



LENT 2017

Part II



VINTAGE**CHURCH**

INTRODUCTION

Lent is historically a time of repentance; by reading scripture, fasting, and praying, we want to dig up things in our heart that we need to repent of and trust all the more in the Lord. Our goal in observing Lent is not to earn favor with God by fasting and praying, but to allow us a season to reflect on the reality of the darkness that surrounds us and the light available in Jesus. Our hope is that this Lent devotional guide will help us as we pursue what God would have for us as a church this season.

As we journey through Lent together, there will be views each week of our own sin. The point of this isn't to berate ourselves, but to truly grasp our need for the death of Jesus on our behalf. When we understand the weight of our sin and the depths of our need for mercy, we truly understand the monumental nature of what was accomplished on Calvary. And as we look at our sin each week we'll have opportunities to worship the Lord for his endless grace and steadfast love towards us despite our sin.

We encourage you to dive deep into Lent. Use this guide to work through areas of your life that distract you from the Lord and clutter your life. Traditionally Lent observers pick something to fast from throughout the 40 days of Lent. We'll be observing these fast days on Thursdays, but participate in whatever way is most helpful for your spiritual growth this season. Consider what will allow you to draw closer to God the most, and exercise courage in your decisions to fast.

Going through this guide as a family

This guide has been written for individuals to walk through Lent and prepare for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. We want to invite you as parents to lead your kids in this journey. We are excited about the idea of Vintage families sitting with their kids each day during Lent and opening the word, talking about their relationships with Jesus, and praying together. Maybe your family already does this, or maybe you've never done anything like this. This guide has been designed with a supplement for families to implement this guide for family discussion. Here are some helpful tips as you help your kids in this journey:

- **Lead** - The family supplement will help in applying this guide to children, but you as parents will have to apply it to your specific children. We encourage you to dive in; it's not unrealistic to lead preschoolers in spiritual discussions, bible reading, and prayer each night. This guide will work best if you as parents prayerfully engage in the guide personally before leading your children.
- **Pick a time** - Choose a time that will work for your family during the week. The guide is designed for 5 days each week and will take around 15 minutes with kids.
- **Make it a priority** - Communicate to your kids that this is a priority. The exercise of fasting during the week and putting things on pause once a day communicates to our kids that we value Jesus more than anything else.
- **Get in a rhythm** - This guide will lead you to Easter. Our hope and prayer is that your family will develop a rhythm of being in God's word and praying together, and that it will continue well past Easter Sunday.



5

HOPE ONLY IN JESUS

Monday, March 27 - Friday, March 31

MONDAY

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

We're in the thick of March Madness yet again. Basketball is on every restaurant TV and maybe playing in your break room at work. March Madness elicits a huge emotional investment from all sorts of people, and sometimes they don't deal with that emotion well. With this year's tournament will come yet another round of embarrassing fan photos from the bleachers. Maybe you've seen this year's version of the meme, a young Northwestern fan who ended up sobbing and yelling at the referee towards the end of Northwestern's loss to Gonzaga. Within minutes the clip of him crying in the stands was all over the internet.

If you're a sports fan that may close to home, but everyone has allegiances, whether to sports teams or otherwise, and we all experience a time when loss in that area makes us lose heart. Imagine a time you were undone by getting turned down for a job, or when a house you liked got bought by someone else, or when a university didn't admit you. Inevitably at some point you'll do the opposite of what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 4, and you'll place your hope in something other than Jesus.

Most of the time we place our hope in what our future could be if we get a specific thing or become a specific thing. When we do this we anchor our well-being on a future likelihood, and when that likelihood disappoints us or doesn't come to pass our well-being is left unmoored. We end up like the Northwestern kid, sobbing in the stands over something that could never bring us hope.

This week we're assessing what it means to place our hope in Jesus alone. Take time to list out areas of your life where you hope (or you're tempted to hope) in something other than Jesus. When you're finished with your list, take time to pray over what you've written.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Father, reveal to me the ways I look to other things for my security, well-being, and happiness.

Give me focus and clarity as I search out idols in my life that lead me away from you, and help me as I root these idols out of my life. I believe that by your Spirit and by your power you can help me hope in you alone.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Family discussion:

- Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- Discuss with your family what you think Paul means when he talks about an "eternal weight of glory."
- What are your hopes and dreams for the near future? For the rest of your life?
- How might you feel if these hopes never happened?
- We put our hope in Jesus because we will never be disappointed by him, and will be able to enjoy him forever! Pray together that you would live in this reality.

TUESDAY

Read Job 1:13-22 and Philippians 4:11-13

This week we're talking about hoping in Jesus alone. As we seek to do this, we need to figure out how to hope in Jesus even through the difficulties of life.

If, like Job, you got word that you lost your livelihood, or that your family was in a tragic accident, it makes sense for you to grieve. We see in Job 1:13-22 that Job tore his robe and shaved his head, traditional signs of grief, and in all this he didn't sin against God. Grief over the loss of your family, and even over losing a house or a job, is an appropriate response to the difficulties of life.

It's wrong of us to think that hoping in Jesus alone means not being fazed by the hard parts of life. That's really just an effort to disengage from life rather than to live faithfully. We can disengage through two ways, either by becoming Stoics or ascetics. Stoic Greek philosophers advocated accepting all events in your life equally, whether joyful or tragic, and being okay with them all. Unfortunately, trying to protect against feelings of loss or grief is just a futile attempt at making your heart bulletproof. Placing your sole hope in Jesus doesn't mean being free of grief. It means that after grief has had its turn, hope has the last word.

Similarly, as we try to place our hope in Christ alone, we don't need to become ascetics. Ascetics throughout the ages like monks and hermits have abstained from good food, nice clothes, and other luxuries in an effort to curb their sinful attachments to those things. However, just because you give up luxury doesn't mean you've stopped worshipping it. Abstinence curbs behavior, not idolatry. Maybe as you've fasted during Lent you've experienced a bit of that.

To hope only in Christ doesn't mean being unfazed by life's storms or renouncing all things that could lead you away from Christ. Doing either of those things is impossible. Instead of entirely unplugging from the world around us to protect ourselves from losing hope, we have to learn how to be in

this world and still hope in Jesus. We also have to learn how to bring everything to the Lord, whether grief or repentance or a lack of hope. Note what Job did after he lost everything: he laid down and worshiped God. He brought his grief and his hurt to the Lord. At God's throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) we are unconditionally loved and received.

Pray:

Take time to pray about what it means to weather life's storms and hope in Jesus alone. Be personal and real with God; make this time of prayer your own. If you've experienced recent or long-standing grief, pray that the Lord would help you process that grief with him and prevail in hoping in him. Pray that God would help steel you against life's future hurdles, and that you would learn "the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." (Philippians 4:11)

Family discussion:

- Read Job 1:13-22 and Philippians 4:11-13
- What did Job understand that allowed him, even in the most horrible circumstance, to say "blessed be the name of the LORD"?
- Do you think God expects us to not have emotions like anger and sadness?
- What can we do to handle these emotions in a way that is pleasing to God?
- Pray that God would help us seek him in difficult times.

WEDNESDAY

Read Luke 15:11-24

What do you think the prodigal son was hoping in when he asked his father for his inheritance? What image of the future was in the son's head when he took his gold, packed his bags, and left?

Take a moment to look back over the list you made on Monday. Maybe some of the items on your list are just default areas of temptation: success, popularity, wealth, etc. But, if you were honest with yourself, some of the items on that list are areas of sin that are particular to you. They're your "reckless living." (Luke 15:13)

By hoping in Jesus alone, Jesus becomes the sole recipient of your worship. By doing so we look to him for our security, well-being, and happiness, and we delight in the fact that he himself provides those things for us. However, when we hope in other things we squander our worship just like the prodigal son squandered his inheritance.

But Jesus told this parable not to highlight the prodigal son's faithlessness. The most striking aspect of the story is the way the father received his son. The prodigal expected to come back as a lowly servant, yet the father ran to him with open arms, dressed him up, and prepared a feast for him. As you look at the things you've hoped in other than Jesus, remember that this is the way God receives you when you return to him.

Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Before you pray, take a look back at your list.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Father, I know that I have squandered my worship on lesser things. I have spent my hope in reckless living. Father, forgive me for all the things I turn to other than you.

I trust that you welcome me and that you receive me as a loving Father.

Thank you.

I trust that you understand and can sympathize with my brokenness.

Thank you.

I trust that you receive me with more grace and mercy than I can fathom.

Thank you.

In the name of Jesus I worship you and pray these things. Amen.

Family discussion:

- Read Luke 15:11-24
- What do you think the son was hoping his life would look like after getting his father's money?
- What was he hoping his life would look like once he returned home?
- What was the father's response when he saw his son return?
- What does this teach us about God?
- Pray, thanking God for welcoming us back every time, no matter what!

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

"One of the goals of this season is to reveal habits or mindsets that may be preventing us from experiencing true freedom and wholeness. The restrictions imposed by the Lenten fast seek not to deny the goodness of the many blessings we enjoy in this life, but rather to remind us that they are, in fact, gifts. Above all, a fast is intended to nurture a sense of gratitude to the giver and to encourage us to share these gifts with those in need." - Beth Bevis

Traditionally, people have fasted by eliminating luxury items from their diets, but the nature of your fast is up to you. If you're new to fasting, just leave an item or two you'd normally eat each day out of your diet. Every time you start to get a craving for those items, you will be reminded of your fast, and then you can take the initiative to pray instead of eat.

If you're unsure about whether or not denying yourself something you're used to has any real value, read the following quote. It might help you see why so many practice this discipline.

"The normal 'food' that we eat (distractions, busyness, entertainment, ordinary life) works to shield us from the deeper chaos that lurks beneath the surface of our lives.

Lent invites us to stop eating, so to speak, whatever protects us from having to face the desert that is inside of us. It invites us to feel our smallness, to feel our vulnerability, to feel our fears, and to open ourselves to the chaos of the desert so that we can finally give [God] a chance to feed us." - Ronald Rolheiser

In whichever way you choose to fast, whether daily or weekly, from a food or a habit such as social media, a critical part is prayer. Whenever you have a craving for the item(s) you've given up, it's a great idea to pray and to talk to God about it. Each time you talk to God during your fast, listen for his response. God is thrilled to be in a relationship with you where you share openly and honestly what's on your heart and in your head. Let him share the same with you.

Listen to God's love as he shares.

Family discussion:

- Read Joel 2:12-13 again.
- If you are doing this at the beginning of the day, remind your family that Thursday is a day of fasting from whatever you decided last week. Talk about strategies you can use throughout the day to turn fasting into prayer and praise.
- If you are doing this at the end of the day, share with each other the ways you used your time of fasting to pray or to think about Jesus. You can also encourage each other in the struggle, if it was a day of struggle.

FRIDAY

After four days of prayer, examining our hearts, and confessing our sin, today we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

“[Repentance] means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God.” -John Piper

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

Throughout the season of Lent we progress towards celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus, in which we find a source of humility and repentance. John Stott said this:

Every time we look at the cross Christ seems to be saying to us, “I am here because of you. It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying.” Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we have visited a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.

Repentance is the practice of humble faith. In humility we are aware of our failings, our weaknesses, and our shortcomings, and most importantly, our inability to do anything about them. We realize that Jesus died the death we deserved. However, in faith we trust that God is merciful, that we are redeemed in Jesus, and we re-orient our lives around that truth.

Perhaps you've already made steps in that direction this week. Take out your list from Monday and think back over it. As you pray, be real with God about areas you have and haven't repented over, and ask the Lord to help you as you turn from other things to hope in Jesus alone.

Family discussion:

- Read back over the story of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-24
- Discuss with your family what it means to repent.
- How can we help each other as a family hope in Jesus alone?
- How can we help each other turn away from hoping in other things?
- Take time to pray and thank God that he welcomes us as a loving Father with open arms.



6

FORGIVENESS

Monday, April 3 - Friday, April 7

MONDAY

Read Matthew 18:21-35

The closer one gets to Jesus, the larger the cross becomes.

When you see something off in the distance and measure it with your fingers in front of your eye, it appears only a couple of inches tall (think of the photos tourists take of the Eiffel Tower pinched in their fingers). But the closer one gets to the tower, or building, or mountain, the greater the reality of its magnitude becomes. The same is true of the cross of Jesus.

It's ludicrous, and even dangerous, to think that the more we understand Jesus the less we need forgiveness. The closer we get to Jesus the more we understand the magnitude of the cross. In Matthew 18 the servant owed the king 10,000 talents. A talent was worth 20 years' wages; he would have to work 2,500 lifetimes to repay that debt! The number that Jesus uses here is a laughable amount of money. At first glance you might think what this servant owes the king is a gross metaphorical exaggeration of the sin debt that we owe God. The closer you grow to Jesus though, the more you'll understand the fittingness of that number.

Hopefully over the last five weeks you have seen the cross of Jesus grow larger and larger. Hopefully you see your need for forgiveness from a holy God greater now than you did two months ago. The first message from this parable for you is this - be free!

Imagine the freedom this servant felt at first, having been freed from an impossible debt. Jesus doesn't want you to spend the rest of your life trying to repay a debt you never could. He doesn't want you to live with the guilt of someone else paying your debt for you. He wants you to be free, to be grateful, to rejoice, and to embrace it.

This week we are going to dwell on forgiveness. Today, spend some time thanking Jesus, rejoicing in his forgiveness, and being awed by the magnitude of the debt from which you've been forgiven.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

God, I realize that I'm the servant who has been forgiven an un-payable debt. Forgive me for underestimating the heinousness of my sin. Forgive me for my pride in thinking that I could pay off that debt by the things I could do for you. Thank you for forgiveness. Thank you for setting me free.

Today, I pray that you would give me a better perspective of the magnitude of the cross. As you have revealed my own brokenness I pray that today you would also reveal to me your righteousness, which I know is now mine through Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray. Amen.

Family discussion:

- Read Matthew 18:21-35
- Try to put the numbers from the parable in terms your kids would understand. 1 talent = 20 years' wages. 10,000 talents = 200,000 years of wages = working until the year 202,017 to pay it off!
- With kids we need to explain parables that adults might understand. Take the time to explain to them that the king is God, and we are the ones who owe him a debt that would take 200,000 years to pay off. The king forgave the debt in the story, as God forgives our debt because of Jesus.
- Close by thanking Jesus for paying a debt that we could never pay.

TUESDAY

Yesterday we focused on the first half of the parable. Today we're going to focus on the servant's response.

Read Matthew 18:21-35 again.

Our first response to this parable has to be overwhelming thankfulness to God, considering he forgave us a debt of enormous proportion. Yesterday we focused on that part of the story. However, by looking at the context of this parable we can better understand Jesus' true intent. Jesus tells this story after Peter asked how many times he has to forgive someone who sins against him. This parable concludes with harsh words ("you wicked servant!") and a harsh response towards the one who fails to forgive as he was forgiven.

Lest we think this parable is a one off, let's read Jesus' words which conclude his teaching of the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:12 and 14-15:

...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

These are strong words. These are Jesus' words for us this week.

The servant in the parable comes across looking like a greedy and selfish fool. We might clearly see the servant as shortsighted, yet still harbor bitterness, anger, and un-forgiveness towards people in our lives who have offended us. When we store up debts against others it affects both our relationship with them and with our heavenly Father. This is not to be glib about people who have hurt you. There are probably people in your life who have inflicted life-altering wounds (in fact, the amount the servant was not willing to forgive was still a lot - around \$10,000 in our context).

However, in a relational context your inability to forgive others hurts you more than it hurts them, and it further communicates a poor understanding of the gospel (we will talk about that more tomorrow).

No doubt in reading through these words the Lord has brought to mind people in your life who you feel incapable of forgiving or who you simply refuse to forgive. For today, let's focus on our relationship with Jesus. How thankful are you that there is no sin in your life that Jesus is unwilling to forgive? Take a moment to compare the wounds inflicted upon you with the wounds you've inflicted upon Jesus through your sin and idolatry. That might sound like a dark thought exercise, but unless we understand Jesus' forgiveness toward us we will never extend it to others.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Heavenly Father, the more I dwell on people in my life who have offended me the more I'm in awe of how you have forgiven my offense against you. Thank you, again, for Jesus. Thank you for the forgiveness that is mine because of who he is and what he did for me. Give me a better understanding of grace today, so that I can offer it to others. In his name I pray, Amen.

Family discussion:

- Recap the parable from yesterday (Matthew 18:21-35)
- Read Matthew 6:12-15
- Ask your family why God thinks it is important that followers of Jesus forgive other people.
- Remind your family that Jesus even wants us to love and forgive our enemies!
- Pray for each other the God would give you the strength to forgive others.

WEDNESDAY

Jesus will never ask us to do something that we can't do when empowered by his Spirit. Do you believe that?

Read Ephesians 4:32-5:2

The saying goes, “to err is human, to forgive divine.” However, God’s word clearly and strongly commands us to practice that divine act of forgiving. And yet there’s nothing that is less natural for us humans to do than to forgive. John Piper once said this in a sermon:

“Forgiving is to a fallen human heart what flying is to a heavy human body...”

Left to ourselves, forgiveness seems as impossible as flying. If we look at the world around us we see forgiveness truly modeled about as often as we see people flying down the street. But John Piper continued in his sermon to say this:

“The gospel bids us fly—it commands us to forgive those who have wronged us. But it also gives us wings.”

Forgiveness is irrational, and like many things Jesus asks us to do, the first step is realizing that we can't do it on our own. Maybe this has been a difficult week to read because you've had serious wounds inflicted upon you. For many of you, even as firm believers in the gospel of Jesus, even as ones who understand the un-payable debt Jesus paid on your behalf, you can't imagine the gospel “giving you wings” to forgive. Ultimately we can't muster the strength on our own to forgive, but being changed by the gospel we can, and we must, forgive as we have been forgiven.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Lord God Almighty, lover of my undeserving soul, thank you for your grace in my life. My desire is to be an imitator of you, even in the area of forgiveness. I know this is what you desire from your children, and I confess that I am incapable on my own. But you are capable, and I ask that you help me as I seek to forgive as I have been forgiven. Amen.

Family discussion:

- Remembering what we talked about yesterday, share the ways in your life that you worship God faithfully.
- Share the ways that you turn to things other than God for comfort or for encouragement.
- Read 1 John 1:9, then Hosea 11:8-9 and 14:4-9.

THURSDAY

Read Joel 2:12-13

A spiritual discipline or exercise often observed during Lent is fasting. If you're choosing a weekly fast, we'll observe this each Thursday of Lent.

A fast is a personal act of devotion to God. Jesus told us that when we fast we shouldn't turn it into a show. While a fast can mean eating nothing at all, this is not always the case. The daily or weekly fast associated with Lent is actually a disciplined diet. During a religious fast, you still eat but you abstain from certain things. During this lenten season we encourage you to abstain from something that brings you regular comfort or that is a daily ritual. The reason for this is not to earn anything from God, but to put ourselves in a posture that reminds us where true comfort comes from.

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FRIDAY

After four days of prayer, examining our hearts, and confessing our sin, today we take a step to re-orient your life around the reality of God being our King, our comfort, our Lord. The word for this is repentance, which is a translation of the Greek word “metanoia”. It literally means a changed (meta) mind (noia). Admitting, or confessing, our sin is only the first part of repentance. As we take steps of repentance, it’s a turning back to the Lord.

“[Repentance] means following through on that conviction and turning around—changing your mind and your heart so that you are no longer at odds with God but in sync with God.” -John Piper

This may feel overwhelming or beyond our ability. After all, confession itself was difficult and humbling! Thankfully, we’re not left alone. It is the Spirit of God who works in us to result in conviction in the first place. Our rebellious hearts would not come up with repentance on our own! But our Good Father gives us repentance, enabling us to turn back towards life and light: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). What actions do you need to take in order to not only confess your sin but to repent, turning back to God?

This week we have meditated on the forgiveness that is ours through Jesus, and the forgiveness that is required of us. There are steps that you probably need to take in the area of forgiveness with specific people. Perhaps you need to finally, fully forgive someone and your heart needs to be free of the bondage of resentment. Be free! If you aren’t ready to go to them and forgive them, maybe your first step is praying that God would begin to empower you to forgive. Some of you may need to take the courageous step of seeking counseling to help you begin the process of forgiveness. Perhaps you are the offender, and you need to humbly go to the one you have offended and ask for their forgiveness (knowing that forgiveness is already yours through Jesus!)

What are your tangible next steps going to be? Take some time and commit those to the Lord.

Family discussion:

- Recap the verses we have read this week about forgiveness
- Forgiveness can go 3 ways – God forgives us, we forgive others, and others forgive us. Take some time to talk about others you need to forgive (even if they don't ask for it!), and also people to whom you need to ask forgiveness (knowing that Jesus has already forgiven you).

INTRODUCTION TO WEEK 7

The Easter account is a familiar one. Many people know the story of Jesus riding in on a donkey, the palm branches, the last supper, the crown of thorns, the cross, and the empty tomb. As Easter Sunday approaches yet again, we would be remiss to focus merely on the logistics of the week. Instead, as our 2017 Lenten season comes to a close, we'll examine what was accomplished by Jesus during the week before his death and resurrection, and what it means for us as we live the gospel today. We'll see the events of Holy Week were more than acts of humility or even obedience, but all part of the greatest rescue mission in history.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)



7

HOLY WEEK

Monday, April 10 - Friday, April 14

MONDAY

Read Isaiah 42:1-9 and Hebrews 11:39-12:3

The prophecy in Isaiah 42 laid out the mission of God's chosen savior for his people. Jesus would have been familiar with this passage and known the end to which he was called. The Gospel accounts are filled with evidence of his understanding of what lay ahead. Through his life and ministry Jesus not only perfectly obeyed God, but perfectly trusted God.

Jesus knew he had to die for us to live, and his trust and obedience was received by God as perfect worship. This meant he looked to nothing else for his comfort, his identity, or his deliverance. The season of Lent has had many of us giving up things we are tempted to look to instead of our Heavenly Father. It has been an exercise in dying to something in order to live with Christ. The passage in Hebrews lays out our call to follow Christ by looking to him and "laying aside every weight and sin that clings so closely." Obedience is abused when it is divorced from trust. We are not called to obey to earn God's love and guidance. We trust God in his love and guidance, and so we obey.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

"Gracious Father, we trust you to work in our hearts to fulfill your good purposes. Help us find our place in your Story. Give us a greater desire for your glory than for our happiness. Fill us with joy and anticipation, as we surrender to your plans and timing. Keep us from impatient obsessing; "walking by the light of our own torches" (Isa 50:11); and idol-laden scheming. It would be better if we did nothing, than to start leaning again upon the shallow and fragile foundation of our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

We know everything you purpose is good because everything you purpose has Jesus in view. All of history is being summed up in your Son (Eph. 1:10). Everything you do, Father, you do with the Day in view when every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to your glory (Phil 2:10-11).

So until that Day, we will seek to make our plans in keeping with your Word and the gospel of grace; trusting you to be the God who opens doors we cannot shut, and the One who shuts doors we cannot open (Rev. 3:7-8). Oh, the blessed peace and confidence this brings. So very Amen we pray, in Jesus' merciful and majestic name."

- written by Scotty Smith, originally published on blogs.thegospelcoalition.org, October 14, 2011

Family discussion:

- Before you read Isaiah remind your family that Isaiah was written around 700 years before Jesus came.
- Read Isaiah 42:1-9 and Hebrews 11:39-12:3
- Ask your kids to highlight the parts of Isaiah 42 which especially talk about Jesus.
- Why do you think the author of Hebrews said that Jesus endured the cross "for the joy that was set before him"? Why did he use the word "joy"?
- Close by thanking Jesus for being obedient to the will of the Father.

TUESDAY

Read Matthew 21:12-16

In his commentary on Matthew, theologian D.A. Carson wrote:

"But letting these things go on at the temple site transformed a place of solemn worship into a market where the hum of trade mingled with the bleating and cooing of animals and birds. Moreover, especially on the great feasts, opportunities for extortion abounded."

What action did Jesus take when seeing what was taking place? What do you believe this action tells you about Jesus' passions and beliefs?

To explain his actions, Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7. Go now and read this in context by reading Isaiah 56:6-8. Who does the prophet mention "joining themselves to the Lord" in verse 6? In verse 8, note who the Lord God gathers to himself.

Jesus' actions in Matthew 21:12-16 show his passion for people, both near and far. He fought for their freedom to worship and know God without manmade obstacles. He healed all those who came to him. He loved people, and during a religious festival shared with everyone God's heart for them. God's love is not only for us, but our neighbors, our city, and the world.

In light of this, pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Lord Jesus Christ,

you used your hands to heal; to lift up; to bless;
to sow kindness and tenderness in desolate lives.

Forgive us when we keep our hands at our sides
when we could be reaching out in love.

Lord Jesus Christ,

you used your hands to bear the burdens of others and to feed the hungry.
Forgive us when we use our hands to take care of ourselves
without any thought for those who are hungry
or overwhelmed with adversity.

Lord Jesus Christ,
you used your hands to welcome and to include
those who were considered outcasts in the society of your time.
Forgive us when we clench our fists and exclude people
simply because are different from us.

Lord Jesus Christ,
open our hands and our hearts to love as you loved and to care as you cared.
Strengthen us to include in our prayers and our fellowship,
those who feel excluded because of such things as their race,
their religion, their sexuality, their gender, their age, their handicap—
whatever it is that creates barriers between people.

Lord Jesus Christ,
help us to accept people as you accept them,
as people made in the image of God,
and precious to God.

We pray this prayer in your name. Amen

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news:
there is forgiveness and steadfast love with God
who saves us from all our sins.
God has shown this love for us in that,
while we still were sinners,
Christ died for us.

Thanks be to God! — written by Moira Laidlaw

Family discussion:

- Read Matthew 21:12-16
- If needed, explain to your family that the Temple was the place in Jerusalem where God's people would come and offer sacrifices and worship God.
- Ask your kids why they think Jesus was angry and did what he did.
- Ask them to find in these verses what the Temple should be (hint: v. 13).
- Talk as a family about ways in which our church can be a "house of prayer for all peoples."

WEDNESDAY

READ MATTHEW 22:1-10

Jesus often spoke in parables, which teach us through stories. In this parable, the king first calls “those who were invited to the wedding feast.” If God represents the king, who do you think falls into this category? How did they first respond? Upon being called again to the feast, how did they respond?

Who does the king then open up the wedding feast to?

This parable is a picture of God’s scandalous grace. The wedding feast is filled with “both good and bad,” showing us that the kind invitation of Jesus is not based on our own righteousness. Consider how you may unknowingly add qualifications to being loved and invited by Jesus. Pray that God would continually show you the good news of his grace, and that he would open the eyes of your love one to that grace as well.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

Dear Lord Jesus, you spoke these words to women and men that you love, who were attempting to limit that love. Your grace stands alone, and our own self-righteousness cannot add to it. Rather than earning grace, it’s evidence of our need for your grace.

Forgive us, Lord Jesus, for becoming self-righteous about your grace.

Forgive us for our arrogance about our theology, and condemning those who do not hold to all facets of what we believe.

Forgive us for believing that there are neighbors, co-workers, or family members who are beyond the reach of your grace. Break our heart for each person, showing us the immeasurable depth of your grace.

Forgive us for putting limits on your love and forgiveness, whether in our own lives or for those around us.

Thank you, Jesus that your grace covers even our self-righteousness when we know the truth. Continue to change us, by your grace and for your glory. We ask these things in your name.
Amen.

Family discussion:

- Read Matthew 22:1-10
- Take some time to discuss who the characters in this parable represent. What about the king? His son? Those he invited? Those who ended up coming?
- What does this story tell us about God's grace?
- Pray and thank God for inviting us to His wedding feast!

THURSDAY

Read John 13:1-15

This story may be familiar to you, and we have the tendency to see these people as one-dimensional. Read back over this account, and picture it in your mind.

What are the sights, the sounds of the environment? The gospel writers give us an incredible amount of detail considering the time they were written. But place yourself in that scene and look at the reactions of people as events transpire. See this not as a play with people delivering lines on cue, but feel the emotion and consider what it was like to process things in real-time.

After spending time picturing this, consider the actions Jesus took in v. 4-5. He knew his time was limited before his arrest and crucifixion. What does this communicate to you about Jesus' love? What do you learn here about Jesus' view of leadership and servanthood?

Jesus explains his actions and gives a mandate in v. 13-15. Would this describe how you love and serve others? As you consider this, pray that Jesus would help you love others the way he taught us, commanded us, and displayed to us.

This passage contains another picture of Jesus' sacrifice and loving grace. Consider that even Judas was among those whose feet were washed, moments before he betrayed Jesus! No greater love can be found.

Family discussion:

- Jesus was and is King, but he came as a servant. What would your have been reaction in this story if Jesus tried to wash your feet?
- What does this story tell us about Jesus' love?
- See if your kids can find the command Jesus gives in this passage (hint: it's in v. 14).
- What would it look like for your family and for our church to "wash one another's feet"? Pick one thing and make a plan as a family to serve someone in the name of Jesus.

FRIDAY

Read John 13:1-15

These two criminals encounter Jesus as all of them are being crucified. It becomes clear the second criminal has faith that Jesus is God, and yet he doesn't try to justify himself or excuse his actions. Being found guilty, do you ever attempt to justify your actions? What do you think causes us to have that reaction before God?

What does the second criminal request of Jesus? Do you believe this criminal earned Jesus' affirmation by his own righteousness?

The invitation we receive from Jesus is the same offer he gives the criminal. Like the criminal, our actions have not earned us a standing before God. As you read this passage again, spend time thanking Jesus for the grace he has given you.

Our Lent Devotional ends with a prayer, asking God for the assurance that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ completely justifies and sanctifies those who receive it in faith.

Pray this prayer, silently or aloud:

O God of my exodus,
Great was the joy of Israel's sons
when Egypt died upon the shore,
Far greater the joy
when the Redeemer's foe lay crushed in the dust!

Jesus strides forth as the victor,
conqueror of death, hell, and all opposing might;
He bursts the bands of death,
tramples the powers of darkness down,
and lives forever.

He, my gracious surety,
apprehended for payment of my debt,
comes forth from the prison house of the grave
free, and triumphant over sin, Satan, and death.

Show me the proof that his vicarious offering is accepted,
that the claims of justice are satisfied,
that the devil's scepter is shivered,
that his wrongful throne is leveled.

Give me the assurance that in Christ I died,
in him I rose,
in his life I live,
in his victory I triumph,
in his ascension I shall be glorified.

- Puritan Prayer, from the Valley of Vision (adapted)

We look forward to celebrating the love and grace of Jesus on Easter Sunday!

Family discussion:

- Read Luke 23:32-43
- What did this thief do in between when he confessed Jesus as Lord and when he died?
- (The obvious answer is – nothing! He hung on a cross. Then he died.)
- How does this story help us understand what we can do to earn salvation?
- How does this story help us understand the kindness of God towards us?
- Pray and thank Jesus for his grace. Also, take some time to pray for our church on Easter Sunday, for the guests that will be coming, and hopefully for the friends that you will be bring with you.