NEW SALEM
LENT
40 DAYS OF PREPARATION AND PRAYER
newsalem.org/easter
For hundreds of years, Christians have been participating in Lent. Lent has traditionally been a time to prepare our hearts for Easter by fasting, praying, and repenting of sin as we remember the death of Jesus and celebrate His resurrection!

You’ve probably heard of Lent before—you may have even participated in it before. But it’s not just an empty tradition or a meaningless ritual. Christians all over the world observe Lent as a way of removing clutter from our lives so that we can see Jesus more clearly during Easter.

2020 and 2021 have been difficult for many. These months have reminded us of the fragility of life and the hardship of change and new routines. We hope it has also reminded you to reflect on what is really important! What is needed and what is just excess in our life.

Traditionally, people who practice Lent give something up (fast) in order to spend more time in prayer, worship and the Word. Your fast could be just about anything—food, TV, social media, or even choosing to drink only water. As we remove physical things, the excess things from our lives for this period of 40 days, it can help us focus on the deeper parts of ourselves that are redeemed and made whole by the truth of the Gospel.

To help you focus on Jesus in this season of Lent, we have asked our leaders and teachers within New Salem to create a devotional consisting of a Scripture reading, a small devotional thought, and a prayer challenge. Our hope is that by the end of these 40 days you will have a better understanding of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and what He means for all of us.

Together, let’s focus on that for the next 40 days and see what God will do to get our hearts ready to see Jesus clearly.
Wednesday, February 17, Day 1:
Author: Nicholas Pepper

It seems like this winter has already been the longest year. It has seemed long, dreary and even down right depressing for so many. Let’s be very transparent, it has been hard in so many different ways... our jobs and all the change, our relationships (or lack there of) and even Church has changed. All of this change and difficulty can get in our heads. It can cloud our thoughts and our attitude if we are not careful…but there is better!

Let me give you a glimpse of that something better...
Isaiah 6:1-3
In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and His robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphim were standing above Him; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; His glory fills the whole earth.

The GLORY of the Lord filled the temple! But, not only the temple, the ENTIRE earth! Allow this glimpse to recalibrate this long season. Allow this vision to remind you that even through the difficulty, God's glory shines!

What is it that might be clouding your vision of the Lord as we begin to prepare our hearts and minds for Easter? Do you have unclean lips and need to turn to a God that can cleanse you? Would you take time to allow the Lord of Lords to do an amazing work over these next 40 days leading up to Easter? To remind yourself of His greatness, His love, His forgiveness and His sacrifice.

Spend time praying for Holiness and Obedience for these next 40 days and beyond. Is there anything you need to “give up”/cleanse from your life: physically or mentally as we enter the season of Easter?

Spend some time reflecting on the Glory of the Lord!
Thursday, February 18, Day 2:  
Author: Linda and Bill Gaddy

Humility

“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” Matthew 23:12-13

As for an example, must we not simply choose the greatest one, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! And so doing, I choose the second definition from above. And the “supreme example of humility is found in the incarnation and death” of Jesus Christ.

He who was and is the Son of God, Creator and Ruler of the universe, chose, to come to our world in the most humble of conditions, a Babe born in a lowly stable and laid in a manger used to feed the animals.

He lived a life without sin, obeying His heavenly Father and earthly father and mother until, at around the age of 30 years old, surrendering His entire being to the saving all of mankind for all time. Tempted by Satan, tested by hunger and thirst in the desert, He refused to exert His absolute power to throw off His calling. And all humanity can not do anything but thank and praise Him!

We are all given talents by our God, talents that we should and must develop to their greatest level and use them to honor and obey our Father, to expand His kingdom here on earth and to demonstrate a life and a living more like Jesus every day. And when we do, casting our eyes on Jesus, with humility and love, we will indeed be most blessed of all peoples!
Friday, February 19, Day 3:  
Author: Game and Katie Pongpa

The Sacrifice for All Man and All Time

Hebrews 10:1-18, Leviticus 16

What comes to mind when you hear the word sacrifice or offering? My mind goes straight to the Old Testament and the old covenant between God and His people. I think of the book of Leviticus and the explicit instructions for purification, atonement, sacrifice, and worship. I think of the overwhelming and impossible, and thankfully temporary, means by which God made a way for sinful man to be reconciled to Himself.

Living in Thailand, my mind also goes to ornate golden temples and idols with people bowing before them making wishes and giving money to try to outweigh their sin. I think of people unsuccessfully trying to perfectly follow even just five moral precepts. I think of people living in the uncertainty of their eternal fate.

But the Word of God clearly tells us that an imperfect, man-made sacrifice for every sin would never do. It would never be enough to cover the sin of man and bring the righteousness needed to be with God. As it says in Hebrews 10:3-4, “But in the sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Our loving, merciful God always had a permanent solution to restore sinful man to righteousness and relationship with Himself through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God does not want man's sacrifice and offering. God’s will is that Jesus came to offer Himself once for all time to take away our sins and make us perfect forever. And the Word of God says in Hebrews 10:18 that where there is forgiveness of sins, there is no longer an offering for sin.

As we meditate on God’s Word and remember the perfect sacrifice Jesus made for our sin by his death and resurrection, would you pray for the more than 70 million people living in Thailand, 99% of whom don't know Jesus. Pray for those people who don’t know that their sacrifices aren’t acceptable because Jesus has already made the only acceptable and perfect sacrifice for our sins, once and for all. Pray that God will send more followers of Jesus to share the Good News with the lost of Thailand and all around the world.

Katie and Game Pongpa serve full-time in Sanpatong, Thailand sharing the gospel, making disciples of Jesus Christ, and planting a house church in Game’s home village. For more information about their ministry, visit thepongpas.com
Monday, February 22, Day 5:

Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
“It’s all about the Gospel”

Annie Armstrong (1850-1938) Annie was born in Baltimore at a time when there was little opportunity for women. Yet, her devotion to Christ led her to a life of service and leadership. She organized women to pray, to give and to meet the needs around them. She challenged pastors and churches to action and rallied vital support for missionaries. Ultimately, Annie was recognized as a national Southern Baptist trailblazer for her visionary leadership that still inspires millions today.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 “For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”

Annie’s Contributions:
Started Bay View Mission for Baltimore’s poor and addicted
Served as the first executive of Woman’s Missionary Union, the largest protestant women’s organization in the world
Led the formation of missions’ organizations for children
Raised support for missionaries to Italian and Jewish immigrants
Refused a salary because she would never give to the Lord “that which costs me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24)
Initiated fund-raising “brick cards” to build churches in Cuba
Gained support for the first black, female missionaries
Secured funds to relieve China missionary, Lottie Moon, who had served for 11 years without a furlough
Advocated for Native Americans and impoverished mountain people
Honored in 1934 when The Home Missions Offering was re-named for her to encourage more to follow her sacrificial example

Today, over $1 billion has been given through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. All gifts—100%—support thousands of missionaries in church planting and compassion ministries across the U.S. and Canada. Please pray how you can give towards, support and go on missions in 2021!

“What a glorious thing it is to be a co-worker with God in winning the world for Christ.”

You can read more about the offering and missions here:
https://www.anniearmstrong.com
Tuesday, February 23, Day 6:
Author: Cindy Kropff

Patience

The children in our Wednesday night class requested, one summer, that we study the Fruit of the Spirit, and so each week we looked at one aspect of the fruit. On the fourth Wednesday we explored patience because it is listed fourth in Galatians 5:22-23 where the fruit of the Holy Spirit is described.

Now, one of the many rewards of working with children is that you can learn from them. For example, patience is defined in Strong’s as longsuffering. Well, the children defined it as “putting up with something and not complaining about it”! Okay…

Some of the situations we discussed in which patience should be shown were mistreatment from others, frustration of not being understood, or having to wait on something that you want. Even young children understood that being patient in these situations is not easy. A classic teaching demonstration used for this lesson is to present a deliciously craved candy treat and tell students they have to wait patiently to receive one. This I did, and, as you can imagine, resisting the urge to ask, “When will I get one, who gets one first, why did he get one before me, why can't we have it now?” etc. was overwhelming.

Patience is not a virtue that we can demonstrate on our own; however, we who have been saved do possess this ability to be patient. In a few days we will celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who made our salvation possible. When He returned to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to help us live lives that honor God. The Holy Spirit working in our lives produces a fruit which, among other aspects, includes patience.

God has and continues to demonstrate His patience toward us as an example of how we are to be patient with others. His Word clearly instructs us to be patient and tells us why:

1 Timothy 1:16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

Colossians 3:12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
1 Peter 2:20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

What an incredible witness to extend patience to the unsaved. How wonderfully uniting it is when we patiently work with fellow Christians within the church. Just like the children in our Wednesday night class reaped the candy treat reward for their patience exhibited until the end of our lesson, we continue to be patient as we wait for Christ’s promised return. The ability to be patient allows us to grow and experience hope and joy as we anticipate that glorious day when He returns.

James 5:8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.
Wednesday, February 24, Day 7:
Author: Lisa Steltenpohl

Ordinary Miracles

I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts the other day (Birds on a Wire – if you moms aren’t subscribed you should be!) and the host was interviewing a missionary, Betty Loudermilk, who was a missionary in Japan for FIFTY YEARS! She was single woman who ended up adopting 15 children, though that was not AT ALL in her plan, and brought them back to America. This sweet lady spoke about a moment after she’d adopted her first child, when she stood outside washing cloth diapers, and asked God how she was supposed to take care of this baby when she had very little? She said God spoke clearly to her heart, “What is that in your hand?”

In Exodus 4, God had just called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, but Moses is afraid. Moses fears he is not up to the task. Moses protests, then God asks him “What is that in your hand?” Moses replies, “A staff”. A staff is just an ordinary, every day thing. Nothing special. It was used for shepherding, a common man’s job. But when the staff was used for God’s purposes, it became the stuff of miracles. God had big plans for Moses’ staff. God used it to bring the nation of Egypt to its knees, to part the Red Sea, to bring water from a rock in the desert. Only God could use such a simple thing for His glory!

On that day, Betty looked down and saw a diaper—an ordinary thing of motherhood—and decided in that moment to give it to God. She never looked back.

What’s in your hand right now? What has God given you that may be an ordinary, every day thing, but that through God, can be used for His glory? I ask you today to consider your situation, and how God may use the ordinary in your life to do miraculous things. We are all ordinary until God comes into the picture. What might happen if you gave it to God and let Him work out the miracle? I pray that we all be open today to whatever plan God has for us. I pray we let go and let God. I hope this speaks to your heart as it did mine.
Thursday, February 25, Day 8:
Author: Dana Moore

God’s Goodness

Even if you did not grow up in church, it does not take long to hear about the goodness of God. From the prayer God is great, God is good to the saying, "God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good." His goodness is made known.

It is easy to talk about the goodness of God when everything is going smoothly in your life or basically the direction you think it should go. In my head, I plan on what my life was going to be, and as long as it went that way, I felt God was blessing my family and being kind to us. But what does your mind think about the goodness of God, when a terrible thing happens in your life?

In March 2019, we had an unexpected life-changing situation with my family. This life-changing situation would impact all of us in a significant way. My heart and mind were angry with God for allowing this to happen. I positively was not thinking about His goodness at all. I was behaving like a child that had not gotten their way. My hurt, disappointment, and anger over this situation clouded my thinking. As tears were shed and time passed, I began to see the goodness of God in this unpleasant situation. Romans 2:4 tells us, the goodness of God leads you to repentance. I had to repent because, from the beginning of this terrible situation, I could look back and see the goodness of God. I could see His goodness in decisions that were made before the situation unfolded. His goodness was also shown in friends, prayers, and people being at the right place at the right time.

Psalm 23:6
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 100:5
For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.

These verses from the book of Psalm are excellent reminders of the goodness of God during good times and bad times. Through this tough season of life, I was reminded to praise Him in the storm, and when I did, I felt His peace and goodness even when things did not make sense. We as Christians have to spend time in His word, in prayer, and actively seeking Him. When we actively seek Him, His goodness is so evident.
Friday, February 26, Day 9:  
Author: Kathryn and Garrett Skrbina  

Joy, Even in Times of Uncertainty.

We’ve had an unbelievably crazy year with tons of exciting changes. We got engaged, married, moved across country, and both started new jobs. All exciting milestones in our lives, yet many times we found it hard to be joyous.

We got engaged on December 25, 2019 and started planning the wedding of our dreams. We picked our date, ordered invites, and “proposed” to our wedding party. We had it all planned out. Garrett had submitted applications to several schools and several deposits had been made for our wedding… and then COVID hit. What were we to do now when there were so many unknowns? The courthouse was closed and there was no way to get a marriage license. Would we actually be able to get married? What about the invites, downpayment, etc., that we’d already invested money into? Are we just going to lose all of that? What does our future hold?

Garrett planned to enter the academy and pursue a PhD, but COVID put an end to that dream. I found myself out of a job and worried about how I would pay bills and have enough money for a wedding that may or may not happen. This was a time of our lives that was supposed to be completely joyous, yet the world seemed like it was crumbling around us.

But guess what…God saw us through. His plan for our lives prevailed. Garrett found several ministry opportunities here in Georgia that he was very excited about. The Lord opened a door for a job in Kansas City to tide me over until we were married that actually paid more than what I had been making (in the middle of a pandemic, no less), and I found employment here at New Salem. And you guessed it, we had our wedding. Was it a little smaller than we planned? Sure. Did our guests have to wear masks? They sure did, but it was still a wonderful day and will continue to be a special memory for the both of us.

We found ourselves forgetting where our joy truly lies. Our joy does not come from the perfect wedding, job, or plan that we have set for our lives. Our joy is not of this world, but is so much greater. Our joy comes from a baby born in a manger; a lamb who was sacrificed on a cross; a savior who conquered death and rose from the grave; a God who is still alive, still in control, and is sovereign over all. Our joy comes from Him and Him alone.

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” -Romans 12:12

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds…” -James 1:2

“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” -Psalm 16:11
Monday, March 1, Day 11:
Author: Rex Rennie

Self-Denial

The Position of Sacrifice

As I looked out the window that night, I thought to myself for the first time, “I won’t do it, but I can see how some fathers leave and don’t come back.” It was 2am. I slapped myself a time or two to stay awake. Anxiety, anger, and sleepiness traded places as the strongest in my heart from minute to minute. My baby in my arms had been screaming for hours. My skin was wet with a cold sweat; the feelings in me were all contrary to nurturing. I could not go for Rachel’s help because her day with our son had been even harder than mine, and she had just finally gotten to rest. My mind raced about the problem I’d been stuck on at work, the 500 pages of reading due at the end of the week for my seminary class, the way I had been unkind to Rachel again, the immense need I had for sleep, and the chores stacking up. As I continued to rock my son, some memories from high school came to mind: hanging out with friends, watching movies, napping, goofing off, and going out. Back then, I had a world of opportunity and little burden. I was like a race car that could quickly shift, turn, and speed wherever I wanted to go. If I broke down, I would be the only one affected. But now, I was in a position of sacrifice.

Not a minute was mine anymore. All my minutes belonged to others: my wife, my son, my boss, and those who I was training to minister to. I had a world of burden and what felt like little opportunity. I was now a steam engine pulling a train, moving much slower, feeling a lot of pressure, knowing that if I broke down, it would cause others to crash. I longed to return to race car living, and despite my insidious disposition, I praised myself for “just sticking with it.” I thought that because I was changing some diapers, feeding some bottles, and waking up at some ungodly hours, I was doing well. More recently, however, I have learned this truth from the Lord: Anxiety often grows from being in a sacrificial position unwillingly.

I was full of anxiety because I was stuck in a sacrificial position that I did not want. My heart was against it; I was unwilling. Though my body stayed to do the jobs, my heart had left. That was the case with our first child throughout the newborn stage, but thankfully now, with baby #3 soon to be born, I have a third option besides running away or being stuck:

“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. For what good does it do a person if he gains the whole world, but loses or forfeits himself?’” (Luke 9:23-24, NASB, bold mine).

We must not fixate on the word “cross” here as if it were code for some burden we are experiencing. People who do that often say, “Oh, that’s just my cross to bear” with reference to something in life
that is bothering them. This is a mistake that misses the point and actually reveals that the person is stuck in something they do not want, just like I was! On the contrary, Jesus is inviting us to do something willingly just like He did.

When you picked up a cross in that day, it meant that you had already been sentenced to death. For most people sentenced to crucifixion, they were carrying their crosses quite unwillingly, wishing for any opportunity to escape, run, teleport somewhere else, anything to get away and not face this horrible fate!

For Jesus, it was quite the opposite: He was the one controlling the entire narrative of his execution. Every moment He carried His cross, He was not wishing to leave. He was powerfully and willingly pushing toward something He deeply desired to do. Even when Pilate tried to claim that he was in power to sentence Jesus to death, Jesus replied, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11a). Jesus was essentially saying, “I am God. You get to sentence me only because I let you.” Ironically, Jesus was the only one who has ever been crucified who indeed had the power to escape, to teleport away, to be defended by legions of angels, to launch a counter-attack and win easily. He was there because He wanted to be there. Therefore, when He invites us to take up a cross and follow Him, He is suggesting that we sentence ourselves to death for His sake, purposefully, openly, urgently, powerfully. We are not meant to grit our teeth and get through our sacrificial positions in a spirit of cowardice. We are meant to boldly claim those positions and do them with all perseverance in the Holy Spirit.

So I ask you, what position of sacrifice do you find yourself in? You are going to have to endure it either way. So are you willfully in it, or is your heart trying to escape it? Do you make the first move toward it, or do others in your life have to nag you to move? In this season of Lent, let us mature by owning our own positions of sacrifice. Let us sacrifice willingly so that we can reap the benefit of joy in following Jesus instead of reaping the pain of anxiety and fear. Push your daily sacrifices to the next level rather than trying to run from them, and may my heart be present, willing, and eager whenever I hear our new baby girl’s cries, in Jesus’ name.
Tuesday, March 2, Day 12:
Author: Joan Johnson

Self-Control
Restraint exercised over one’s impulses, emotions, or desires

Why did I pick this topic? Because there is an area in my life where I struggle constantly with self-control.

I am the baker in our family. Oh, I can produce casseroles, sauces, meat and potato meals, etc., but my passion is whipping up cakes, cookies, or pies. I love baking with my grands.

Ironically, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes some 13 years ago. Guess what? The above are all things I should avoid or eat in moderation. This is something I find very hard to do in my own strength. The following scripture has much to say about self-control as well as everything we need for righteous living.

2 Peter 1:3-8 (NIV) says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; to goodness, knowledge; And to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; And to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

These verses tell me that I’m not so much seeking self-control but seeking God-control over self. This control is not something I can do alone and in my own strength.

Titus 2:11-12 (NIV) says, “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.”

Am I always successful in my efforts of self-control over what I eat? Absolutely not. I am almost at the end of a 40 day fast from sugar and for the most part God has helped me to make it. One thing I’ve learned in this time is the absolute importance of staying immersed in God’s Word and in constant contact with Him. I do not have the ability in and of myself to say NO.

Do I want my life to be self-controlled or God-controlled? I choose God-controlled.
Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) says, “Let us approach the throne of grace, with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

In what area of your life are you struggling? Call on Jesus to help you in that struggle, and immerse yourself in what He has to say in His word and what He has to say to you as you commune with Him.
 LORD HAVE MERCY

As a child, these three words take me back to my Nanny’s house. Whenever, something happened that was a little out of the ordinary, she would proclaim, “Lord have mercy.” However, this is not quite the way it came out, because as any true southern woman knows, they actually pronounced the saying, “Lorda/Lawda mercy” as they would shake heads in disbelief. Now, this didn’t have to be anything that was incredibly unbelievable, just something a little different or new, such as technology or the way the entertainment industry could make it look like a baby or animal was actually saying words.

The Mariam Webster Dictionary defines mercy as, “compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one’s power.” While we may understand the word, compassion, the word forbearance in this case is defined as “a refraining from the enforcement of something (such as a debt, right, or obligation) that is due.”

These words remind me of a story told in Matthew 18. Jesus told this parable to help us understand about the forgiving nature of God. In Matthew 18:23-27 we read, “And so the kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents, and he could not pay. So his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all his possessions, to write off the debt. So the servant fell on his knees, begging the king, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master released the servant forgiving him the debt.” Notice, the king did not put him on a monthly payment schedule. The amount of ten thousand talents would have been the equivalent of several million dollars, something that the servant could have never been able to pay. The king was well within his rights to punish and sell him and his family. However, out of compassion and mercy, he gave the servant something that he never could have earned...forgiveness and freedom. Now, the rest of this parable does not turn out as well for the servant, as he does not forgive his debtors who owed much less. But it does serve us well to understand the nature of the king, who was representing God.

We, as humans, owe God a debt that we simply cannot pay for our sinfulness. The only choice for us is to simply ask Him to show us compassion and then, mercy, so that we may be forgiven and have that debt erased. So, in this case, the saying “Lord have mercy” is not something to be said lightly, but to be cried out from the bottom of our hearts, as broken and repentant people. It does us no good to try to get ourselves together, as it is not predicated upon what we do, but what God has done for us!
“Having been buried with Him in baptism, you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses. He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2:12-14
FORGIVENESS

Thursday, March 4, Day 14:
Author: Robert Steltenpohl

Is there anything more difficult than forgiving someone when you absolutely know you're in the right? I'd like to think your answer is a resounding “no.” It's so hard to forgive, like almost impossible at times because being hurt by someone leaves a mental and emotional scar. We've earned those scars, and we want everyone, including those that hurt us, to never forget that they put it there.

Those scars are valid; they hurt and they are almost impossible to forget. I know that first hand. I've been hurt by family and close friends, and I've held on to that pain as if those scars give me the right to never forgive. I'm sure you've struggled with it too, or maybe you are in the midst of struggling with it now. The scars could be fresh from a recent pain or maybe something from years ago. But, they are still there, and that isn't the best situation to be in.

Let's take a second and look at what scripture tells us about forgiveness. Matthew 6:15 tells us, “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” This passage has some incredible implications, but the truth that is spoken is simple: forgive or you will not be forgiven. You may be thinking, “Robby, you don't understand what I've been through.” You are right; I don't know what you've endured. There's only one that can understand: Jesus.

He endured the cup of wrath that God was to pour upon the earth because of sin for you and for me. He was betrayed, he was beaten, he was cursed at, and he was stabbed. You know what else he received in all of this? Scars. Many, many scars that were left on His body. However, let's look back to what He says in His final breath on the cross: “Father, forgive them …”

Christ endured worse things than we could ever imagine, and He still called for forgiveness to be had. So, I see no other way for us to continue in our lives holding on to the scars from being wronged by others, when our Christ above endured scars in order to save us from eternal damnation, and He did willingly because He loves us. I challenge you today to let go of those scars, release that grudge, and forgive those around you because scripture instructs us, and our Savior showed us that scars aren't beyond forgiveness.
A Powerful Environment for Prayerfulness: A Crash Course in Fasting

One time, I went a week with only water. I was a new believer in Jesus and a student at Georgia Tech. I had just heard about fasting, and I dove into the discipline head first out of zeal! I remember spending meal times studying, sleeping less since my body wasn’t spending energy digesting, praying late at night, and freaking out my roommate. Despite my ignorant way of entering into a fast, God graciously brought me through, and some of the prayers I prayed during that week, including asking God to let me go into ministry one day, are still bearing clear fruit in my life today.

Do you ever wish you could be more prayerful, as though it was on your mind more often, as though you could have more clarity with God or a more intentional atmosphere for prayer? Fasting, while rare in our 21st century first world context, is actually an amazingly powerful and relevant discipline to create a deeper atmosphere of prayerfulness. It provides unique clarity to the mind, reminds you of your fragile dependence on God, and gives a (literally) painful reminder to pray. When done well, it is a sure way to increase your prayer life and intimacy with God. When done poorly though, it looks something like this:

The next time I tried fasting, I was planning on going for a longer amount of time. I thought that meant I should eat a lot the night before starting, and I also flippantly drank a lot of coffee that day. The next day when I started the fast, I made it until 6pm. Then, the body shock hit me. My stomach was in a knot, I was dizzy, and my head grew a tremendous migraine. I tried to go to bed at 8pm to resolve it, but I woke up at 2am feeling much worse! I went in the closet at that moment in agony, prayed, and then ran into the kitchen to have more cereal and bananas than anyone should ever have in one sitting.

This might be the more common story for people who have fasted without some wisdom surrounding the discipline. But since then, I have learned more about the discipline and thus had several times of fasting that were more well informed by Scripture and therefore, better executed. For starters, if you have health problems that would make fasting dangerous, do not participate in this discipline. Instead, try the spiritual discipline of solitude to create a prayerful environment. Fasting is a tool, not a requirement. Next, if you have a caffeine or sugar dependence, spend a couple days without those first before fasting. Drink a lot of water, eat well, get rest, and take headache medication as directed. Next, if you are free of health issues and addictive stimulants, spend one or two days eating smaller meals than usual before going into a fast. While it may sound counter-intuitive to eat less before fasting, this is healthier because it is a gradual decline instead of a shock to the system. Fasting, as I am defining it here, is drinking only water and not eating for a planned period of time, and for that reason, it is important to stay very well hydrated throughout the duration of the fast.
In terms of creating a goal for yourself, it is better to succeed small than plan big and have to stop (especially when it involves a migraine and bananas at 2am!). Try fasting only one meal for your first fast, drinking only water during the time you would have eaten. If that goes well, you can plan another time to do a 24 hour fast (only water from dinner time the first day to dinner time the second day). If that also goes well, you can try a full day fast and then the next step would be multi-day (in which a small glass of juice every morning in addition to water throughout the day would not be “cheating”). Get to know your body’s ability to engage this discipline slowly, and remember that any bit of fasting that you do is a bonus, not a requirement.

For some other housekeeping related to fasting, you might think of the command in Matthew 6 to be secretive when you fast. This should be the case publicly, but you should tell whoever in your home buys groceries/makes dinner ahead of time so that they can plan for the lessened need for food. This is a courtesy that does not go against the command, and it is actually healthy that at least one person knows you are fasting. Furthermore, Isaiah 58 instructs us that a fast done without giving is really a fast unto oneself and not a fast unto the Lord. We do not want to make that mistake! For that reason, instead of using the extra money on yourself, give the money that you would have used on food to the church or a homeless ministry; instead of using the extra time to knock out your to-do list, give the time to prayer that you would have spent eating.

If you are able and willing, give fasting a shot this Lent in a controlled, healthy, and holy environment to grow in your faith! If you have any concerns, questions, or curiosities regarding fasting, I would love to talk any time about this discipline (rex.rennie@newsalem.org). Let us take advantage of it as Jesus anticipated that believers would in this period before He comes again:

“And they said to Him, ‘The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘You cannot make the attendants of the groom fast while the groom is with them, can you? But the days will come; and when the groom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.” Luke 5:33-35 NASB
Monday, March 8, Day 17:
Author: Taylor Finley

Our Source of Wisdom

I like to research topics. It’s not uncommon for me to get interested in something and then go out and find a book, website or series of YouTube videos to binge so that I can absorb as much info as possible about that topic. I could browse Wikipedia for hours and not lose interest. In the same way when I am about to do something new for the first time, I like to gather as much information before I begin. The more prepared I am with knowledge, the more comfortable I feel.

So what happens when I’m put into a situation where I have no time to prepare, no ability to research and not even a good way to find some guidance? Let me tell you I don’t do well.

This was the situation that I found myself in last August. Hannah and I had just found out that we were going to be having a baby and then just over a week later we lost the baby. We’d only been married about five months at that point and I was (and still am) learning how to be a husband. And all of a sudden were were experiencing such a great tragedy. One neither of us anticipated. I was lost. Where do I go for help? Who can guide me through this? How do I care for Hannah in all of this?

These were the questions I wanted answers to. No amount of research was going to give me the answers though. I needed a source of wisdom that isn’t found in books, Wikipedia or YouTube. I needed the True source of wisdom to help me.

Wisdom and strength belong to God;
counsel and understanding are his.
Job 12:13 (CSB)

Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.
James 1:5 (CSB)

When I needed it most, wisdom was only found in Jesus Christ, our access to God the Father the source of all wisdom. Even when we’re lost with no direction, God is still faithful to lead us through. Hannah and I are still in the middle of this story. The conclusion has not been written yet but above all we are clinging to God, our source of Wisdom.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own understanding;
in all your ways know him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Proverbs 3:5–6 (CSB)
The Pursuit of…

In life we are ALWAYS pursuing something. In case you want to argue with me on this one, think about your past week. We all pursue the necessities of life; food, housing, love and you can probably think of so many more things as well…vaccine, relationships, money, entertainment, joy, rest and the list goes on and on. But is there something even better for us to focus on in the midst of all of our pursuits?

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness —without it no one will see the Lord.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us to pursue two things: peace and holiness. Interesting that the writer would remind us of peace. In the time of this scripture, there was little peace. Instead, theirs was occupation, turmoil and strife. Even in our day and age we see similar issues…politics, weather, disease and so many other issues. Yet in the midst of it all we are still called to pursue peace. As Jesus reminds us in Matthew 5:9, Blessed are the peacemakers…

The second idea that the writer of Hebrews is reminding us to pursue is holiness. This idea is not perfection, but to pursue who Jesus is so we can strive to be like Him. When we pursue holiness there will always be a tension between our personal sin and our personal holiness. Jerry Bridges said the following in his book, The Pursuit of Holiness, “As we grow in holiness, we grow in hatred of sin; and God, being infinitely holy, has an infinite hatred of sin.” Such a wonderful reminder that our pursuit of holiness will impact our walk with the Lord and we are continually being sanctified through Him daily! Let you pursuit and holiness be evident to everyone around you, so that they too can see and hear the Gospel.

I am not asking for you to give up all the other pursuits, just think about the priority and the order of your pursuits. And yes, maybe there are some we do need to remove from our life as we prepare our hearts for Easter.

Lord, help me examine my heart, my desire and my pursuits. Please bring to mind the things that you do not desire so that I may rid them from my life and my thoughts. Help me draw closer to you and pursue you with an even greater vigor than yesterday. Amen
Wednesday, March 10, Day 19:
Author: Taylor Finley

Determined

What are you determined to accomplish in your life? Determination can be a very helpful feeling but I find so often that it comes on strong and will fade over time. I can be determined to accomplish a project but the determination fades as the reality of the work comes to light. This happened last year with our garden in our backyard. I got really excited about growing some vegetables. Dug out a nice sized plot to plant, got the seeds in the ground and that was the end of my determination. I was determined to get the garden started but the long, continual process of tending to a garden was not on my radar. Our garden is basically just weeds now because my determination was limited to the first part of the project.

Praise God that He is not the same as us.

*I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* -Philippians 1:6 (CSB)

God is determined to see the work He started to completion. Whatever he’s started in your life will be worked out.

If it were up to you or I, our ultimate fate would be an unknown. But, because God is the one who is working on us, then we know we won’t just become like a plot of weeds in the ground but He will tend to us daily. He will reap a good harvest from his labor.
Thursday, March 11, Day 20:  
Author: Rex Rennie

I met the Truth.

It was 12:45am, August 16th, 2012. I was sitting in my bed in my parents’ house in Kennesaw, Georgia. I was listening to “Passion: White Flag,” my first Christian CD. As the words rolled through my ears, “We raise our white flag… We surrender… All to You,” I felt the presence of God. He was there in my room, and He was tapping on my heart to do exactly what I was hearing. I raised my white flag. I surrendered, all to Him. I trusted in Christ. I found the truth, and I knew it through and through. Nothing in my life had ever been so true, so real, so certain. Jesus, who said of Himself that He is “the way and the truth” proves to be just so for each of us who know Him. As the world searches for truth in countless places, it is extraordinary to know Him, the truth, in the midst of it and to be charged with making it known.

When I think about “the truth” in the Scriptures, no place stands out to me so tremendously as John 18:36-38 (NASB): “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.’ Therefore Pilate said to Him, ‘So You are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’”

Can you imagine being Pilate? How much more ironic can an image possibly be? The man asks the Truth, who is standing right in front of him, what truth is! Truth is living and breathing for him to see. He is looking into the eyes of truth. He is talking with truth. He is walking next to truth as he brings the truth out before the crowds. He sends truth to be scourged… and crucified.

There was a lot more truth surrounding this scene as well. Pilate said, “I find no guilt in this man” (John 18:38). That was the truth. The soldiers came up to him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (John 19:3). That was the truth. The chief priests said later, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). That was the truth. There was the inscription given upon the cross where Pilate wrote “The King of the Jews” as a fact instead of as a claim (John 19:21). That too was the truth. Lastly, Jesus said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Thank God, indeed, that is the truth.

We live in a world today where the idea that an absolute “truth” even exists is offensive to people, but that is no surprise for we who believe. The Scriptures make clear that the world will always resist the truth through passing fads, ideals, and intricate plans to solve all of our problems. Yet throughout all of time, the truth remains and continues to be the only answer for humanity. To know Jesus is the only
thing in this life that meets the bar: He is truth. Do you believe this? Are you on a search for truth, or have you found it? Look no further than Him!
Friday, March 12, Day 21:
Author: Chris Chance

BE KIND

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” – Ephesians 4:32

If you are 35 years old or above, you probably have memories of renting a VHS tape from Blockbuster or a small video store and reading the sticker on it that said, “Be Kind, Please Rewind.” By just this simple act on the consumer’s part, it would save the video store from having to rewind everyone’s tape rentals. Now, that might sound like such an easy thing to do, but there was a reason for that sticker.

Lately on social media, I have noticed that there are a lot of meme’s about how we should be more concerned with being kind, than being right. There is much truth in that and although being kind seems so simple, it can really be a difficult thing to do. In Galatians 5:22, we read that kindness is one of the fruits of the Spirit. This means that if we are followers of Jesus and have the Spirit living in us, that we should be producing kindness…even when it might not be so easy to do. One of the things that we have tried to teach our children, through words and acts, is that we can always choose to be kind, even in our disagreements with others. However, that is where kindness becomes more problematic. One of the issues that blocks us from showing kindness is our pride. Another popular saying nowadays is that, “It costs nothing to be kind.” While I understand the sentiment in that, it may not always be true for every situation. It is easy to be kind to those who have shown kindness to us. But what about those other people…the ones that are just hard to deal with or even those who are flat out mean to us? Do we need to show kindness to them as well? Absolutely! In Luke 6:35, we are told, “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return…” That costs us something, as it is not our natural human nature to do this. However, in Colossians 3:12, Paul tells us, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” We have to take off our pride and sinful nature and “put on” kindness. It is a choice and something that we are only capable of by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Lord, help us to put on kindness in each situation that we are confronted with, so that you may receive the honor and glory and draw others to a relationship with You. Amen!
Monday, March 15, Day 23:
Author: Hannah Finley

Waiting

I struggle with waiting. I feel like I am constantly waiting for something and while that something has changed over the years there does seem to be a continuous vein of longing running through my life. That longing has taken different shapes; some years it has been a desire to be married, desire for a new job, desire for healing for chronically ill or terminally ill family and friends, desire for a child, a new car, reconciliation...the list goes on. I wrestle with the waiting. Perhaps I am just being discontent? Or perhaps I am simply not trusting God enough? While at times both of these things have been true, they are not the full story. Waiting is a normal and natural part of our earthly lives and longing for good things from God is not inherently sinful. However, the waiting is hard and wrestling with the “not yet and perhaps not ever” of it can so quickly lead us to despair. God never promises to fulfill all our desires, even when those desires are for good things. So how do we cling to our faith in his goodness when everything seems to be going the opposite of what we want?

I am certain that I will see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord. -Psalm 27:13-14

I am trying to learn to cling to the truth in these two verses. The psalmist gives two exhortations and a hope for while we’re waiting. He encourages us to be strong and let our hearts be courageous. Waiting is not for the faint of heart. Waiting oftentimes requires steadfastness even in the face of insurmountable odds. It requires us to have the strength to trust that what we see with our dim, human eyes is not anywhere close to the full picture of our situation. Waiting also requires courage. Merriam-Webster (Yes, I know it’s cliche to quote the dictionary, bear with me) defines courage as: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” Waiting is not made up of us sitting sweetly and waiting patiently with gentle smiles on our faces. Waiting is often a battle and one where we don’t know the outcome. Waiting requires much of us, it quite literally requires perseverance in the face of danger, fear, and difficulty. But like the psalmist we can be certain that we will “see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living.” He is not just waiting for the good that will come when God finally comes again and makes all things new. Instead, he is clinging to the belief that he will experience God’s goodness in the here and now, in this present world. At the end of your time of waiting you may not have the answer you so deeply desired and ardently prayed for but in the midst of your grief you can rest in the assurance that there is still good in this world...and so much unspeakable joy to be had in the next. So stand strong and wait on the Lord.
Tuesday, March 16, Day 24:  
Author: Robert Steltenpohl

Faithfulness

Thessalonians 3:3

Last year, I wrote about the phrase that has created a folk theology of sorts within the church, “God will never give you more than you can bear,” and I focused on the trials that we go through are hard for a reason. Many of you know what last year was like for our family; we were without Lisa and Elijah spent a lot of the year sick (not to mention the global pandemic that shut everything down.) It was difficult; it was trying; it caused me to doubt Him at times.

Let’s fast forward to now. My wife is home, my son is healthy, and we are united as a family and loving it every single moment of every day. We are here now because of His faithfulness. He never stepped away from us; He never forgot about us. He was probably closer than I ever imagined, and He was thinking about us every moment through our trial. So today, I turn the lens back on to you.

Where are you at today? Are you struggling? Are you thriving? Are you in the depths of doubt and despair? Are you sitting in the joy of the Lord? There are so many of you that answer yes to these questions, and you may even be caught in the middle of despair and joy. And let me be the first to tell you … IT’S OK. The exchange in Mark 9:14 shows us that we will doubt, and we should ask God to help with our doubt because it’s going to happen.

So, I ask you now to reflect on two things: 1) Think about the trials that you are/have been going through. I want you to take it, give it to Him, and let Him be faithful. 2) Those whom have gotten through a trial. Think about where you were in the midst of it. Dwell in those lowest moments. How did you get through? His faithfulness to you because He loves you. 2 Thessalonians 3:33 tells us this clearly, “But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”

We’re not told to hold strong by our own power, or that we got through our trials because we are so awesome. We’re told that He will provide because HE IS FAITHFUL. I’ve experienced it first hand, and I know some of you have as well. God is faithful, and our trials are great but God is greater.
God is Just

Romans 3:23-24  For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

God being a just God, is something that becomes abundantly clear in this season. God is always righteous and Holy, but He also always loving toward His creation. There are many times in the Bible where God is seen as the Judge. God, through His Son, Jesus will deliver the final judgement for each of us. The question is, where does that leave us? I remember as a child, being taught and singing about God's love. When I was 13-years old, I began to understand that I was separated from a Just God because of my sin. Being a Just God, He can't accept the sin that we have in our lives. The good news is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are justified. There was not any way for us alone to resolve the sin that separated us from God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tell us: For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. The judgment that we had coming was accepted by Jesus so that we could be in a relationship with God. This time of year, we should remember that if God because of his love for us had not sacrificed His Son, we would still be under God's righteous judgment. The Holy Spirit in us testifies to our justification as an heir with Jesus Christ to the kingdom of God. We are to live lives that demonstrate a Just God to the world around us through the Holy Spirit working through us.

Even in years that have been as hard as this one we can live lives that demonstrate the joy that salvation through Jesus provides to a lost world.
Faithfulness

Luke 16:10
He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much…

Faithfulness is the continued steadfast adherence to a person or thing to which one is bound by an oath, duty, obligation, etc.

It is undeviating allegiance to a person or institution, which, in the realm of religion, usually is undeviating allegiance to God. Maybe in understanding faithfulness, one should look at the word faith first. Webster’s definition is as follows:

Faithfulness of our God goes all the way back to the founding of the heavens and the earth, the universe and all that is within it. God created and has forever since been faithful in His upkeep of His universe.
In other words, up is always up and down is always down. Gravity always exist, light speeds along at a rate of 670,616,629 miles per hour. Always!

But most of all, faithfulness was given first by God to His creation, which in turn must be given back by us to our Creator, LORD God Almighty. Think about just a few of the events in Biblical history concerning His faithfulness.

God created man and woman. He gave them a place to live and food abundantly. Even today, God’s creation feeds the world, with a wisdom unparalleled, and our world has all that mankind needs to survive.

Noah, found by God to be faithful amongst the unfaithfulness of the rest of the world, took the design of an ark from God and proceeded to work the next 120 years to build it. No rain came until the ark was built, and as God was faithful to keep His promise, then the rains came for 40 days and 40 nights.

Our entire religion and our entire life are built on the foundation of faithfulness from an awesome God. Could we not take a small portion of our time, talent, and treasure to give back to God our faithfulness!
Friday, March 19, Day 27:
Author: Taylor Finley

Peace

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility.
Ephesians 2:13-14 (CSB)

Who is on the opposite side of the “wall of hostility” in your life? What would it take for that wall to be brought down? Walls go up when we hold grudges, refuse to forgive and allow resentment to direct us.

When Jesus died on the cross He made a way for us to have a relationship with God, a vertical relationship. But He also made a way for enemies to not only have a relationship but to be unified in Him. For two groups to become one. Paul calls Jesus our “peace,” not just meaning absence of conflict but that even relationships can flourish where animosity used to be.

Jesus said “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9) We can reflect the work of Christ by becoming peacemakers ourselves. Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 5:18, “Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” We get to participate in the work of God by reconciling people.

Where is there hostility in your life? Jesus may be trying to tear down walls that you are putting up between yourself and someone else. Where is God calling you to be a peacemaker? Are there broken relationships around you that he’s leading you to reconcile?

Pray today that God would lead you to reflect his heart and be willing to participate in His work of peace on earth.
Monday, March 22, Day 29:
Author: Charlie Johnson

Patience and Redemption

What thoughts come to mind when you think of the words Patience and Redemption in your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ? Patience is the ability or virtue of waiting for something without getting angry or upset. Jesus exemplified the greatest example of perfect patience when He completed His work on the cross and ascended back to Heaven at the side of the Father to patiently intercede for us to come to salvation through faith in Him.

(AMP) 2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord does not delay [as though He were unable to act] and is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is [extraordinarily] patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Jesus never forces His forgiveness and salvation on us, He gave us a free will, but He patiently waits for us to do our part to hear His call to repentance and to respond in faith to receive it with grateful, thankful hearts. And when we receive His sacrifice for our sin, one of the greatest words in scripture takes place, Redemption occurs! Redemption is the act of buying back something in exchange for payment to clear a debt.

(HKJV) I Peter 1:18-19 “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

A quote from Oswald Chamber’s writings in My Utmost for His Highest says, “The main message of the gospel is the reality of redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus labored in redemption to redeem the whole world and to place it perfectly whole and restored before the throne of God.” Understanding this and who we are in Christ after our salvation, how should we live?

(AMP) Ephesians 4:30 – “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God [but seek to please Him], by whom you were sealed and marked [branded as God’s own] for the day of redemption [the final deliverance from the consequences of sin].”

The Patience and Redemption of Christ calls us to salvation, and there is nothing easier than being saved, we do not have to work for it, we only have to believe and accept it by faith because it is the sovereign work of God only that brings a soul to new birth.

(AMP) Isaiah 45:22 – “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

(AMP) Job 19:25 “For I know that my Redeemer and vindicator lives, and at the last He will take His stand upon the earth.”
I pray you can sing the Hymn,” Redeemed”, with me. The chorus says “Redeemed, redeemed, Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! His child and forever I am.” If not, Jesus is patiently waiting to redeem you, why not come to Him in faith today and be “Redeemed” forever.
Tuesday, March 23, Day 30:
Author: Tim and Karen Brown

God’s Presence

_Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go._ Joshua 1:9

There are many wonderful verses in the Bible about the presence of God, verses that promise refreshment and restoration (Acts 3:20-21), peace (Philippians 4:7), salvation and rejoicing (Zephaniah 3:17), and so much more that is there for each of us who draw near to Him and seek Him with all our heart (Jeremiah 29:13). It is appropriate that, as we celebrate our Savior, His work upon the cross, and the empty tomb, we reflect upon the Lord’s presence in our own lives.

Tim: In the summer of 2002, I left to go up to Liberty University (eight hours away) for a couple of classes, leaving behind Karen and our son, who was two-years old at the time. We had recently learned we were expecting again. A week into the class, Karen went to her physician here in Georgia and learned our baby did not have a heartbeat. We were devastated. A very short time later, we suffered a miscarriage. I felt very helpless and alone, being hours away from Karen and sensing the aloneness she was also experiencing. It was a very hard time for us. However, during this difficult time and through our tears, I am very thankful for my Lord’s presence, love, grace, and peace and the support and prayers received by those with me at Liberty University, along with the prayers and words of encouragement to Karen by her family and those at New Salem. God’s presence and God’s supernatural peace were very real to me and I experienced a love as shown in 1 John 4:16.

Karen: The first time I truly experienced the presence of God was, of course, when He convicted me of my sin and made me aware of my need for His forgiveness. After I repented, the shame that I felt as a result of His presence was replaced with a sweet peace. His presence has been with me ever since. Another time, in particular, I can recall was after the death of my father when, once again, He gave me that sweet peace that is described in Philippians 4:7.

The presence of God is something of which this world is in desperate need. There is a saying which has been spread across many old church billboards: If God seems far away, guess who moved? Although it may seem hopeless at times, the Bible says, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:8-10). We must realize there is an urgency to this command because there will come an end to His call as is made clear in Isaiah 55:6, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.” He is waiting on us as Psalm 27:8 says, “You have said, ‘Seek my face.’” Let us echo David’s reply “My heart says to you, ‘Your face, Lord, do I seek.’” He will be faithful to respond (2 Timothy 2:13). Thank you, Lord, for your presence and for your indwelling Spirit.
Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16
Wednesday, March 24, Day 31:
Author: Anthonia Ajiboye

FREEDOM

The term freedom could mean absent of constraint, restriction, violent, pressure or being set free from slavery. Freedom in Jesus Christ connotes both physical and spiritual liberation. It entails total deliverance or recovery from eternal condemnation into full son-ship in Christ Jesus. My salvation experience as a Muslim covert during my college days rewrite my life story of slavery into freedom in and through Christ Jesus. I accepted Jesus as the Lord and Savior of my life at the age of 24 through my Christian roommates that lavished the love of Christ on me. They did not verbally share the gospel message with me but they thrilled me with the love of Christ. So, I decided to be Christ’s follower. When my life received this turn around, I couldn't travel back to my father because he was an Islamic cleric and Islam allows its adherent to eliminate one’s child or anyone that will not practice the religion of Islam. I was even rejected by my brother as a result of my faith in Christ. My brother told me on phone that my case has been discussed at the Mosque and it has been finalized that I deserved death. But, Jesus Christ set me free from every threat of death.

The above testimony is a path to freedom for me and for anyone that desires to live for Christ. Jesus Christ is all the world to me, even when my earthly father, siblings and/or friends forsake me. I am confident that I have Jesus as my father and friend. Now, I can confidently say I am free from sin and second death. Christ forgave all my sins and ushered me into a new life in Christ. Apostle Paul is right when he affirmed, “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). That’s what it means to have freedom. The truth of the gospel message liberates and conforms anyone that chose to follow Jesus. Paul says, “for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). This freedom in Christ is both spiritual and physical freedom. The spiritual aspect has to do with forgiveness of sins and the guarantee of eternal life with the Father. The physical freedom is the freedom from external compulsion or restrictions that entangles us from full performance. Jesus Christ liberated me and connected my destiny to eternity, He saved me from both physical and spiritual death. The Bible says; if the Son shall set you free you will be free indeed. I am free indeed, I have been set free from my slavery into freedom in Christ Jesus.

I am inviting you to embrace this freedom as you accept Jesus Christ into your life today, if you have not done so. If you have, I will encourage you to continue in that freedom that Jesus Christ gave to the whole world. Peace be with you!
Repentance

“Recalculating,” says the GPS after missing my turn, “in 500 feet make a U-Turn.” So often when driving somewhere unfamiliar, and you make a wrong turn or miss a turn the most sensible thing to do is to turn around and go back. To get back on the path so you can make it to your destination. Thankfully we have GPS built into our phones so that we won’t get lost. I remember driving for the first time back home from college. The two-ish hour drive from Athens is a pretty easy one for me now. 316 to I-85 to I-285 to I-75 and then get off at Delk or South Marietta Parkway. But the first time I drove I remember just trying to follow verbal directions from my dad and turned off onto Jimmy Carter Boulevard from I-85. This was before the iPhone was a thing. I thought I was going in the right direction but I realized eventually, I’m not where I’m supposed to be. I had to call my dad and get him to direct me back on my way.

We often take wrong turns in our spiritual journey. Whether is getting distracted, holding on to pet sin, or rejecting the faith all together, we can take wrong turns and end up somewhere we didn’t intend to go. What should we do in those cases? The Bible call it repentance.

“Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah.” Acts 3:19-20 (CSB)

Peter, speaking to a crowd of people in Jerusalem explains what has happened to Jesus and gave them this instruction. “Repent and turn back.” Repentance means taking a 180, a U-Turn. Turn from your sin and re-turn to God. Repentance is also agreeing with God about sin. It’s saying, “This sin isn’t life-giving for me, it will actually destroy me. God I see how destructive this is and need to get rid of it!”

When we find ourselves in that spot, it is the Holy Spirit giving us the GPS directions, “Make a U-Turn.” And if you don’t have the Holy Spirit guiding you then you also need to call your Father to get Him to help you direct your way back home.
Friday, March 26, Day 33:
Author: James K. Ajiboye

His Sacrifice

Hebrews 9:11-15
But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

Sacrifices are common practices in some World religions. The most common sacrifice in these religions is human sacrifice to idols which is a detestable thing to God. In the Jewish religion there are two major categories of sacrifice: Mandatory sacrifices and voluntary sacrifices. Under the mandatory sacrifices are the sin offering and the trespass offering. The main purpose of mandatory sacrifices is to atone for human sins and for cleansing. The word atonement means to appease, to cause reconciliation: This recompilation is between the holy God and the sinful humankind. Under the voluntary sacrifices are the burnt offering, grain offering, and the peace offering. Other offerings in the Old Testament era are embedded in these three major offerings [Read the book of Leviticus 1-7 and Numbers 15].

All these sacrifices are a foreshadow of what Christ came to fulfill through His death on the Cross of Calvary. God offered the most perfect element of sacrifice to the whole world for the forgiveness and remission of our sins, once and for all. Jesus Christ carried all our sins to the cross in order to turn the wrath of God away from sinful human beings. So, His sacrifice provided a way of escape for the punishment of our sins. By His sacrifice we now have access to approach the throne of grace and receive help in time of need. Jesus Christ is the perfect sacrifice for our redemption. Praise be to His holy name!
Monday, March 29, Day 35:
Author: Hannah Finley

Gentleness

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. The law is not against such things.* -Galatians 5:22

Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit. I know that is an incredibly simplistic and obvious statement, after all if you’re like me and you grew up in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School odds are at some point you learned a song that listed all the fruit of the spirit. Yet despite that list being ingrained in our minds, I’m afraid that many of us (myself included) don’t often consider what the fruit of the spirit actually are. Even more specifically, what is gentleness?

To be honest, I wrote the first part of this devotional and then realized I didn’t know how to answer that question. Thankfully my husband was able to share some wisdom on the topic from a professor he had in seminary. Per my husband, that professor, Dr. Kendrick, defines gentleness as the application of just enough force. So if you’re handling an egg you are gentle with it by keeping it protected and not throwing it around. Excessive force will lead to the egg breaking. Treat a hammer and nail the same way and you won’t be building anything fast. Jesus was always gentle. He treated those who needed healing, comfort and love--gently. When he had to deal with the Pharisees he used just enough force to accomplish what needed to happen. Even in driving out the money changers he only did what was necessary to clear the temple.

If this last election cycle made anything clear to me, it was that this kind of gentleness is not something that many aspire to. Just look at many of the politicians, actors, celebrities, authors, etc. who capture so much of our attention. Gentleness is frequently missing...but anger, hate, fiery speech, “hot takes,” inflammatory rhetoric, etc. are commonplace. This should concern us. Even in my own life I can see how my desire to have the perfect comeback to win a disagreement or the best argument to prove my point tends to supersede any sense of gentleness I have. At times, winning feels far more important than being Christlike. It doesn’t matter where this situation is taking place, it could be at home, at work, with my friends, online, etc. I can become so easily blinded by my objective that I miss the most important part of any interaction--to reflect God. There is a time and place for strong words and conviction, but are we handling an egg like it’s a hammer?

In James 3:13 it says, “Who among you is wise and understanding? By his good conduct he should show that his works are done in the gentleness that comes from wisdom.” My study Bible has a note on this verse which states “As faith is demonstrated by works, so also wisdom is demonstrated by good conduct and gentleness.” So gentleness is an outworking of wisdom and that wisdom is what tells us whether to treat a situation like an egg or a hammer.
Tuesday, March 30, Day 36:
Author: Racheal Chance

SERVE OTHERS – SERVE GOD

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
1 Peter 4:10-11

In 1929 at 8 years old, my grandmother, Eloise Dolora Stewart, was hit by a bus while walking home from the grocery store. At the hospital, a sheet was placed over her body and she was pronounced dead. However, God had another plan for Eloise. A nurse noticed her body move which led to emergency care and a long recovery.

So, what did her story look like after this event? Eloise learned to walk again and at 12 years old, she received Christ as her Lord and Savior and was baptized. As an adult, God placed on Eloise’s heart a call that He calls all of us to as seen in Philippians 2:3-5 “doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Eloise was pressed with a burden to love others, share God’s word and serve others at the Veteran’s hospital during WWII, in her church, and at the Council on Aging.

What does that look like for us? We are called to be attentive to His voice, available to His plan, prepared to obey His words, and open to God using us as a vessel so that in all things, He may be glorified. May we look to Him through prayer and His word for how we may serve others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us through your Son what it means to be a servant as seen in your Word that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others, and to give His life as a ransom for many. May you place a burden on our hearts, areas in which you are calling us to serve – our family, our church, our community and others across this world. Continue to grow our understanding of your Word and what a servant heart looks like, so that we may be used as a vessel to lead others to You. Amen.
“I Know You and I Love You!”

God has always taught me things of Himself through children whether from my babysitting years in college, teaching children in a classroom setting, through the struggles and joys of raising my own two children, or through our foster babies. Recently I was reminded of this gentle way God teaches when our two year old foster son began saying, “Know you” in response to our, “I love you.” While the sound he was saying was simply no, it translated at the first moments of hearing it in my head as know. And it went deeper as I responded back to him, “I know you and I love you!” Wow! When I say that I love God, I should be able to say the same to him, “I know you and I love you.”

Our relationship with God is personal; therefore to love Him should be to know Him, and to know Him should be to love Him more. Each part is a cyclical response to the other. My knowledge of God leads my heart to love Him more deeply, and my love for Him drives me to seek Him and know Him in greater ways = intimacy.

The Christian’s purpose in life can be found in this verse, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30). What would happen if we lived this verse out by seeking to know the Lord our God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength?

God desires to be known*. Jesus talking to God in John 17:3 said, “This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent—Jesus Christ.” There are simple ways to know God more as a believer. Look around you. We are without excuse as we look at this beautiful world filled with people that are made in the image of God (Psalm 19, Romans 1). And then there are ways to know God that require discipline: read His word, meditate on His word, study the word, pray, praise Him, fast, attend corporate worship, serve, evangelize the lost, and disciple others. We know the things we must do to know Him more deeply, but are we willing to do them? Knowing and loving God completely is not satisfied in one moment when we surrender our lives to Christ. Instead, it is a daily commitment of seeking and surrender for a lifetime of knowing Him more deeply. If we truly desire to love God as we say that we do, then we should be carving out the time to actually do these things and then be able to say to Him daily, “I know you more and I love you more!”

What is your desire as we head into this Lent season? Is it to love God more? Let’s take the time to seek Him more! As you reflect on all the things Jesus endured for you….his life, his sufferings, his sacrifice, his death, burial, and resurrection, let’s pray these verses for each other:

Ephesian 1:17-19 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray
that the perception of your mind may be enlightened so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His vast strength.

*Do you have a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ? This link explains how to do that: https://www.cru.org/us/en/how-to-know-god/would-you-like-to-know-god-personally.html or talk to our pastoral staff at New Salem.
Thursday, April 1, Day 38
Author: Nicholas Pepper

Good Friday?

First, we want to invite you and your family to join us Friday for a night of worship and remembrance at 6pm on April 2. To remember what Jesus did for us personally and for the entire world. You can worship with us online well at newsalem.org/live

It still amazes me that we look at this day and call it good. Good that Jesus would have to die because of my sins? Good that He would hang on a cross so that I could be justified before a Holy God? Good that He took the punishment and not me?

Romans 3:23-24 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

As terrible as that day was, without it, where would I be? Friday is good, because of salvation, forgiveness and love. Friday is good, because through Jesus I am forgiven and saved from a punishment that I personally deserve. Friday is good, because it reminds me of the good news of the Gospel.

Friday is good because it reminds us that Sunday is coming!

Hebrews 12:2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne.

Our Response and Prayer:
Lord, thank you for taking everything upon yourself. Thank you for taking the pain and humiliation because of my sins. Thank you God for your perfect forgiveness and salvation. Thank you for reminding me that my salvation wasn't free, that I could not do it on my own and that I need a savior! Thank you God for the resurrection to come on Sunday and that Christ is alive today! Thank you God thank I can have an abundant life through Christ each and every day!
Romans 5:6-10
6 For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! 9 Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath. 10 For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! 11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have now received this reconciliation through Him.

From helpless to hope
From sinners to saved
From enemies to sons and daughters
From darkness to light
From sadness to joy

Take time today to praise the One who took your place, who paid your debt, who made you free:
I hear the Savior say, "Thy strength indeed is small,
Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me thine all in all."

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Lord, now indeed I find Thy pow’r and Thine alone,
Can change the leper’s spots And melt the heart of stone.
For nothing good have I Where-by Thy grace to claim;
I’ll wash my garments white In the blood of Calv’ry’s Lamb.
And when, before the throne, I stand in Him complete,
"Jesus died my soul to save,” My lips shall still repeat.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.
Saturday, April 3, Day 40
Author: Kathryn and Garrett Skrbina

The in between…

Holding on to Hope in the Midst of our Waiting and Doubt

I remember the anticipation I felt leading up to our wedding day. It felt like time just slowly crept by and our day would never arrive; but I knew eventually I would wake up and it finally be here. And I was right! Suddenly, it was the day before the wedding, we were decorating, rehearsing, and spending time with family. I was filled with excitement, but also an abundance of nerves that I hadn’t had before.

I started to worry about silly things like tripping down the aisle, flubbing up our wedding vows, or forgetting our first dance routine. On the other hand, I also started to worry about more serious things like, “What would happen if I woke up, got ready, walked down the aisle, and was stood up. What if he suddenly realized that this was a bad decision? What if he doesn’t want to marry me anymore? What if he doesn’t show up?”

Rest assured, none of these things happened. I made it down the aisle without tripping over my feet, made it through our vows and dance routine without a problem, and had a handsome groom waiting at the altar to marry me that afternoon. I was worrying for no reason. I knew he loved me, and deep down, I knew he would be standing there on our wedding day, but that didn’t stop the doubt and worry from creeping in.

Similarly, did the people who had witnessed and heard of Jesus’ brutal death on the cross experience doubt and a loss of hope in their waiting? Were those who believed left wondering if He really was who He claimed to be? He claimed to be the Messiah they had been waiting hundreds of years for. How could this Messiah be so easily slain? Was He really who He had claimed to be, or had they placed their hope in an imposter?

Do we worry and doubt Him, too? Have we become complacent in our everyday life and forgotten that our Messiah will return? Matthew 24:36 says, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father only.”

We don’t know when He’s coming, just like the people who witnessed and told of His crucifixion on Calvary; but unlike them, we don’t have to worry, doubt, or wonder if He is who He said. We KNOW!! He’s already defeated death! He will return! Are you ready for that day to come?
Thank you for joining us on a 40 day prayer and preparation journey through this Lent Season. We pray that it was beneficial to you. If you would like to talk to someone about your next steps as a Christian, the pastors and staff would love to talk with you.

Connect with us by going to newsalem.org/connect and let us know what is on your mind, or by joining us on a Sunday morning at 836 New Salem Rd, Kennesaw GA 30152, at 9:00 or 10:45 am.

We would love to celebrate Easter with you, April 4th at 9:00am and 10:45am.

NewSalem.org/Easter