
A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2019



CALVARY
MEMORIAL

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“LET NO FALSE COMFORT LIFT US UP
TO CONFIDENCE THAT’S VAIN
NOR LET THEIR FAITH AND COURAGE DROOP
FOR WHOM THE LAMB WAS SLAIN.”

JOSEPH HART, 1835

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AN INTRODUCTION TO LENT

Each year at Easter, Christians remember Jesus' crucifixion and celebrate His resurrection because it is the means and model of man's salvation. Lent (lente for springtime) is the Church's time of preparation designed to renew our dependence on God in the weeks leading up to Easter. Lent lasts 40 days and is characterized by fasting from food or comforts on which we typically depend, so as to remind ourselves of our need for God.

This reflects the 40 days of Jesus' fasting and temptation in the wilderness, which began His ministry (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, so named because ashes have traditionally signified our mortality. Ashes also mark biblical references to repentance, as in Daniel 9:

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. — Daniel 9:3

Before his extended prayer in 9:4-19, Daniel gives attention to the Lord with physical preparation—fasting, sackcloth, and ashes—demonstrating a spirit of repentance before engaging the Lord his God. Repentance makes us dependent on the Lord's mercy. It is that spirit of repentance that we seek to cultivate together during the Lenten season, as we pay closer attention to our sinful condition and our dependence on God's own Son for salvation. It is this contemplation of our deep need, met with God's willingness to satisfy it, that prepares us for the richness of Resurrection Sunday.

FASTING

Each Thursday of Lent, this devotional guide invites us to focus on an area of life where it is a challenge to remember our dependence on the Lord. We will assess our habits of dependence in a world of resources and reacquaint ourselves with Christ's sufficiency. It is traditional to fast from food during the season of Lent. To foster a spirit of unity, Calvary is inviting the congregation to fast each Thursday during Lent, as a means of reminding ourselves of our dependence on the Father who called us to Himself and gave us His Son. We will break our fast together as a congregation at our Maundy Thursday service, during Holy Week. Feel free to choose another day of the week to fast if Thursdays do not work well for you. If you are unable to fast from food, we invite you to abstain from some other meaningful item or practice.

APPLICATION

Each Thursday you will have an opportunity to engage with a passage of scripture and a series of reflection questions. The questions are designed for self-inspection. Take your time and pray that the Lord would help you answer them with honesty and self-awareness. The passages and precepts are to focus you on God's sufficiency. As you move toward renewed dependence on God for security, pray that your engagement with scripture will not be a distant proposition but an exhortation to your soul that God alone is your fortress.

May this season of Lent be a time of corporate and personal repentance, renewal, and preparation as we recalibrate our dependence on the Lord and anticipate the hope of Easter.

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways we prepare for the future. We check our bank accounts against anticipated costs, we search the web to learn about a new employer, school, or neighborhood, and we consider past experience to predict future outcomes. We always want to know, “Will it go well with me?” Whatever metric we rely upon ultimately points to our need for security. But with so much data at our fingertips and such desire for preparedness, how much need is left to depend on God?

SCRIPTURE

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from Him comes my salvation.*

*He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I will not be greatly shaken.”*

Psalm 62:1–2

EXPOSITION

The One who has the power to deliver us from death is a worthy stronghold, a fortress inspiring confidence in the matchless security of God’s protection. If we look at verses 1-2 together with verses 5-7, we can learn something from David’s process of renewing his hope in God. He begins by remembering what is true, the proposition that God alone is his rest and salvation. He assesses his present crisis and then repeats what he knows about God; but now it is not just a proposition, but a bold self-exhortation. We might call it Scriptural self-talk. But it is the necessary reiteration required by our emotions, the part of us that often seems reluctant to join the brain in embracing truth and applying it to every circumstance.

REFLECTION

Do you trust God with big decisions, or your future in general, only when certain logistics are in place, or when the forecast seems favorable?

What gives you the greatest peace of mind as you look to the future?

Which verses on God’s sufficiency do you have trouble embracing wholeheartedly? When you are shaken, are you as persistent with Scripture as David? Are you as thorough in its contemplation as you are with other sources of security? During this week, try meditating on Psalm 62 by taking a cue from its structure.

- First, review what it says about God (62:1-2)
- Next, consider your present circumstances in light of it (Try substituting your own complaint for 62:3-4)
- Then, affirm any evidence of the psalm’s praise that you have seen in your own life, e.g., “I have found rest in God when...” or “I hope in You, Lord, because...”
- Finally, tell yourself to rest in God alone

PRAYER

Father God, You are my security and with You as my stronghold, I will not be shaken. I confess that I fear being shaken and I find a measure of security in many things. Help me to trust in You at all times and to pour out my heart before You when I am fearful. For You alone are my salvation and I will find hope in You. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Our days are often defined by busyness. In reply, technology gives us ways to be in two places at once. But this alternative to face-to-face interaction also tempts us to control every conversation or avoid it altogether, giving us an escape from vulnerability whenever we want. What, then, should we do if we want to be known and valued? How many truly personal interactions—and how much risk—does it take to forge the bond of intimacy?

SCRIPTURE

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. —John 15:5-15

EXPOSITION

We are rooted in the life of Jesus. He asks us to remain in His love by keeping His commands, just as He does with His Father. But this is not merely a bond of obligated service for His followers. He calls us friends! Remaining in Christ is the way to be filled with His joy and love such that it overflows to others. This is the command Christ's branches are to embody: love one another sacrificially as Christ has. For the love Jesus speaks of is the love of one who died for his friends. Our vulnerability makes us dependent on Christ, but His love empowers us to love others vulnerably. It guards us not from disappointment, but from depletion, for the love of Christ never runs dry.

REFLECTION

How can you be an agent of Christ's overflowing love among those in the Body who may have lost sight of this reality? Over the next few weeks, meditate on John 15 and 16 to see what intimacy looks like for Jesus' disciples. Then, continue into chapter 17 as we approach Good Friday.

PRAYER

Father, You have lavished Your love on me through Your obedient Son, my lifeblood. Despite my sin, I now know the love of a Savior who made me clean. I confess it is difficult at times to love like Jesus. But I recognize that because of Your great love, I have no excuse for not loving all for whom Your Son died. Help me to obey Your mandates.

I long to live in the love and joy that Jesus promises to those who remain in Him. I can do no better. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

We spend so much time in our vocation and devote so much effort to its tasks that we often feel like the force driving what happens. As a result, we can end up associating our value with our success. This influences our sense of purpose. We easily associate a pattern of successful outcomes with confirmation of our purpose. Conversely, failure and disappointment tempt us into thinking that we are either lacking purpose or fulfilling it poorly.

SCRIPTURE

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. —Ephesians 1:5–14

EXPOSITION

Ephesians begins with extensive praise of God. Encompassing the litany of God's works is an emphasis on His glory because God's glory is the purpose of God's activity. And because of His gift of salvation, we serve that purpose as well. The centrality of God's glory is reinforced by references to His will and purpose. God's purposes are ultimate and His plans certain. The sovereign God who chose us before creation calls us to look beyond ourselves to the praise of His glory. When we do so, all other things find their place.

REFLECTION

Take stock of the things you find most fulfilling. What is most important to you? Are they the same things? What could it look like, week to week, to be to the praise of God's glory? Part of Calvary's DNA is living in a way that declares God as central, not ourselves. We do this by making much of God all the time and by acknowledging Jesus Christ as preeminent in everything. Spend some time in Ephesians 1-2, which begin with exalting God and proceed to how He exalted us from death in sin to life in Christ.

Praise God, for He keeps us humble in our victories and encouraged in our defeats.

PRAYER

Father of glory, Creator God, You have chosen me for Yourself and I gladly submit to Your perfect purposes. Teach me the joy and humility of living for Your glory. May the truths of Your word ground me and form my perspective. Help me meditate on Your revelation and keep me from crafting purpose from idols. Steep Your Church in renewed desire to live to praise of Your glory. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Where do you draw the boundaries in your life when it comes to work and rest? Being busy accomplishing things is highly valued in our culture, and technology has extended the work day to match the amount of hours we spend awake. Inasmuch as it depends on us, we determine how much we should work and how we go about working. But what are the controlling factors behind our decisions?

SCRIPTURE

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

*Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.*

*It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

Psalms 127:1-2

EXPOSITION

As creatures who care about purpose, human beings have a hard time laboring for something that fails. God's people, however, recognize their need for a Redeemer to accomplish what they cannot. They have a failproof Creator and an omniscient watchman. It is sobering to consider that the efforts of God's people, including ministry, can be in vain. So how do we know if the Lord is behind our efforts? The Lord's activity in verse 1 is concurrent with the builders and watchmen. We must approach our endeavors as co-laborers with God, seeking His involvement and then remembering that the outcome does not depend on us.

REFLECTION

Under what circumstances do you tend to labor in vain? How does the need for rest show up in your life? What do you do for emotional or spiritual rest? If you are prone to anxiety, where can you invite God's involvement and rest in His results?

Spend some time this week looking for
Jesus' example of rest and reliance on the Father.

PRAYER

Lord, wherever I go, You are there with me and all I do matters to You. You are the One I look to. I want to labor and rest in step with You, knowing I am leaning on You. Help me to see my need for Your involvement in what I do. Renew my habits of prayer and dependence on You so that I experience the rest of knowing and trusting You deeply. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Given their appetites, our bodies have great influence on our habits. We hunger for food or sex, struggle through pain or sickness, and tire of seeing and feeling our physical flaws. But for every appetite, options abound for satisfying them and as our appetites grow, so does the challenge to control them. What, then, is the governing wisdom for how we respond to our bodies' needs in a sea of wants?

SCRIPTURE

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

*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 4:14–16*

EXPOSITION

Jesus, the exact representation of God's being, is empathetic with those He came to save. He had the same appetites we do, but avoided sinful means of satisfying them. For this reason, He has not only been tempted as we are, but has in fact endured more than us, having felt the heights of temptation in His steadfast resistance. By comparison, we typically give in to sin before feeling temptation is at its strongest. Therefore, because of Christ's qualifications and His empathy for our need, we should draw near to the throne of grace. This access to God through prayer is the privilege of the one who is in Christ. But it is not merely permission; it is a confidence to speak freely to God, asking for His help frankly and boldly as we deal with temptation. There we will find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need.

REFLECTION

Where do you associate dependence on God with your physical needs and desires?

Is there an area where you feel like you are ruled more by your body than by God?

If you have not adopted a habit of prayer in your times of need, identify a temptation and plan to resist it, remembering Jesus' own suffering steadfastness.

PRAYER

Father, I praise You for sending the radiance of Your glory to suffer on my behalf. Because of Your Son, I can approach You with reverence and frankness for You know me and my temptations. Help me to run to You in my time of need. I'm humbled by Your mercy and grace. May I know the power of Your help in my weakness. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

One of the leading paradigms for delight in our day is digital entertainment. The proliferation of accessible entertainment inundates us with more options than we can thoughtfully handle. As a result, our attention to worthy pursuits can become divided. But whether our delight is in the digital world or not, competitors for our affections abound, begging our attention with the promise of pleasure.

How should we create patterns of healthy delight?

SCRIPTURE

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. —1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17

EXPOSITION

Addressing the pursuit of financial gain, Paul paradoxically states that contentment is great gain, not buying power. Money, the means to all kinds of delights but the root of all kinds of evil, causes many griefs. By contrast, the wise Christian pursues what is valuable in God's eyes. This is the stance of the future-minded Christian who knows that earthly possessions will pass away. Wealth is uncertain, along with our ability to wield its power. Only God is the source of unending enjoyment. He has given us a framework of obedience, and the pleasures He has given us do not contradict it. Our criteria for delight, then, is God's word.

REFLECTION

What do you depend on for delight? Are there consequences to your choices? Are you in tune with godly delight? How can you navigate the marketplace of delights as a sojourner seeking what God has given you to enjoy?

PRAYER

Father God, You have knit me together and know me well. You have created innumerable delights and given us stewardship of Your beautiful creation. Train me to seek the enjoyment You have for me, not conforming to the pattern of earthly delights. Help us to focus on You and Your word, which defy trends and outlive all worldly attractions. Forgive me for my undisciplined forays into dubious delights.

Rekindle my gratitude and wonder so that I may reap the gains of godliness with contentment. Amen.

NOTES

NOTES



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