me in order to better face that situation?

## *Lean In*

Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit! I worship a magnificent and powerful God. I also worship a God who loves me enough to be with me. Always. To the very end. You will never leave me nor forsake me. Amen