

Confronting *the Pharisee in Me*

Part One

Lent Devotions 2026

Week 1

The Call to Repentance

February 18th - Psalm 51:1-17 **“Create in Me a Clean Heart”**

Written by Pastor Christian Pieper, Associate Pastor

It may sound strange to say, but I love the season of Lent. I find the sober, somber tone brings healing to my soul. Too much of modern life is marked with overabundance - calendars we stuff, shows we watch, podcasts we consume, information we absorb. Sociologists have a name for the behavior behind this: we live in a therapeutic culture.

Of course the goal of therapy is to bring you relief. So if busyness helps you feel productive and good, run after it with all of your heart. If you have stress in your life, whether relationships or work, relax with some tv to feel better. If you’re utterly bored just waiting in a waiting room, you have airpods to soothe your lonely soul. The worst thing you could do is withhold happiness from yourself, unless happiness really isn’t your greatest need.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, Lent cuts through distraction and exposes the superficial things we settle for. The words are sharp, they diagnose our condition, but they carry truth that we desperately need to hear. “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

Just like Adam and Eve, we prefer to hide from our situation, we’d rather cover up than face our brokenness and mortality. So we use makeup and workouts, cardio and kale, certainly fig

leaves can work for a while. But to look in the mirror and see an ashen mark on your forehead, you find the only one you're fooling is you.

Instead of lying to ourselves, God wants healing for you and me, that's why Psalm 51 is an excellent place to begin. We find David, king of Israel, who isn't praying from a place of strength, but rather he speaks from the ashes of his sin. Yes, he's sober, and somber, and remorseful for what he's done, but he's no longer hiding from the living God. In fact, David's faith compels him to believe that the Lord of life can do something new.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

As David sat in the dust, he got in touch with the truth, that what he needed wasn't power, nor women, nor success, but the life-giving love of his God. The Maker of the universe made each one of us for Himself, and even sin can't change that about you. So while it's true that we are dust, and we can cover up all we want, God in His grace says He never leaves you there. He sent Jesus to become flesh, and make His dwelling among us, that He would save us through His death on the cross.

Today the ashes on our forehead proclaim God's final Word, that though we are marked by sin, God renews us through the mark of Christ. For when we confess our sin, and believe that Jesus is Lord, we agree that what we most need is this: *“God is never reluctant to forgive. He is reluctant only to let us*

cling to our lies.”¹ This Lent, let’s give thanks for God’s perfect, healing love, for He gave Jesus to create a clean heart in you and me.

¹ Donovan Riley, “Why Christian Tradition? Why Confession”, 1517.org

February 19th - Isaiah 58:1-12

“Blind Sight”

Written by Heather Schmitz, Director of Tiny Treasures

Fasting is all the rage.

But why do you fast? Are you fasting for Lent? For health purposes? Is your fast from food, an activity (social media), or a person?

Isaiah calls the Israelites out for fasting for outward reward. As they fast, they treat others badly, quarrel among themselves, and seek their own gain. Similarly, Jesus calls the Pharisees out for fasting for outward reward in Matthew 6:16-18. Today, we might fast to check something off our to-do list, a way to humble ourselves before God or others. It might make us feel good, but does it bring us closer to God?

Isaiah 58:6-7 calls for a different fast. A fast that helps people, shares with people, and notices people. Things done not to earn the favor of man or God. Things done to show our faith and to bear its fruits. The more we experience God’s love and mercy, the more we humble ourselves and serve others.

Christ, who lived a sinless life, humbled himself to suffer and die. Because of this, we are forgiven, guided, satisfied, made strong, and restored. Then we can serve with humility, justice, and mercy.

Prayer: *God, forgive us for our empty acts of faith and our self-focused righteousness. Turn our hearts to Christ, who*

gave Himself for us. Shape us by your mercy, that we may love you and serve our neighbors with mercy and humility. Amen.

February 20th - Luke 18:9-14
“Pharisee’s Prayer vs the Sinners Cry”
Written by Pastor Ben Johnson, Lead Pastor

Jesus tells this parable, Luke says, to those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous & treated others with contempt.” The Pharisee’s prayer is polished, grateful, theologically correct and not really that irreligious. This prayer would have been a common prayer spoken by the religious leaders of the day and those who viewed themselves as doing a pretty good job for God.

The tax collector, by contrast, offers no speech of self-defense. He stands at a distance, eyes lowered and beating his chest. The beating of the chest was a physical gesture of an embodied confession. His prayer is painfully short, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” He brings no comparison, no resume, no explanation but only brings his need. Jesus tells the group that this man goes home justified, which is a word that means “set right” with God.

Lent confronts us with an uncomfortable truth that religious activity can easily mask spiritual pride. We can pray, fast, and worship in ways that can subtly reinforce our sense of superiority over those “really bad” people of the world. The Pharisee’s greatest sin is not arrogance alone, but his inability to imagine that he still needs grace. Lent gently but firmly dismantles that illusion.

This season invites us to relearn the sinner’s prayer, but not

as a one-time confession, but as a daily posture before God. To come before God honestly, exposed, and dependent is not a weakness but is the heart of true faith. The road to the cross begins, not with confidence in ourselves, but with trust in God's mercy. glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9 NIV)

February 21st - Matthew 23:1-12

“The Danger of Religious Pride”

Written by Chris Thomson, Executive Director

The Pharisees were an influential religious sect within Judaism in the time of Christ and the early church. They were known for their emphasis on personal piety (the word Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word meaning “separated”), their acceptance of oral tradition in addition to the written Law, and their teaching that all Jews should observe all 600+ laws in the Torah, including the rituals concerning ceremonial purification.

And Jesus saved many of His harshest words for them. They were using rule-keeping as not only a way to justify themselves but as a way to be a burden to the people. Religious pride, just like any form of pride, is the desire to be our own god. The Pharisees elevated themselves above others in order to receive the glory that was only due to God. And Jesus wasn’t having it.

Later in Matthew 23, Jesus says this, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (vv 27-28)

Religion can be defined as our attempt at earning God’s favor.

Have you ever told God something like this..."I have done the right things. I have been a good person. So why aren't you giving me what I want? Or why are you letting this bad thing happen to me or my loved ones?"

When we use our obedience, even as flawed as it is, as a bargaining chip with God, then we know that we have lost the proper motivation for following His word – love. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15)

The Pharisees were not following 613 laws because they loved God. They were following them because they loved themselves. The Gospel breaks our pride by showing us that we can only be saved through God's grace. Our version of perfection pales in the majesty of His glory. Our desire to follow God then shifts from earning His love to living our lives as a faithful and obedient response to His love.

Motivation matters. What we do is important. Why we do it is even more important. May we pursue a life of pleasing our Heavenly Father out of the love that He first gave to us.

February 22nd - 1 John 1:8-9

“Take a Good Long Look in the Mirror”

Written by Mike Martens, Director of Men’s Ministry

Anne and I have one of those nostalgic popcorn poppers in our basement that sits on a cart with wheels. It looks fancy and clean on the outside, and people even comment on how nice it looks. But what you don’t know is that on the inside the kettle no longer works. It may look fancy on the outside, but on the inside it’s broken. This can happen to us as well when we begin to focus on the externals in our lives. Outwardly we may appear beautiful, but within there’s a Pharisee in each of us. We sometimes focus on our outward appearances such as church and Bible study attendance and how well we’re doing at serving – while we ignore what’s going on inside with our heart condition.

If you’re like me, you’ve read through some stories about the Pharisees in the Gospels only to shake your head at their hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is defined as “the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one’s own behavior does not conform, essentially a disconnect between what someone says and what they do.” We sometimes call this a double standard which is essentially holding others to a standard you don’t apply to yourself. And this is exactly where God’s Word takes us in our reading today.

1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Our sinful human tendency is to project a life of moral righteousness. “Look how good

I'm doing" or "at least I'm not as bad as _____" "(fill in the blank). We don't want people to really see how bad we are, so we just make our best attempt at hiding our brokenness.

In our reading two days ago from Luke 18:11, the Pharisee said, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men." If we're being truthful, we've all thought or said things like this when we've compared ourselves to others. Maybe coming off with an attitude of superiority because we've never "sinned like that person." And yet again, as we take a good long look in the mirror, God's Word convicts us that we have.

Psalm 51:5 reminds us that we've been sinful since our conception and Romans 3:23 tells us that all of us have sinned and every day we fall short of His glory (see also Romans 3:10-12). We don't have to be perfect to follow Jesus, we just need to be honest (see Psalm 51). God wants us to be honest with ourselves and honest with Him. Denying our sin is lying to ourselves and making God out to be a liar. Maybe we can hide it from others, but we can't hide it from God. He knows everything about us! He knows about our pride, resentment, anger, bitterness, gossip, and self-reliance. We do our best to hide these, but we're just lying to ourselves when we do.

The amazing thing about our God is that we don't have to hide. In 1 John 1:9, God is inviting us to confess our sins before Him and then He promises to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us. This is 100% God's work who does the washing and makes us clean by purifying us from the inside out. Ephesians 5:13 says, "But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes

visible.”

Ask God today where you have deceived yourself. Then shine a light on the brokenness in your life and make it visible by the truth of God’s Word. We do this by repenting and turning in faith to the forgiveness Christ earned for us by His death and resurrection. It is Christ’s righteousness that is credited to us, and this is apart from any human worth, effort, or merit of our own. You are forgiven and free on account of grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Take another good long look in the mirror and joyfully say, “I am a child whom Jesus loves, and I am redeemed by His blood! Thank you, Jesus!”

Finally, James 5:16 says “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” I want to encourage you to join a life group here at Gloria Dei. We need trusted brothers and sisters in Christ that we can share our struggles with. As we do, we will walk in light together with a heart of gratitude for the forgiveness, faithfulness, and grace we receive from our heavenly Father. Please contact me if you would like more information about our life group ministry.

Father, we thank you for the precious blood of your Son that offers us cleansing and healing from all sin. Purify our hearts and make us more like Jesus every day. Amen.

Week 2

The Danger of Hypocrisy

February 23rd - Amos 5:21-24 **“When Worship Misses the Mark”**

Written by DeAnn McCue, Director of Women’s Ministry

Amos prophesied to Israel during a time of economic prosperity but deep moral decay. Amos delivers an unsettling message. God declares that He hates religious gatherings, songs, and offerings—not because worship is wrong, but because worship has become a substitute for obedience. The people sing faithfully, sacrifice generously, and gather often, yet their lives tell a different story. The poor are oppressed. The vulnerable are ignored. Justice is absent.

God confronts a people who are faithful in appearance but unfaithful in practice. Their worship is abundant—songs, offerings, holy gatherings—yet God rejects it. Their lives contradict their liturgy. Worship is not meant to end at the altar.

The prophet’s image is powerful—justice rolling like water, righteousness flowing like an unending stream. God desires a faith that moves, nourishes, and transforms everything it touches. Justice is not a momentary act; it is a way of life. Righteousness is a right relationship with God. Justice and righteousness are meant to flow through every part of life.

The people were doing the right religious things, but their lives told a different story. Their songs did not lead to compassion. Their sacrifices did not lead to fairness. God rejects worship that stays inside sacred spaces and never reaches broken lives.

God is not seeking more ceremonies but transformed hearts. Worship that pleases God cannot be separated from justice. Prayer and praise are meant to form us into people who love mercy, seek fairness, and walk humbly with God. During Lent, God calls us to examine whether our devotion ends in comfort or flows into action.

Lent invites us into holy honesty. God desires worship that leaves the sanctuary and enters the street. Let's carry our faith into our work, homes, and communities.

Prayer:

Holy God, Forgive me when my worship is sincere in words but shallow in action. Let my prayers shape my choices, and my faith flow into justice and mercy. Make my life an offering that honors You. Amen.

February 24th - Matthew 6:1-6 “Who Gets the Likes and Follows?”

Written by Tim Kightlinger, Director of Youth Ministry

There are times when I scroll through my social media feeds and come across a video that interests me. As I watch it, there inevitably comes a time when the person talking says, “Hit the like button!” and/or “hit the follow button!” Why are they doing this? A couple of basic reasons. The more likes/followers they get the more the social media algorithms push their content out and the more followers/likes they get can get them paid. Sometimes it can get annoying because they push their likes/follows more than their content. They make it about themselves.

Our bible reading today talks about a similar thing. Living out our righteousness. Righteousness is the living out of our faith and doing/following God’s desires of what is right and wrong. Jesus’ words sends us a warning that we shouldn’t live in a way that focuses on how good we are. In other words, are you seeking a pat on your back on how much better we are compared to other people. An attitude that says, “Look how good I am.”

Comparison can really cause us problems. In our social media crazed world, the more likes you get the better you feel about yourself. The more followers you have makes you popular. What are we seeking in this world? What do we want our lives to display?

Our lives need to reflect Jesus and not our own goodness. Our reading says that if we seek to put ourselves on display for our own benefit, we have already received the reward we seek. Earthly trophies and accolades. But if our lives reflect God's goodness and our desires to make him known in and through how we live our lives, then, and only then, is our righteousness pointing to the righteous one, Jesus. May your life scream, "Like and follow Jesus, not me!"

God, help the vision of my heart and mind be focused on living to point people to you. It's not about me, it's about your goodness, love, and mercy. May others see that in me as I live out my life today and every day. Amen.

February 25th - Romans 2:17-24

“The Hypocrisy of Knowing and Not Doing”

Written by Pastor Tim Phillips, Care Pastor

Have you ever felt that you were too close to a situation to see it clearly? Who do you go to when you seek wisdom? Who is the truth speaker in your life?

As believers, we ultimately must turn to God. Now we can have friends that are helpful or even coworkers that give us good advice. But ultimately the Holy Spirit is our guide. Even the best advice, from human, can fail us. But the wisdom that comes from God never fails. James 1:5 says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”

Knowing what to do is not the problem. God freely gives us advice. God generously supplies us with all the information we need to do the right thing. It’s always the right time to do the right thing. So why don’t we?

Sometimes our fear keeps us from acting. We fear punishment or retribution. 1 John 4:18 reads, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” If fear is what prevents us from doing the right thing, then love is what gives us the courage and strength to do what must be done.

That’s really what it boils down to. If we love genuinely, we do what love does. If we really love, then we will love sacrifi-

cially like Jesus. Jesus' love for us, compelled Him to do what was best for us, no matter what it cost him. Jesus endured the pain and the shame of the cross because it would satisfy the payment for our sins. So what must we sacrifice in order to do the right thing? Is it a matter of stepping outside our comfort zone? Is it a matter of choosing not to indulge ourselves? Is it a matter of overcoming something that seems inconvenient?

Here's another way to look at it. Who do you struggle to love? Maybe it's someone who hurt you. Maybe it's someone who owes you. Maybe it's someone who's rude or arrogant. Maybe it's someone who always gives you a hard time. When you're involved in a difficult relationship, that animosity can be a roadblock for you to act in a Christ-like way. Maybe the thing that you are called to do is to forgive them. You know it's the right thing to do. You know that Jesus forgives you everything that you've ever done. You know that Jesus calls you to sacrifice your right for revenge. And here's the clincher, you know that Jesus says you must forgive as you have been forgiven. Luther spells this out for us in the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer:

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by His grace, for we daily sin much, and

surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

May God give you the love to do what is right in His sight!

February 26th - Micah 6:6-8 **“What Does the Lord Require”**

Written by Jenn Fuller, Director of Kid’s Ministry

What is enough? A question, I think, we may have all asked ourselves a time or two. As a Mama to three, I often ask this question. I've done the multiple loads of laundry AND I've put it all away, I've emptied and filled the dishwasher so many times, I can't count, I've picked up the same toy 12 different times, literally, because my kiddos keep moving it and leaving it lie on the floor. I've moved things off the dining room table 3 times already today and it is full again, so not sure where we are going to eat tonight. Note to self: invest in tv trays! I'm not sure if you can relate, but to be open and honest with you, I'm exhausted! And I could go on and on – as I'm sure you can as well. So, we ask... What is enough?

Our reading for today is from Micah 6:6-8, and the people of Israel are exhausted! They are trying to figure out how to live their messy lives and still serve a holy God. They wonder if they need to do more: Should I bring thousands of rams? Rivers of olive oil? My firstborn? They were trying to figure out what would be enough to pay off their spiritual debt that they owed to God.

God's response is so sweet and so to the point and given through the prophet Micah. God is leading the people away from the requirement of ritual to a need for a relationship with Him. He doesn't want the outward displays. God wants a heart that is transformed to look like His. I don't know about you, but I

needed to hear this today!

From Micah 6:6-8, God shares with us 3 things that He would like us to do or requires of us:

1. Act Justly – This is our actions. Remember WWJD? [What Would Jesus Do?] God wants us to think about our actions and act justly by standing up for those who can't, by treating everyone with fairness and kindness, and speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves. We always need to have what would Jesus do in the back of our minds for any and all situations we are in, so we can act as He would act.

2. Love in Kindness/Mercy – This is our affections. God doesn't want us to just show kindness and mercy; He asks us to love it. This is where we can find joy in being kind even when someone doesn't deserve it. Sound familiar? God has been so merciful to us! John 3:16-17 says it all. God wants us to not be indifferent but to actively be compassionate.

3. Walk Humbly – This is our attitude. For us to walk humbly, we need to understand and recognize that we are not in control. What?? I'm not sure about you – but I really like being in control. Yet, we need to put our total dependence on God and on His grace. Having a humble heart means that we have a teachable heart – one that is willing to follow where God leads and not forcing our own way.

What does that mean for us today? We can so easily get caught up in going through the motions of our time with God, that we don't actually spend time – real time – with God. It's Sunday: Go to church – check! And we're done for the week. That isn't

really what God wants from us. It's so much more and it is something we need to strive for daily.

If we look back to what God requires of us from above, we can put it into practice today and every day.

1. We need to examine our dealings. Are we acting justly in our relationships – business and personal?

2. We need to check our hearts. Are we loving mercy and kindness or are we holding on to grudges?

3. We need to slow down. Are we making time for God each day or are we rushing through the motions to check it off our to-do list?

Let's go back to Micah 6. Micah reminds us that we don't need to make any grand gestures for God, we just need to take time to be in relationship with Him. He wants our whole life to revolve around Him – a life of integrity, compassion, and humility. And where our faith is expressed through just actions, a merciful heart, and a humble spirit. What is enough? God is enough. I am enough in Christ Jesus. You are enough in Christ Jesus. Hold on to Him and His promises.

We pray. Gracious and Heavenly Father, thank you for all the blessings that you so richly pour out on me. Help me to know that I am enough in You and help me live a life that reflects Your heart. Give me strength each day to act justly, the compassion to love mercy, and the humility to walk closely with You. Amen.

February 27th - Matthew 5:14-16

“Good Works for God’s Glory”

Written by Sydney Anderson, Promotions Director

Lent has a way of shining a light on what's really going on in our hearts. It strips things back. It makes us slow down. And in that quiet, reflective space, Jesus' words hit a little different:

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Not try to be the light. Not earn the light. You are the light.

That feels important.

During Lent, we often focus on what we're giving up — sugar, social media, spending, whatever it is. And that's good. But it's not just about removing things. It's about making space. Space for God to work in us so that His light actually comes out of us.

Jesus doesn't say, “Hide your faith and keep it private.” He also doesn't say, “Perform so people are impressed.” The goal isn't attention. It's glory — God's glory.

The kind of good works He's talking about aren't flashy. They're steady. Faithful. Small things done with big love. Patience with your toddler when you're exhausted. Kindness when you'd rather snap. Forgiveness when resentment feels

easier. Showing up. Serving quietly. Choosing integrity when no one is watching.

That's light.

And here's the humbling part — the light isn't ours. It's His. We're just reflecting it.

Lent reminds us that apart from Jesus, we're dust. But with Him? We're lanterns. Not because we're impressive, but because He shines through cracked, ordinary people.

So maybe the question this week isn't just, "What am I giving up?" Maybe it's, "Where is God inviting me to shine?"

Not for applause.

Not for validation.

But so that someone, somewhere, sees something different — and traces it back to Him.

Let your light shine. Even if it feels small. Especially if it feels small.

Because small light still breaks real darkness.

February 28th - 1 Corinthians 10:23-24; 31-33

“Why I Do What I Do”

Written by James Thompson, Traditional Worship Director

The date was February 4, 2013 — the day I defended my doctoral thesis. The defense is a nerve-wracking event, to say the least. A select group of faculty gather to ask questions and scrutinize the thesis. Five years of doctoral work (three devoted to coursework and an additional two of research and writing) were reduced to this meeting. I was confident in the work I had done and I successfully passed my defense. I was set to graduate in May. A 25 year journey as a student through the K-12 system, college, and two graduate school programs was finally coming to an end.

In the subsequent days, the excitement I initially felt faded into melancholy. I couldn't understand or rationalize why I felt this way. Afterall, I should have been overjoyed!

Weeks later, my wife and I attended a family gathering. Her uncle (himself a respected neonatology physician) congratulated me on my upcoming graduation and asked how I was feeling about finishing my doctorate. I replied that I was inexplicably feeling a bit sad about it all!

He went on to tell me that when he finally finished the entirety of his medical training, he had similar feelings. The reason, he said, I was feeling low was because all along, the “next thing” was in front of me and the anticipation of that was exciting. Suddenly, there was no more “next thing” —

it's time to do what you've trained to do.

He was absolutely correct. There was some relief in hearing an explanation for my feelings, but it didn't fully alleviate them.

Fast forward a few weeks later to a normal day of teaching at City High School in Iowa City. I was teaching an adaptive music class for special needs students. After the class ended, a new para-educator approached me and said something to me I'll never forget. He said: "You're a Christian, aren't you?" I responded that I was. He replied: "I can tell because of the way you interact with these students."

In that instant, my perspective changed. I realized my PURPOSE. I was no longer a music educator who happened to be a Christian. I was a Christian who happened to be a music educator.

I realized that my purpose in life is to outwardly demonstrate my faith, I just happen to use music as a conduit to facilitate this. My purpose in life is not to accumulate graduate degrees or to have a ****successful**** career; those things are nice, but again they are not my purpose in life. I assert that we all have the same purpose in life and that purpose is to live out our faith, thereby, we share and spread the Good News.

I encourage you to spend some time thinking about ways in which you fulfill this purpose. Some of us have the opportunity to be direct in sharing the Gospel while others must be more subtle in their evangelism. Regardless of your situa-

tion, whether at home or in the workplace, be encouraged to demonstrate your faith — this is your purpose and your highest calling!

****BONUS** devotional: Recently, I've thought a bit about "success" and the way most people would define the word. Success is not about prestige or earnings. How are you successful in ways beyond the common definition? Give it some thought!

March 1st - Psalm 139:23-24

“Search Me, O God”

Written by Emma Griffiths, Contemporary Worship Director

Today's devotional passage is so short, and yet it says so much. How many of us want this? Here, David is pleading to God to root out any sinful way. David has the desire to do God's will, which is the easier half of the problem. It's the execution that we often struggle with. More than wanting to do the right thing, David wants God to know him closely. He wants to hide nothing from his Lord. I don't know what sin you struggle with, but I know how hard they can be hard to let go of in entirety.

To be fully known like David is asking, is to make yourself very vulnerable. Vulnerability is scary and it opens you up to judgement. These verses end this Psalm as one of many reminders of the help God offers. He wants your vulnerability and have no doubt that He loves you in spite of it. Let these verses act as your example that there is nothing God doesn't want to hear about in your life.

My challenge for you today is to pray these verses to God as David did. Ask God what parts of your life do not glorify Him, then ask God to root out any offensive ways in you. Ask for His help to lead you in the way of the everlasting. In this lead up season to Easter, I pray that you will come to a deeper understanding of your shortcomings.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:19, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of

Christ may rest upon me.” We are all in need of a God who sees us plainly, and loves us anyway.

Week 3

The Heart Behind Obedience

March 2nd - Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“Love the Lord Your God With...All”

Written by Pastor Joe Meyers, Emeritus Pastor

Love is a word that is much more easily thrown around today than it used to be. I think we have, for some reason, become freer in our expression of saying that we “love” something...whatever that “something” is in our lives. We used to say “I like (such and such)” a lot more than we’d say, “I love (such and such)”, or at least that’s how I grew up. We certainly used to be a lot less free about ascribing the very strong word known as “love” to random things. But not so much today. We might say things like, “I love sunny days” or “I love snow.” We might say “I love hamburgers” or “I love lasagna” or even “I love baked potatoes.” And to be sure, we easily profess the words “I love...” about deeply intimate and important things like, “I love my family” or “I love my spouse” or “I love my career” or even, “I love my life.” “I love”...insert whatever that is...is definitely used and used widely today.

Now, if you think that as a preacher/teacher of the things of God I’m going to say “C’mon Christian, don’t say you LOVE those things...we are not supposed to ‘love’ the things of this world!”, well, you’d be wrong. All of those things are in fact gifts from God and are therefore are absolutely love-worthy. Though admittedly, 1John 2:15 does caution us saying “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” What the Holy Spirit wrote through John doesn’t mean we can’t love the gifts God gives us. To say that somehow the things of this world

or the things of this life aren't worthy of the all-in phrase "I love (such and such)" would be ridiculous. God has given us this life, placed us in our families and blessed us with all of our worldly or earthly gifts from Him. Food and clothing and house and home and spouse and children and yes, even life itself, are all gifts from God's hand that are to be celebrated and yes, worthy to be deeply loved. To be sure, there is a lot to "love" about the blessings God gives us in this world and in this place.

No, the preacher/teacher in me isn't going to dissuade you from loving your life. I am however, going to instead challenge you on the order of things when it comes to what you "love"... which is what 1John 2:15 is really saying btw. Yes it's certainly okay to love sunny days and love baseball and love lasagna. (Frankly, if you had my Robin's lasagna, you'd definitely use the word "love" to describe the experience.) It's certainly okay to love your family, spouse, career and all-in, love your life too. Of course you should "love" those things and tell others that you do!

But the "thing" holding the pole-position on your love-list, must be loving the One who loved you so much to give you those things in the first place. Our love of things starts with loving the Lord our God who gives us all that we have in this world.

Moses reminds us of this very thing in our text from Deuteronomy "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with

all your soul and with all your might” Deuteronomy 6:4,5. Our Lord and Savior deserves not only the pole-position of love because of who He is as “The LORD,” but furthermore calls us to love Him not just first, but also foremost. Our Lord calls us to love Him first and foremost and to do so with every ounce of being, or as He said it, all of our “heart, soul and might.”

How do you do that though? There’s a lot of things vying for your love, yes? So how is it that the Lord takes first place and preeminence over everything we love?

To do so, we must remember that loving with “heart, soul and might” describes exactly how our Lord and Savior loves you! That is indeed how He loves you and why, at the cross, He chose to stand in your place, take your punishment and suffer and die for you. He didn’t die “half-heartedly.” He didn’t endure the cross “sort of” or “partially.” At the cross He was all-in and He was all-in at the cross, because of His love for you. Jesus died for you because He so-to-speak, loves you with all of His “heart, soul and might.”

And that all-in love for you, now given to you by faith in Jesus and through His Holy Spirit within your body, then moves you to love Him in the same way in return. Yes, love Him deeply because He has given you amazing things in this amazing life. No question. Love Him to the depths of your soul for the stuff He provides. No question. But love Him even more so and with every ounce and fiber of your being because of His deep, deep love given to you at the cross. Love Him “with all of your heart, soul and might” because He loved you more than

life itself. Love Him “with all of your heart, soul and might” because of His deep love for you—proven by giving His life, by suffering and dying, by enduring eternal damnation and doing so, for you! In a very real sense, at the cross, Jesus boldly and unequivocally proclaimed His love, saying loud and clear, “I...love...you” as He died in your place. Then by faith in His cross, with our voices and our lives, we can proclaim back to Him, “Lord Jesus, with all of my heart, soul and might, I love you too!”

March 3rd - Matthew 9:10-13

“Mercy at the Table”

Written by DeAnn McCue, Director of Women’s Ministry

In today’s text, Jesus is not in the synagogue or the market-place. He is at a dinner table—surrounded by those religious society labeled unworthy. Jesus’ presence there is not accidental. It is intentional grace.

Jesus is criticized not for what He teaches, but for who He eats with. Table fellowship was a sign of acceptance, and Jesus chooses to share it with tax collectors and sinners—those pushed to the margins. The religious leaders value sacrifice and separation; Jesus reveals a different holiness, one that moves toward brokenness with compassion.

In first-century Judaism culture, meals were declarations of acceptance and shared life. To sit at this table was to be seen, known, and welcomed. Jesus’ table disrupts religious boundaries because it includes those written off as spiritually unclean.

As Jesus reclines at the table with tax collectors and sinners, the religious leaders look on in disbelief. To the Pharisees, this was scandalous. Holiness meant separation from moral contamination. The Pharisees ask, “Why does your teacher eat with such people?” Their concern is not curiosity but caution. They fear contamination.

The Pharisees question the disciples, not Jesus directly—re-

vealing a concern for control rather than understanding. Their focus is not the people being restored, but the rules being broken.

The Pharisees prized sacrifice, rule-keeping, and separation. Jesus points them instead to mercy. He does not deny the reality of sin, but He refuses to let judgment have the final word. Like a physician, He goes where the sickness is—not to shame, but to heal.

Jesus responds with clarity: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” He names the reality of brokenness without shame. Sin is real—but so is grace. The goal is not exposure; it is healing.

Quoting Hosea, Jesus declares God’s desire for mercy over sacrifice. Sacrifice without mercy becomes hollow ritual. Mercy without humility becomes sentimentality. But when mercy flows from repentance, it becomes the truest expression of worship.

Lent reminds us that we do not come to God because we are righteous. We come because we are sick and in need of healing. And having received mercy, we are called to extend it – to make room at the table for others. We all sit at the table by grace. Mercy is not weakness; it is the heartbeat of God. Let mercy interrupt your routine.

Who might encounter Christ if we made room at the table?

May our faith look like Jesus—seated among the broken, offering healing and hope.

Prayer:

Merciful Christ,

You meet us at the table of grace, not perfection.

Heal our hearts of pride and fear.

Teach us to love as You love—

with mercy that restores and grace that welcomes.

Amen.

March 4th - 1 Samuel 16:7

“God Looks at the Heart”

Written by Pastor Christian Pieper, Associate Pastor

When I went to college, one of the first things I was excited about was I didn't have to sing in choir anymore. While my high school required a certain amount of fine arts credits, the truth is I sang in choir because of my mom. My mom is very musical, it's both her gift and her value, and she wanted to instill a love of music in her children. So we sang in a kids choir at church, and again at our school, and we even took voice lessons in high school. Many parents know the value of guiding their kids to music, but at some point, it only thrives through love instead of law.

Everyone has experienced trying to keep up appearances. It can be learning piano to please our parents, or maybe for you it was playing their favorite sport. For others it's impressing friends on social media, for many it's the pressure of looking put together - balancing work, family, and health. Even in church people are tempted to work on an image, because having the right answers and praying the right prayers can be validated by people around you. But while the appearance of obedience may work for you today, it's never what matters to the Lord.

There's a famous story in 1 Samuel, where God wants to choose a new king for Israel. He sends his prophet Samuel to the family of Jesse, because he has sons in abundance. Each son that Samuel selects has the right look for being a king - strong, tall,

handsome...mature enough. Yet God demands the youngest, because smallest one named David has what only God can see:

7 “*Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Here’s the truth - too often we strive to keep up appearances because we want others to validate who we are. But while appearances gain favor, only love grows real relationships, and that’s what God is looking for in you and me. What He wants is to free us from living for performance, and lead us into living from the heart. Jesus gives a test to discover whether your obedience flows from lawkeeping, or from love for the Lord.

Do you pray? Go in secret. Lock the door to your room. Let your prayer life go unseen except before Him. Do you serve? Give an offering? Did you give up something for Lent? Let your righteousness be the best secret between you and God. (Matthew 6) Why? Because the Father who sees in secret is not looking for an image—He is looking for your heart.

Years later I discovered that for myself. In my junior year of college, I chose to join choir again—not because anyone required it, but because I wanted to sing with my friends. For the first time, it came from freedom. I loved using the gift of my voice, not to prove anything, but simply because it brought joy.

So here’s the question: am I obeying to be seen...or obeying because I am loved? Because in Jesus we are free to let go of

appearances so He can renew real love in our hearts. After all, that's what we find in Him.

March 5th - John 15:9-12
“Abide In Love and Bear Lasting Fruit”
Written by Chris Thomson, Executive Director

“As the Father has loved me...” Do you ever think about that part of the passage? How does the Father love the Son? How do the different persons of the Trinity love one another?

We can start with the truth that the Father’s love for the Son is eternal. God is eternal, and has always existed as a Trinity, therefore the love between all persons of the Trinity is eternal. Jesus is saying that His love for us is also eternal. His desire is for His people to spend eternity with him, in a love and fellowship that will never end.

Father and Son are also unified in purpose. When Jesus is baptized, the Father’s voice comes down from heaven. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus was carrying out His Father’s mission on earth, His rescue plan for His people. When we abide in Jesus’ love, we share God’s mission of reconciling all things to Himself. We become ministers of reconciliation.

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...” Obeying God and loving God are inextricably linked. God is not after our begrudging submission. He is after our joy – complete and abundant joy!

But we don’t always see it that way, do we? God’s commands can feel like handcuffs, like our freedom, our “individuality” is

being limited. “I know what’s best for me!” we shout at God.

Oh, no we don’t.

Tim Keller said, “Freedom is not the absence of restrictions but the presence of the right restrictions.” True freedom comes from embracing wise constraints, like those found in God’s design, that liberate us to live fully, rather than the modern idea of limitless choice, which often leads to bondage. Jesus is telling us to abide in Him, because apart from Him, we will pursue those things that will destroy us.

The background of Jesus’ words in John 15 is most likely the Old Testament imagery where Israel is called a vine or vineyard – although one that did not produce the expected fruit (see Isaiah 5: 1-7). Jesus claims Himself to be the true vine and we are the branches. We cannot bear fruit apart from the vine. Unlike Israel, Jesus will not fail to produce fruit in all the branches that are connected to Him.

We live in a broken world. We are bombarded with daily headlines that testify to that truth. But we have an anchor, a firm foundation, a vine with which to cling. We will not be shaken if we abide in Jesus. And we will bear fruit out of our joy for Him and His love for us.

March 6th - Colossians 3:23-24
“Remember Who you Work For”
Written by Pastor Tim Phillips, Care Pastor

My first real job came along when I turned 18 in March of my senior year of High School. In addition to going to school I worked the afternoon shift for Chevrolet Gear and Axle in Detroit. It was a dirty greasy job in a loud and strange environment. The work was hard but the pay was good. It was the kind of job that motivated you to get an education and do something—anything else with your life.

My dad was a plant Superintendent and it was with his connections that I got the job. He told me that I needed to do good work because people would know I was his son and my work would reflect positively or negatively on him. I always kept that in mind as I worked.

As Christians, we have a similar responsibility. We bear the name of Jesus. How we live our lives impacts what people will conclude about Jesus. 1 Peter 2:12 says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Remembering who we work for is critical in our witness for Jesus. If we have a bad reputation we won’t be effective. We need to keep our eyes on the prize! Our primary purpose in Christ is to win people for Him. Do everything in the most excellent way. A wise friend told me, “It takes the same amount

of energy to do something the right way as it does the wrong way. So, why not do it the right way?"

We have to ask ourselves, "why do we do less than our best?" When we think of leading people to Jesus "our best" is always required. When I coached archery I would tell my kids, "Your best is always good enough." Be assured that your extra effort and your dedication puts you in a position to do great things for Christ.

That job I had in the auto industry was a great learning experience. I learned how to work hard and the fruit of my labor was a life-changing college education. One summer I earned enough to pay for myself and my brother's next year of college. So, my hard work impacted him too! He went on to graduate with a degree in Forestry and later followed that up with other educational achievements.

So, that is how we need to look at our work ethic. Doing our best benefits others in an eternal way. It's not just about us and what we want. It's not about doing a job half way. We can inspire others with our hard work. If we have a reputation as a good worker, doors will open and you will have a platform from which to share your faith.

Which of the Ten Commandments speaks into this issue? Luther's explanation of the Fourth Commandment adds something to this conversation.

The Fourth Commandment:

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

Our boss comes under that category of “other authorities”. How can you honor your boss? How can you be a blessing to your boss? When you are a good worker there is a double blessing! First, you are a blessing to your boss and company. Second, you will enjoy job security as a valued worker.

May God bless us in our work and may He be glorified in all we do!

March 7th - Philippians 2:1-4 **“Attitude of Humbleness”**

Written by Tim Kightlinger, Director of Youth Ministry

If you not in first, you’re in last! I don’t know if you’ve heard this before, but it’s a teaching that we hear in our society. The champions get celebrated. The MVP’s are elevated. We live in a results-based world, and you need to be better than the person next to you. You want that scholarship? Then you need to beat everyone else!

Competition is good, don’t get me wrong. I’ve been on both the winning side of the championships and the losing side of the game. It does feel good to win and receive the prize. But in our reading today, Paul challenges us to make sure we focus on the right things.

Our attitudes are important whether we win or lose. It starts with our relationship with Jesus. It always starts there. Paul begins by talking about what we’ve received from Jesus. His love. His love changes how and why we do things. It challenges us to make sure our attitudes are right as we compete. And in this world, we compete in almost everything we do. From school, to work, to sports, to extracurricular activities, to the size of house we own, to the cars we drive. There is competition and comparison.

If we understand the full truth of how great the love of our God is in our lives and the fact that the Holy Spirit is leading us, then we live and walk in humility in everything we do. Win or

lose. In verse 3, Paul tells us to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.” He’s not saying don’t compete your hardest and try to win. What he’s saying is when you do, play hard, compete hard, but be humble about it.

In verse 4, God tells us to care for ourselves, but he also says to make sure we take care of others as well. We show love in all situations. We display care for others no matter the outcome. We give encouragement to everyone. That’s what we do as Christians because it all comes from relationship with Jesus. That’s what he gives to us, therefore we give it to those around us.

God, thank you for your love, care, and encouragement. Lead me through your Holy Spirit to show that to others. Give me the strength in every situation to live humbly and to look after the needs of others. To your glory. Amen.

March 8th - 1 Corinthians 13 “Without Love, We Are Nothing”

Written by Jenn Fuller, Director of Kid's Ministry

Love. Love. Love. Whenever I think of the word love, I hear the famous Beatles song, “All You Need Is Love.” Are you singing it now in your head?? Let’s sing it together!

*All you need is love
All you need is love
All you need is love, love
Love is all you need
Love, love, love
Love, love, love
Love, love, love
All you need is love
All you need is love
All you need is love, love
Love is all you need*

Songwriters: Paul McCartney / John Lennon
All You Need Is Love lyrics © Sony/atv Tunes LLC, Shapiro Bernstein & Co Inc, Mpl Communications Inc

Love is mentioned so many times in that song – and that was just the chorus! And as much as I love that song, it doesn’t really get to the heart of what love really is. For that, we need to go to 1 Corinthians 13 – also known as the “Love Chapter”. The Apostle Paul wrote all of 1 Corinthians somewhere between 53-55 AD during his third missionary journey while he

was in Ephesus. He wrote this chapter and letter because the church in Corinth had questions.

So, what is the Apostle Paul sharing with us? His message in chapter 13 is this: without love, our actions, gifts, and sacrifices amount to nothing. For us, that means that that we need to examine the motivation behind all that we do – and if it is not coming from a place of love – then, it is nothing.

Let's look a little closer to 1 Corinthians 13. In the first 3 verses Paul describes a series of scenarios that seem very significant:

1. Speaking in the tongues of men and of angels – without love though, this is just “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (v. 1).
2. prophetic powers and understanding all mysteries and all knowledge – without love, having all the intellect or insight is worthless – nothing (v. 2).
3. having all faith, to move mountains – without love, this is still impossible to do (v. 2)
4. giving away all I have and even sacrificing my own body – without love, even acts of charity or making the ultimate sacrifice of oneself still means nothing (v. 3).

Paul is not against any of the above things – but he is calling attention to the motivation behind doing those things. He is trying to help the church at Corinth, and each of us, to understand that love is essential and that love is what gives meaning and value to everything else.

In verses 4-7, Paul shares with us what love truly is by listing its characteristics.

Love is...

- Patient and kind
- Does not envy or boast
- Not arrogant or rude
- Does not insist on its own way – not irritable or resentful
- Does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth
- Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

So, all you really do need is love. The Beatles had it right! Verses 8-13 remind us that many gifts like prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease or be made obsolete, yet, love “never ends”. All you need is love. Love is eternal. It is a gift from God to each of us and it reflects the very nature of God – who is love. Paul says it so well in verse 13: “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

So, for us, we need to really look at why we are doing the things we are doing and ask: Am I doing this out of love for God and others, or for my own recognition, fulfillment, or sense of duty? If we check our hearts and find a lack of love, the most impressive achievements and sacrifices are rendered empty and mean nothing. We then become as Paul wrote, nothing more than a noisy gong. Don’t be a noisy gong! Show love in and through everything you say and do! Because *ALL YOU NEED*

IS LOVE! LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED!

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you for the reminder in 1 Corinthians 13 that all our efforts are nothing without love. Help us to examine our hearts and motivations. May love for You and for others be the driving force behind every action, word, and deed. Fill us with Your enduring love so that we may live lives that truly honor You and benefit those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

March 9th - Psalm 46

“Be Still and Know That I am God”

Written by James Thompson, Traditional Worship Director

We live in an age in which we are obsessed with control. We plan every detail, orchestrate every outcome, hold tight to our schedules, finances, relationships, and futures with fervent determination. We convince ourselves these are actions of wisdom and responsibility, but too often we trust our own ability to steer our lives more than the One who is actually at the helm.

Psalm 46 confronts this situation by illustrating a catastrophic scene of the earth collapsing; mountains crumble into the ocean and chaos abounds — and yet the people of God do not fear because “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

A danger far greater than the collapsing earth is the temptation to become our own refuge.

Adopting this mentality ultimately means that we dethrone God in our hearts in favor of ourselves. The result is we trade peace for anxiety and trust for self-reliance. But through all the “noise” is a gentle, commanding voice that reminds us: *“Be still and know that I am God.”* What does this verse actually mean?

First, let’s discover what it **doesn’t** mean. “Be still and know that I am God” does not invite us to be idle. Consider the par-

able of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30): the master entrusts servants with resources “each according to his ability.” Two servants invest and are rewarded; the one who buries his talent out of fear is condemned. This parable directly teaches effort and accountability.

“Be still and know that I am God” means to **stop trying to be God.** Release the idol of control and surrender as a dependent child of God.

Today, examine your heart. Where are you gripping too tightly? What outcome are you afraid to entrust to Him? Be still. He is God and **you are not.**

Week 4

The Subtle Idolatry of Control

March 10th - Exodus 32:1-8
“When Impatience Leads to Idolatry”
Written by Pastor Ben Johnson, Lead Pastor

The golden calf story does not begin with rebellion, but with waiting. Moses is delayed on the mountain and the people are growing anxious. What if something happened to him? What if he never comes back? What if this God is not who he thought he was? Fear fills the gap where trust once lived. In response, they demand a god they can see, something immediate, tangible, and controllable.

What makes this moment so tragic is how quickly they abandon the God who delivered them. The calf is formed from their own gold, shaped by their own hands, and celebrated with their own desires. Idolatry here is not a rejection of worship, but a distortion of it. They still want a god but they want one that fits their timeline and brings comfort to their fears.

Lent reveals how impatience still drives our spiritual compromises. When God seems slow, we start grasping for substitutes. Substitutes like productivity, distraction, certainty or control. These modern idols promise relief but deliver emptiness. Like Israel, we often turn to what is visible because trusting the unseen feels too risky.

Lent calls us back into the spiritual discipline of waiting. To fast, to pray, to slow our pace is to resist the lie that something else must save us now. The wilderness teaches us that God is not absent in the delay and that true faith does not mature by

grasping, but by trusting as we wait.

March 11th - Matthew 6:25-34

“Freedom from Worry”

Written by Emma Griffiths, Contemporary Worship Director

Today's passage is often titled “The Cure for Anxiety” or “Do Not Be Anxious”. It's a red-letter reminder from our Savior that our needs will be met. Beginning in verse 25, as plain as it gets, “do not be anxious about your life” for God is in control. Your Heavenly Father will take care of you to see that your needs are met. Jesus details three simple creations that God has cared for, and if He cares for the smallest of His creations, will He not care for you even more? This isn't to denigrate God's view of plants and animals; in the recounting of creation, he said these things were good. But only one creature was made in God's image. We are God's chosen creatures and He will continue to care for you.

Now, I understand that it is not earth-shattering to say don't worry, God loves you. How many of us read this passage then continue to worry about everything that makes up a busy life? Lucky for us, Jesus doesn't end his sermon there. He instead turns our focus to an actionable take away to help refocus our attention to a worthier cause. Take a look at verse 33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”* The more of our day that we spend seeking the kingdom of God, the less time we have to worry about our own lives. Trust that He will provide for you in all that you need as you pursue His kingdom. As you talk to God today, ask Him to reveal to you where in your day you can be furthering His kingdom. What small step

can you take today to live more like Jesus commanded? Can you share the gospel with someone today? Can you be a good neighbor and check in on a friend who is struggling? Let Jesus' words be a guide for you today.

We end in verse 35: *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* I encourage you to trust that God's mercies are enough for you today.

March 12th - Philippians 4:4-9
“The Peace of God and the God of Peace”
Written by Mike Martens, Director of Men’s Ministry

What comes to mind when you hear the word “peace?” Maybe you experience a feeling of peace when the circumstances of your life are going well, your family is healthy, and you love the vocation God’s given you. You simply have this sense of calmness and peace. But we know that somewhere along our path in life, the “world” is going to try and steal some of that peace. What happens to your peace when your circumstances of life are not going well, when there are literal storms of life going on, when your family is not all healthy and when your vocation isn’t good. Do you still have that sense of calmness and peace?

Today, if you feel overwhelmed, please remember peace isn’t the absence of the storm, but the presence of our Savior in the middle of it. No one and nothing can steal our peace because no one and nothing can steal our Jesus.

What makes our reading today from Paul so incredible is the fact that he penned these verses while he was chained in a Roman prison facing an uncertain trial. Yet, his tone was full of joy, hope, and thanksgiving. Why? Because the Christian joy he had was not rooted in his circumstances. We can all relate to difficult circumstances in our own individual lives. Sickness, relationship problems, unemployment, financial worries, pain, death, and uncertainty of the future. But Paul’s focus was never on his circumstances, but on the unchanging

nature and character of Christ Himself. This is why Paul can say, “Rejoice in the Lord always” (v.4). He doesn’t say “rejoice when things are going well” or “rejoice when you feel happy,” but always!

In Philippians 3:10 Paul says he wants to share in Christ sufferings. Paul knows that life will bring trials (see John 16:33), but his focus is on the goodness of the Lord who always remains faithful, and that is reason enough to rejoice. Paul had a supernatural peace that transcended all human understanding, and so do we. When we go through challenging seasons, we don’t always get the answers from God that we want, but He always gives us the peace we need. It’s okay to lean into the mysteries of God and not have all the answers.

As I write this, I had surgery on my Achilles tendon yesterday starting a nine-month clock to total recovery. There are so many things I won’t be able to do for a long while, but peace is still possible! Why? Because of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit allowing us to rejoice always. Even when we’re crying our hearts out to God through the hard and difficult seasons of our lives, we can have peace and boldly say, “I trust you, God.” The Lord is near, so we do not have to be anxious. God is sovereign! He’s on the throne, and He’s in control. Pour out your heart to God and don’t hold anything back (see Psalm 62:8). And through your prayers, with thanksgiving, you can rejoice even during your suffering. Because it’s not the circumstances of this life that bring us joy and guard our hearts. It’s the Gospel joy we receive through a relationship with Jesus. We have the joy of being forgiven and the assurance that Jesus will one

day take us to our eternal home to be with Him.

The “peace of God” acts as a phroureo – a Greek military term for a garrison or sentry. It stands watch over the “gates” of our hearts and minds, preventing intrusive, anxious thoughts from taking root. Do the books you read, the TV programs you watch or the movies you see contribute to a wholesome thought-life? If not, you can make a choice to stop filling your mind with garbage. If you spend hours scrolling through negative news or comparing yourself to others on social media, you are allowing harmful things inside your mind. This is where Paul takes us in vv.8-9. He instructs us to fix our thoughts on what is just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy. He wants us to “filter” what we allow in our minds. Like a coach, Paul encourages us to “think on these things” and “practice these things.” Paul is giving us some wonderful spiritual disciplines that we can choose to implement into our own lives.

Disciplines that will be developed through repetition. Let this reading today encourage you! Put this into practice and use it as an outline and a path that leads from the “peace of God” (v.7) to the “God of peace,” (v.9) who will always be with you!

Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

Notes

Notes

Part Two coming:

MARCH 7 & 8

Pick up at a Connection Center or scan below to access the digital copy!



