

CRSWLK SERIES GUIDE

The 
Invitation

INTRODUCTION

Studying Scripture Together.

Welcome to the journey of studying scripture together. We assume you have someone in mind that you would love to help grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, the Church, and with you. It is an exciting proposition: to take on the responsibility of leading someone through a scripture journey and helping them understand who Jesus is more profoundly. It is a sacred task, and you are up for it! We promise to help you make the most of the time you spend with your friends as you study, grow, and lead them in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Here are a few things you should know before you begin:

1. You don't have all the answers, and neither do we!

The good news is that you don't have to have them. This is a journey of discovery you will take part in with whoever you are studying with. You will grow with them; they will ask you questions, and you may or may not know the answer. But that is okay. We don't always know the answers, either. What is essential is that they are engaged enough to start asking questions. Your job as a spiritual mentor is not to always answer each question but to lead them to more study, inquisitiveness, and curiosity.

It is always okay to say: "I don't know, let's find out together!" This statement continues the conversation and invites them into the journey of discovery that is scripture study

2. It is not your job to convert but to give testimony.

When you study with someone, the Holy Spirit convinces them to fall in love with Jesus. We are only asking you to make the introduction, and we are asking you to be honest with them. We

will never ask you to be anything less than truthful about your relationship with Jesus, the Church, and with other believers. We believe that an honest testimony is the most vital, even if you are in the midst of a storm in your life and faith. The Holy Spirit can work through you; it will happen if you are open to it.

3. This guide will help you create an experience that can make a great conversation about the text.

We will spend time in the text each week, breaking it open and exegeting (pulling out of) the text's meaning. If needed, we will do historical work, cultural context, and basic translation. All this background material should help you understand the text so that when you share and teach it, you will have a solid understanding of what it means and how to apply it to your study partner's life.

To do this in a way that makes sense, each week, we will take portions of the text and do a deep dive into it so that the most relevant material can come to life for you. The teaching team at Crosswalk Church will take on this task so that you will have a different voice teaching you each week. However, we all have the same intent: that you understand the text and can break it down for your study partner so that you both might grow together in wisdom and understanding.

Lastly, we are taking on large portions of scripture each week, so we may choose to emphasize certain portions of the text rather than the whole chapter each week.

Week 1-TIMOTHY GILLESPIE

DAY 1

Luke 18:1-8

18 One day, Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. 2 “There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people. 3 A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ 4 The judge ignored her for a while, but finally, he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, 5 but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”

6 Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. 7 Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So, don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”

Jesus spoke to his disciples directly and wanted to remind them to pray and not lose heart. This reality means a few things to me. 1) the disciples sometimes got frustrated, just like you and me. There were times they needed to figure out if their prayers went above the ceiling right above them. Incredibly, things are not so different for the disciples as they are for you and me today. I often get frustrated and have to live in the reality that there are times when God’s silence makes me want to stop praying. 2) I am reminded that Jesus was such a phenomenal teacher that he often approached the issues they were dealing with before they mentioned it.

This story was addressed to them so they would not be discouraged.

He tells the story of a judge who didn’t care much for the people he was supposed to be working with and for. Instead, he was insensitive and willing to ignore the good of the people. In this story, we see the unjust judge who only handed out justice when the widow was persistent in coming back to him repeatedly, admonishing him to give her justice.

But then Jesus didn’t seem to rebuke the idea of this unjust judge. Jesus focused on the widow, who consistently warned this unfair

judge. In this way, Jesus created a “type/anti-type” construction for us to understand. When he shows us the unjust judge, he can offer us precisely the opposite kind of ruler than the judge is. He then juxtaposed that judge with how God is gracious and caring in his compassion for his people. Indeed, if a judge who didn’t care about the people would relent to a persistent admonishment to do the right thing, how much more do you think that a just God would hear the cries of his people?

To apply this today means that we are to continue to reach out to God, even when we don’t feel as if God is listening. You may be tentatively studying with someone who says they can’t “feel” God and may not have what we would consider a relationship with God. They may feel their prayers go no higher than the ceiling above them. This story means we can encourage them to continue asking for God’s presence and understanding. Remind them that God is not like the unjust judge, but he is much greater than that, and if they continue to reach out, they will see God.

1. Have you ever felt that God wasn’t present in your life?
2. Do your prayers ever feel unanswered?
3. What would be the best way to encourage someone to continue to reach out to God?

DAY 2

Luke 18:9-14

9 Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 10 “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! 12 I fast twice a week and give you a tenth of my income.’

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ 14 I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The juxtaposition of these two different kinds of prayers and these two men is a powerful illustration of what Jesus valued. This story

tells us of a man with status who uses his faith and position within it to further his agenda and look pious to those who might follow him. The other is a scourge of his society, a compromiser, and involved in a hated profession for the occupying government in their land.

The Pharisees prayed in a way that others could see and hear. He prayed prayers that seemed almost offensive, touting what he perceived to be the blessings of God to his station and his position. He reminds others of the piousness and righteousness in which he lives; he does this not to help others grow in their faith and understanding of what God wants but to lift himself and his position above them. He calls out those who are easy to objectify as sinners, and he makes sure everyone knows he is not one of them.

But then we see the way the tax collector prays. He stands at a distance, understanding his sin and sinfulness. He begs for forgiveness and is genuinely repentant for what he does. His recognition of his sinfulness and honesty in God's presence is a powerful lesson for us. His understanding that he NEEDS a savior makes his prayer utterly different than the prayer of the Pharisees. It is for no one but God, and his prayer speaks of an intimate relationship between him and God.

Jesus explains that it is the prayer of the sinner, not the prayer of the righteous, that God hears and acts upon. He states that the sinner went home justified before God.

What does this mean?

It means that God heard the repentant heart of the tax collector. His prayers weren't for a position; they were not for his self-aggrandizement. Instead, they were heartfelt pleas to someone who knew they were wrong and needed God's forgiveness.

When you study with someone searching for God, that search often begins with the understanding that something more is needed in their lives. This "something more" is often the desire to feel complete and whole and to assemble the pieces of their disparate lives. When they realize that there is a God who can do

this for them, and this God profoundly desires a connection to them, they know that the prayers people of true faith pray are heartfelt admonitions sent to a loving God.

As we journey with those coming to this realization, our job is to remind them that it was the tax collector, the sinner, not the righteous Pharisee, that God was pleased with that day. We remind them that we are all sinners searching for the connection God offers us, and we have to be honest with God, and God will be confirmed with us as well.

1. What do your prayers sound like? Like the Pharisees or the Tax Collector?
2. Have you ever taught someone to pray?
3. What would you tell them if you taught them to pray this week?
4. How can we ensure our prayers are like the prayers of the Tax Collector?

DAY 3

Luke 18:15-17

15 One day, some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him.

16 Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. 17 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

This text is quoted often at baby dedications and in many sermons. It speaks to the importance of our kids in church and shows a God who loves the little ones around us as much as he loves us. It also demonstrates how Jesus often pushed back on conventional wisdom regarding who gets access to the Kingdom of God. Children are not excluded but encouraged and celebrated.

In a time and environment plagued with infant mortality at 50% and death, parents brought their kids to Jesus to see and heal. But the disciples thought they should keep the kids away, as many adults needed the attention of the great healer as well.

Jesus put a stop to their action. He wanted the kids close. He held out his hands and let them come to him.

If you have a child or a niece or a nephew who loves you, you know there is nothing better than when they see you, their face changes to a grand smile, and they come running, arms stretched out wide to give you the most tremendous hug you have ever had!

This text speaks to the accessibility of Jesus to those around him. He did not hide himself from them but made himself available to

all those who needed a savior. In the same way that he made himself available to those kids, he also makes himself available to you. This is especially true when we realize how much we need a savior.

But here is the thing: Jesus went one step further, and what he said was shocking. He said you must be like a child to access the kingdom of heaven. Childlikeness is not just one way to gain access to the Kingdom but the only way to get access to Jesus.

If you cannot get rid of your pretentious nature, claims of fame, greed, need to control and dominate, and your grasp of power and identity, you will not be able to find your way into the kingdom of heaven.

Christ seeks those who understand who they are. Tax Collectors, not Pharisees, children with open minds, not adults with closed hearts, and those who recognize their need for a savior.

1. What category do you fit into?
2. How can you become more childlike? And what does that mean?
3. Why do you think Jesus was so open to children?

DAY 4

Luke 18: 18-30

18 Once, a religious leader asked Jesus this question: “Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”

19 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “Only God is truly good. 20 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not commit adultery. You must not

murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.]”

21 The man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

22 When Jesus heard his answer, he said, “There is still one thing you haven’t done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

23 But when the man heard this, he became very sad, for he was wealthy.

24 When Jesus saw this, he said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

26 Those who heard this said, “Then who in the world can be saved?”

27 He replied, “What is impossible for people is possible with God.”

28 Peter said, “We’ve left our homes to follow you.”

29 “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, 30 will be repaid many times over in this life, and will have eternal life in the world to come.”

There is so much happening here; let’s jump right in!

This Jewish civil administrator interrupted Jesus with a question.

This question centered on a difference of thought between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Because the Sadducees only believed in the first five books of the Old Testament, the Torah, they did not believe in resurrection. However, the Pharisees took in all of the Old Testament, Law, Wisdom, and Prophets, so they did believe in resurrection, citing Daniel 12:2 as to why.

Whether this man was trying to get Jesus to take sides or looking for his hope, we don’t know, but Jesus calls him out on something else right from the beginning.

You see, the man had called Jesus “Good Teacher.” While this was a pleasantry, he used the term “good,” something that was only really ascribed to God. So Jesus calls him out on it, making it

public that this man had connected Jesus to God by using that name. The author, Luke, probably assumed that his audience would see the connection for themselves, whether the man was making that connection on purpose or not.

Then Jesus answers the question for the man by telling him to keep the commandments. This is something that the man would have strived to do his entire life. Because Jesus quoted from the Torah, he was speaking this Sadducees language!

But Jesus goes one step further and reminds the man to get rid of his possessions and follow God. However, this man must have been rich as Jesus pushed back on how hard it is for a man of means to get to heaven. He likens it to getting a camel through the eye of a needle. Seems impossible.

Jesus then reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, but there is something of a personal sacrifice that is important to recognize and understand. Jesus also speaks of the reward for those who follow these commandments and sacrifice for God.

You can see that Peter was pretty upset, but Jesus calmed his fears and said there would be a great reward in heaven for their sacrifices for the kingdom of God.

So what is the point here? Some items are worth mentioning: 1) Jesus speaks of eternal life here as he answers Peter's inquiry about their sacrifice. 2) He also gives a deep sense of peace to those listening as he reminds them that God saves rather than the work they do here on earth.

If you are going to use this pericope (a portion of scripture) to teach someone about resurrection, be sure to remind them that it is Jesus who saves, and our lives—those sacrifices that are asked of us—are responses to the amazing grace that God has given us!

1. Are you rich? Does it make it harder to believe and to follow Christ?
2. What does being rich mean to you?
3. How can we be sure we are making the sacrifices Jesus asks of us?
4. Should those sacrifices be evident for all to see?

DAY 5

Luke 18:31-34

31 Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, "Listen, we're going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. 32 He will be handed over to the Romans, and he will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. 33 They will flog him with a whip and kill him, but on the third day, he will rise again."

34 But they didn't understand any of this. The significance of his words was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what he was talking about.

Why was this even included in the text? It was an exercise in the disciples needing help understanding what he was saying. While he gives them an affirmation of everything that is displayed in scripture about the Messiah, if his words were trying to be comforting, it seems that those words did just the opposite. They seemed to fail to grasp any of it.

Does that ever happen to you? You read scripture and then have difficulty applying it to your life, or you can't understand it.

We have all felt this way at times. We don't always know what God is talking about in scripture, and we have to study a little deeper, with a little more intention, to get to the core of what is being talked about.

Jesus is reminding them, and ultimately us, that what he is about to go through has long been discussed in the Old Testament scriptures. His being taken, mocked, and ultimately killed was not news to Jesus, but it was pretty challenging to understand for the disciples. Why? Did they not know the scriptures?

They did, but it is hard to realize that history is talking about the person in front of you. This is what the disciples had to wrestle with over and over again. Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi to ask who they thought he was. When they finally figured it out, everything changed for them, and honestly, everything changed for all of us. But it takes a long time to understand who Jesus is.

If you were to teach this passage, what essential points would you help someone understand?

If it were me, I think I would emphasize two points in particular:

1. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Prophecy. He didn't show up and do random things. He fulfilled all those things said about him. Things in Daniel, things in Isaiah, and things found other places about the Messiah. Jesus moved in a manner that made you see his fulfillment of prophecy with what seemed like every step.
2. I would tell them how hard it was for the disciples to discern who Jesus was. They traveled with him exclusively for years, and they still struggled to securely understand who he was and what he was trying to do. If their journey is full of doubts, they are not alone, but they are in a great company of faithful heroes who took a long time to recognize Jesus as God, as one who fulfills prophecy and law, and as the only one they need for salvation!

Some questions for today:

1. When did you finally really recognize who Jesus was?
2. What made the difference for you?

3. How can you help someone along that journey?

DAY 6

Luke 18:35-43

35 As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road. 36 When he heard the noise of a crowd going past, he asked what was happening. 37 They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was going by. 38 So he began shouting, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 39 “Be quiet!” the people in front yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 40 When Jesus heard him, he stopped and ordered that the man be brought to him. As the man came near, Jesus asked him, 41 “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord,” he said, “I want to see!” 42 And Jesus said, “All right, receive your sight! Your faith has healed you.” 43 Instantly, the man could see, and he followed Jesus, praising God. And all who saw it praised God, too.

This is another healing story of Jesus; we should never get tired of hearing these.

Jericho would have been the last stage of the journey to Jerusalem for Jesus and the disciples. They would have to make one final climb up the mountain, and this one would be his last. People were excited that Jesus was coming, and the crowd was becoming increasingly excited and bigger and bigger.

When the blind man heard the commotion, he was very excited to see if he could get the attention of the “son of David.” Why is this name important? It identifies the royal heritage of Jesus and implies that Jesus would be crowned in his ancestor’s place. Luke doesn’t tell us how the blind man knew all of this.

But when he shouted it, the people around him asked him to be quiet. They didn’t ask; they seemed to yell aggressively at him to stop being a menace. But the man could not be deterred and kept crying for Jesus to be merciful.

When Jesus stopped, he asked the man what he wanted. The man let Jesus know that he wanted to see. And Jesus healed him immediately.

This changed the tenor of the crowd to praising God! They must have been amazed! What strikes me about this story is that the

man was unwilling to give up. Sometimes, we must be just as willing to continue to pray, search, believe that God is good, and reach out when we don't always feel he is.

Others will tell us that God is not accurate, that it doesn't matter, and that we can live our lives without the hope of Jesus and nothing changes. I have people in my life that tell me these things. And sometimes, when it feels like God has been silent for a long time, I almost think what they say makes some sense.

However, I always think back on texts like this where people were unwilling to leave, reluctant to stop praying, and willing to remain. Ultimately, they were blessed by God in so many ways.

So the message today is simply this: to remain, continue, and expect God to show up.

1. Have you ever thought about leaving?
2. What kept you searching for God?
3. How can we help each other to remain?

DAY 7

SMALL GROUP STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

When it comes to prayer, is there a practice that you have found particularly helpful or meaningful to you? What's your question about worship, or maybe something you've struggled with concerning the practice?

HEAD

1. Read Luke 18: 1-14 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. What differences do you see between the harsh judge and God in the parable Jesus tells in the first eight verses?
3. Do you think persistence in prayer equals getting what you want? Explain your answer.
4. What was the difference in attitude between the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in the second parable?
5. Read Luke 18: 15-30 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
6. What got in the way between Jesus and the children? How did he deal with the barrier?
7. What kept the Rich Man from Jesus? How did the Rich Man deal with the barrier?

HEART

1. What significance do you see in Jesus' teaching on prayer at the beginning of this journey to the cross?
2. Should the tax collector have said more in his prayer, or were his few words enough? Explain your answer.
3. As we'll see in the coming weeks, Jesus doesn't like barriers very much. He wants people to have access to Him and the Father. What other examples can you give from Scripture that speak to this truth?
4. How do you see Jesus preparing his disciples in these moments for what's about to come in this Easter story?

HANDS

At the end of our first week in this series, pray for God to continue to reveal Himself to you through the coming weeks, to open your heart to what He has to teach you through the Easter story. Then, maybe consider planting a flower or something that will bloom in the coming weeks (probably indoors for many of you) that will remind you about new life.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then, you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

DAY 8

Luke 19: 28-40

“After telling this story, Jesus went toward Jerusalem, walking ahead of his disciples. As he came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples ahead. “Go into that village over there,” he told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?”

And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for him to ride on.

As he rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen.

“Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!”

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”

He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!"

We love underdog stories, don't we? From David and Goliath to any sports team that has to face their giant who plays with domineering ferocity (think of the Yankees of the early 2000s or the Patriots with Tom Brady).

When Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, it seemed like an underdog situation. Why?

At the time, it was the Passover in Jerusalem. Because of this holiday, scholars estimate as many as two million Jews a year would make the trek to their capital city. When that many Jews showed up, the Roman Empire would ensure their presence was felt and that people knew who was in charge.

So, in an overcrowded city with substantial religious significance and tensions between the locals and the governing empire already on high alert, a humble rabbi from Nazareth marches into town on a donkey.

Why is this significant?

Until then, Jesus had tried to share his true identity only with an elect few like His disciples. He knew what would happen if word got out too early; His time on earth would be cut short. But now, on the Sunday of the Passion Week that leads up to the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus is ready to make a bold statement.

In these times, a donkey was the traditional mount for kings and rulers, so in one sense, Jesus was saying that He is most certainly the king of His people. However, to do this during the Passover fulfilled prophecies about the coming Messiah. So Jesus wasn't just saying He was the King of the Jews, but that He was the Messiah His people had been waiting hundreds of years to arrive.

Enough people knew the signs that they began to rejoice and celebrate. Palm Tree branches waving, coats on the ground, the donkey carrying Jesus would walk on; all were signs of reverence

to the king. And they didn't just celebrate; they praised, "Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord." Other translations say, "Hosanna!"

Yes, there was celebration, but among the religious rulers, there was anger, jealousy, and retribution. They had been waiting for Jesus to claim to be the king publicly. It would justify them to have him killed for being a false prophet and for inciting insurrection against Rome. Jesus knew this would happen. He knew riding into town on a donkey would seal his fate, but he did it anyway. Why? He may not have been the king the religious rulers wanted, but He was the king we all needed.

Consider for yourself and who you study with: what kinds of things do let sit on the throne of our hearts today? What or who seems to rule over us? Beyond politics, what types of things do we give our allegiance to that our actions tell us we care more about than most things (ex, technology, wealth, reputation, success, escapism, knowledge, etc...)?

Consider these questions:

1. What would it take for us to surrender all those other things to make Jesus the King of our lives today?
2. How would our lives be different if Jesus was King instead of the things we listed above?
3. Do you think this idea of surrendering to Jesus as king is something we do once and then we're done, or must it be done more often? If more, how often?
4. **PRAYING TOGETHER** - With the person you're studying with, share one thing you know you need to let go of or surrender to Jesus, then pray for each other to have the strength to surrender to Jesus.

DAY 9

Luke 19: 41-44

“But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not recognize it when God visited you.”

There are two times Jesus wept, as described here, with an allusion to a third later in the book of Hebrews. The word for weep in Greek is *klaíó*, which means to cry aloud as if you couldn't keep it in no matter how hard you tried.

It always breaks my heart to see another person weep this way, and when I read about Jesus weeping, it evokes the same feelings. What's wrong, Jesus? Why does this hurt so bad, Jesus? What can I do to make it better, Jesus? These are all things I want to say to Him in these moments.

The two times we know that Jesus wept like this was the story above and when he was outside the tomb of Lazarus, his friend, who had died. When someone dies, especially someone you're close to, weeping seems like a natural response. But in the Lazarus story, I believe Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead in mere moments, so I don't think he wept for Lazarus.

In that story, I think Jesus wept for all the hurt and pain sin and death caused. Remember, sin and death were never a part of God's plan for us. God's plan for us was Eden, a place without death, mourning, crying, or pain. But we chose to distrust God; we rebelled, and sin and death became a part of our story.

So Jesus cries at the tomb of Lazarus for all the other people who were weeping at the grave of Lazarus and all those who will ever call at the tomb of a loved one.

But why was he crying as he looked upon Jerusalem?

Well, he knew his time on Earth was coming to a close. He knew he had tried repeatedly to break through the thick skulls of the religious leaders, many of whom were not only corrupted by their many compromises with the Roman Empire but also had come to believe that they had all the correct answers to all the questions of Scripture. They were unwilling to listen to what Jesus said because they were right and he was wrong.

So Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because he knows what's coming. He knows that because of their hard hearts and refusal to receive Jesus as their king, Jerusalem would fall, God's people would be scattered, and far too many would go to their grave rejecting Jesus' message.

You see, all of us are invited to receive Jesus as our King, Lord, Savior, Messiah, and friend, but two things can keep us from saying yes.

The first is free will. All of us are free to choose to follow Jesus or free to choose to reject Jesus. When God created us, He didn't create robots with no choice but to do what He said. No, He gave us the freedom to choose so that our love for Him wouldn't be required but chosen. So we are free to choose or reject him; the choice is ours.

Our pride and selfishness are the second things that keeps us from saying yes to Jesus. When we think we've got all the answers, when we think we know all the truth there is to know, and when we believe our way is the best, we can miss all the many ways Jesus shows up, all the many ways Jesus speaks to us, and all the many things Jesus has still to teach us. Jesus said, "You did not recognize it when God visited you."

God wants to save everyone through Jesus and His Holy Spirit (I Peter 3:9), but He won't force us. The choice is ours, and He weeps bitterly for everyone who rejects Him. But for those who choose to call Him Lord and Savior, He throws a party unlike anything we've ever seen here(Luke 15:7).

Questions to consider as you study together:

1. What kinds of things have caused, or do you think would cause, you to weep?
2. Do you believe God is on your side and desperately wants to save you? Why or why not?
3. **PRAYING TOGETHER** - Pray that you would each have the ability to see God for who He is, a God of love who weeps for you to know Him.

DAY 10

Luke 19: 45-48

“Then Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people selling animals for sacrifices. He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.”

After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said.”

There is so much in this story to unpack that we will spend the next three days looking at three versions of this story, as told in Luke, Matthew, and John, to glean all we can from it.

Some have called it the cleanings of the temple or the temple tantrum, but I refer to it as removing the barriers that keep us from God. More on that to come.

For today’s reflection, I want to debunk what has become a standard description of Jesus in this passage.

When this story is told, especially in paintings or films, Jesus is upset and tossing tables as he drives the animals and those doing business out of the temple’s outer courtyard. It’s as if Jesus allowed a rage we haven’t seen in him before to take over. John’s version of this story even includes, “Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God’s house will consume me.” (John 2:17)

But I don’t think Jesus was reacting in anger at this moment; he was so overcome with emotion that he couldn’t control his words or actions. If that had been the case, it would have been scary to think about the Son of God so angry that he was out of control.

But the truth of what happened is almost as unsettling for ordinary human beings.

First, what was happening in this outer courtyard of the temple that motivated Jesus to respond this way?

Well, it's important to note that the outer courtyard was the only place that Jews AND Gentiles (non-Jews) were allowed to enter. No Gentile could go any farther in the temple than the outer courtyard. So, in essence, the outer courtyard was the only place a Gentile could go to worship at the temple.

In addition to that note, the priests and religious leaders had turned the outer courtyard into a place to make money and line their pockets. Everyone had to bring an animal sacrifice to worship, but the animals the people brought were often "not good enough" and would have to be sold to buy one of the temple animals. The temple animals cost way more than regular animals because you'd have to exchange your money for temple money at an alarming rate. So, the priests were getting rich from the people trying to worship.

But Jesus had been watching this happen for years. Every year since he could remember, he visited the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. And every year, he watched what was happening in the outer courtyard. Year after year, Jesus came, he saw, he left. Why do something now? Why this week?

Jesus was also very thoughtful in what He said and did. Knowing his death was coming and having just publicly announced to Jerusalem that He was king, Jesus chose to respond, not in anger, but with power and authority. The gospel of John tells us he "made a whip." That would have taken some time. So, though he may have been passionate and filled with strong emotions, those emotions weren't anger or hate, and he wasn't violent. Jesus was still driven by love because love was the core of who he was. Just like he said, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Luke 6:45 ESV

We'll get more into some of the other reasons behind why Jesus did to the temple what he did, but for today, let's take a few moments to reflect on these things:

1. What is at your core? Are you exhausted, burned out, frustrated, angry, sad, worried, or is this a good season of life, and you feel more filled with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, guidance, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control?
2. How do you find yourself responding in stressful situations, and how might your response reflect what's happening on the inside?
3. If you're interested, what things could you begin to help make Jesus and His love your core?
4. **PRAYING TOGETHER** - Open your Bibles to Ephesians 3: 14-21, and pray that prayer over the person you are studying with that we would all be rooted and established in love, strengthened with His presence in our inner being.

DAY 11

John 2: 13-17

“It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area, he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, “Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!”

Then, his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God's house will consume me.”

As we said yesterday, the temple's outer courtyard was open to everyone, and it was the one place where the Gentiles were

allowed to go in and worship. The Only problem was so much noise and commotion that, as one scholar noted, “one wouldn’t have been able to hear themselves think, let alone pray.”

So, from Jesus’ perspective, some people had come to pray and meet with God, and they couldn’t. The noise and commotion were barriers to building on that relationship with the father.

But honestly, the whole temple system was a system of barriers.

For example, though everyone could enter the outer courtyard, only the Jews could go farther inside the temple the next space, and then only the Jewish men could go even farther. Only the priests, but even then, there was a place where only the high priest could go, only once a year, called the Most Holy Place, which was separated from the Holy Place (open to all priests) by a curtain that went from floor to ceiling.

So, the temple was a system of barriers. One of the things that Jesus did when he flipped the tables and drove out the money-makers was that he was the way so that the Gentiles could worship. It was his first formal step to clearing the way to God, so we all can access him. Why do I believe this?

Follow the journey of this week to its climax. On Friday, Jesus is taking his last breaths as he hangs on the cross. We’re told, “Then Jesus shouted, “Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!” And with those words, he breathed his last.” Luke 23:46 NLT

Do you know what happens next? Matthew says, “At that moment, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart...” Matthew 27:51 NLT

When Jesus dies, the final barrier between us and Him is removed. With the curtain torn from top to bottom, we now have access to God, not just the high priest, on one day a year, but all of us, whenever and wherever we want. We can go in to meet with God, and He can come out to meet with us.

The apostle Paul said it best, “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:1, 38-39 NLT

So, here are a few questions for us to consider today;

1. What barriers seem to be keeping us from God? Is it our sin? Our shame? Something someone else has been telling us about ourselves or God? Or maybe our barriers are other beliefs, lies, or fears? What keeps us from communion with God?
2. What would it be like if you knew all those barriers were removed and you could talk to and listen to God unencumbered?
3. **PRAY TOGETHER** - Once you’ve admitted what barriers might be keeping you from God and accepted that Jesus came to remove those barriers, lay them at the foot of Jesus, and ask for his help to let them go.

DAY 12

Matthew 21: 12-17

“Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves!”

The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, “Praise God for the Son of David.”

But the leaders were indignant. They asked Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?”

“Yes,” Jesus replied. “Haven’t you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, ‘You have taught children and infants to give you praise.’” Then he returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight.”

Ok, day three of our reflection on Jesus’ cleansing of the temple, and I hope it’s been helpful for you.

What’s different that we can take note of in Matthew’s account is really what happened after the barriers were removed. People of all kinds, people that weren’t allowed in the temple before (blind, sick, lame), brought their ailments to Jesus. The closest they had ever got to entering the temple was the gate, but now they have full access and enter.

Not only do they enter in, but they receive from Jesus what we all long to receive from Jesus: healing. In a physical sense, Jesus made them whole, but this likely affected their spiritual wholeness because Jesus believed in making us complete: mind, body, soul, and heart.

You see this distinction clearly in a story found in Mark 5 of a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Scholars believe her bleeding would have been comparable to being on your menstrual cycle continuously for 12 years. Her condition, like any ailment, made her unclean from a societal and religious perspective. This meant a few things: she couldn't touch another person, and another person couldn't touch her; she couldn't make eye contact with another person, and another person couldn't make eye contact with her...FOR TWELVE YEARS!

Imagine how lonely and isolated you would feel.

Mark tells us she spent all she had trying to improve but only grew worse.

One day, Jesus arrived in her village. She had heard much about him, his teachings, his healings, but she knew she could never go to where he was. She'd have to wait for him to come to her. And today was that day.

She felt that if Jesus were who others said he was, the Messiah, she'd only have to touch the hem of his garment to be healed. Long story short, that's what she does, and that's what happens. She is cured in an instant, physically, anyway.

She turned to leave, hopefully unnoticed, but Jesus wasn't done with her yet. She was physically healed, yes, but after 12 years of isolation, name-calling, and rejection, she needed more than physical healing. In the end, Jesus touches her, looks her in the eye, and calls her daughter. All of these are acts of restoration.

So, what in your life needs healing? What in your life needs the touch of the Savior? Talk with the person you're studying about the things in your past or present where you need the healer to come in and make you whole.

Things to talk over:

1. Do you have any emotional scars from your past that haven't quite healed yet?

2. Are there any spiritual scars or baggage you'd like to let go of so you may be made whole?
3. Do you believe that Jesus wants to, and can, make you whole? Why or why not?
4. **PRAY TOGETHER** - Sometimes healing comes in a moment; other times, it takes time. After sharing some areas in each other's lives where healing is needed, begin to pray over each other for that healing, and claim Paul's promise in Romans 8: 26-27, that when we have things we can't put into prayer but we know we need it, that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with moans and groans that our words can't express.

DAY 13

Acts of the Apostles 8: 26-38

“As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and walk along beside the carriage.”

Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

The man replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing.”

This is a great story to spend time with, with so much we could unpack. However, for this reflection, we’ll keep it simple.

First, we note that Jesus’ disciple, Philip, was open enough to hear from and follow the Holy Spirit wherever she led him. I find this to be the kind of disciple I want to be.

Secondly, the other character in our story is a Eunuch. Eunuchs had an interesting history in Biblical times, but one thing was sure - they were not allowed to enter the temple in Jerusalem.

This Ethiopian Eunuch was likely a convert to Judaism, may even have been circumcised, and had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. He was hungry to learn about and meet with God.

But likely, upon arriving, he would have had the door slammed in his face (don't ask me how they checked to see if he was a eunuch or not). Like many others who went to Jerusalem, he had been met with one barrier after another.

In today's story, he's on his way back to Ethiopia and reading from the scroll of Isaiah (he must have had wealth because a scroll was very expensive), but he doesn't understand what he's reading. God sends Philip to help him know that the following two parts of the story are essential.

For those who have been baptized, we're told what our job is when it comes to helping others know more about Jesus, the barrier-remover: "So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus." (Acts 8:35) Our job is to help point people to Jesus.

And for those who haven't been baptized, listen to what happens when the eunuch has the story of Jesus come together for him for the first time; he responds.

"As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him." (Acts 8: 36,38)

When we come to see Jesus for who He is - a God who so loved the world that He died for us, a God who removed the barriers between us and Him so we could be made whole again with Him, then the only thing left that keeps us from being baptized is finding some water and going for it.

Questions to consider today:

1. Do you believe that Jesus is who He said He is - the Word made flesh who came and died for our sins?

2. If you believe the above, have you entirely given your life to Him through baptism? Why or why not? If not, what's keeping you from saying yes?
3. **PRAY TOGETHER** - As you talk all this over with the person you are studying with, ask each other any questions about Jesus or baptism, knowing you can reach out to a pastor if you still have questions after talking. But pray for God to lead and guide you to a better picture of Him, to a conviction in your heart to trust in Him more, and then, when the time is right, to remove the barriers so that you may be baptized or rededicate your life to him.

DAY 14

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

If you celebrated Easter growing up, did you or your family ever do anything special? If so, what? If not, share a question you have often wondered about involving the events of The Passion Week (the last week of Christ) or even the practices surrounding Easter.

HEAD

1. Read Luke 19:28-40 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. The disciples likely knew the Messianic prophecies about a king riding a donkey into Jerusalem. What do you think this moment was like for them? What would have been going through their heads?
3. Jesus knew the Pharisees had been waiting for him to be this obvious about who he was so they could kill him. Aside from the obvious, what do you think was going through His head?
4. Knowing there would have been lots of Roman soldiers in town to keep the Jews under control, what do you think they thought about this Jewish display and the shouts for a king? Do you think they noticed or cared?
5. Read Luke 19:41-44 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.

6. Talk about the heart of Jesus that we see as he weeps over Jerusalem. Remember, he's crying over the ones that will kill him as much as the ones that will abandon him. How did he try to avoid this moment of weeping?
7. Read Luke 19:45-48 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
8. Imagine being a leper who was never allowed into the temple or a Gentile who was never able to pray in peace. What would it have been like that first time you entered or that first time you could hear yourself pray? What feelings would you have towards the One who made it possible?

HEART

1. These two events mark the beginning of The Passion week; Jesus is King, and Jesus has the authority to remove the barriers in our lives. What do you think each of these events has to say about the kind of king and the kind of God Jesus is?
2. Has there been anyone you wept over because you desperately wanted them to know how much they mean to God? If not, is there anyone in that vein he has recently put on your heart?
3. Has there been a barrier between you and God in the past or present? If you're willing to share with others, what was or is that barrier, and is it something you can let God take away for you?

HANDS

With another person or by yourself, take a moment to write out what you feel is coming between you and Jesus. Maybe those things are sins you're struggling with; perhaps they involve unbelief, maybe they involve a season in your life right now, whatever it is, right them all out. Then, in a time of prayer, lay those at the feet of Jesus. If you need to, tear them up or maybe even burn them (in a fireplace or somewhere safe).

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all wickedness."

1 John 1:9 NLT

Week 3-DAVID FERGUSON

DAY 15

Luke 20:1-2

1 One day, as he [Jesus] was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. 2

“Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said.
“Who gave you this authority?”

Occasionally, as little kids, arguments would devolve past any point of logic, and someone would blurt out, “You’re not the boss of me.” This is the ultimate end to a contest of wills as you feel power slip through your metaphorical fingers.

As we enter the 20th chapter of Luke, things are coming to a head. For quite some time, religious leaders have been overwhelmed with worry and fear generated by the popularity, teachings, and healing of Jesus. He is a threat to their way of life. To make matters worse, chapter 19 concludes with an outright attack on the authority of the religious establishment as Jesus tosses tables and scatters the sales booths standing in the way of worshipping God in the temple.

These leaders would end Jesus’ life if they could get away with it. So they probe and provoke. They spy and lay traps. But Jesus is too wily for them. Then, they ask the pivotal question, “Who gave you this authority?”

Indeed, the question of authority is at the heart of spirituality. Authority and appropriate submission are the themes of this entire chapter. So let me ask, “Who IS the boss of you?”

The chief priests feared the presence of Jesus would downgrade their control. And they are correct. We should always suspect a power grab when someone complains of too much Jesus. Be forewarned, Jesus comes to bring a sword to our self-serving ways (Matthew 10:34) and a cross to our narcissistic religiosity (v 38).

Jesus is the origin of our faith, the reason for our hope. He is the author of salvation, the picture of the Father, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection, the Beginning and the End of all things. He IS authority.

Who gave Him this authority? The Father and the Spirit... also He (Jesus) did. It was always His. It will always be His. Paul desperately attempts an explanation in Colossians 1:15-20:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things; in him, all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

But there is this one strange detail to Jesus' authority. He gently asks you to submit to it by your own choice. Rather than forcing His way into your heart, He waits to be invited inside, respectful and honoring to a fault. Make no mistake, He has authority. But He is also the peacemaker, the reconciler, and the one who climbs a cross to save you, to bring you home.

If you haven't already, consider giving Him authority over your life.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how stubborn are you? Are there specific kinds of situations that bring your stubbornness out?
2. Have you ever heard someone suggest there is more to your salvation than Jesus? How do you feel about that?
3. Would you like to invite Jesus to have authority over your life? If so, write your request in a prayer to Him now.

DAY 16

Luke 20:2-8

2 “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”

3 He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, 4 John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?”

5 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’ 6 But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”

7 So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.”

8 Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

I have much to learn from the example of Jesus. Twenty-nine times in the Gospels, He responds to questions with a corresponding question. How frustrating this must have been. The opening question asked by a Pharisee, lawyer, priest, or Sadducee was generally designed to trap Him in an impossible situation.

You've probably been asked some form of the joking question, "Have you stopped beating your wife. Of course, there is no safe answer. Jesus often side-stepped the intended trap (or, as the Gospel writers often put it, "test") by asking a question rather than giving an answer.

This strategy craftily served Jesus' intentions. He didn't allow others to draw Him into hurtful, unnecessary, or politically distracting conversations. However, He was never the one to break off conversation and connection. He stayed present even while seeing evil motives. He was also able to challenge assumptions and the disagreeable reality His opponents were promoting while using their words. Finally, responding with questions allowed Jesus to insinuate essential truths subtly while avoiding the snares set for Him.

So much to learn from Jesus.

One particularly genius element of Jesus' strategy was His occasional decision to avoid any response. I find this nearly impossible. I always have something to say, an opinion you need to hear. In our passage for today, Jesus has reversed a trap meant to destroy Him. But He shuts it down in victory and doesn't press His advantage. And if you look for it, He does this repeatedly throughout the storytelling of the Gospels.

Jesus' priorities include defending the defenseless, standing up for the character of God, and bringing salvation to the lost. But He has very little time for winning arguments with the hardhearted or matching religious wits for the sake of dogma.

A stark difference exists between honest inquiry and a dialogue calculated to cut, destroy, or make one look good. Jesus leans towards connection with the true character and Spirit of God while leaning away from argumentations of religiosity. This is where I wish to grow.

1. How has Jesus reversed the trap by asking whether John's baptism was from Heaven or from Men (Luke 20:3-4)?

2. Is it easy for you to want to argue about spiritual things?
Why do you think this is so?

DAY 17

Luke 20:20-26

20 Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. 21 So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22 Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

23 He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 24 “Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?”

25 “Caesar’s,” they replied.

He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

One more time, Jesus senses the motives behind a dangerous group of followers. Pretending to value His teachings, they bate Him into an impossible question. If He sides with the feelings of His Jewish crowd and disrespects the Roman government, His opponents have leverage against Him as a dissident revolutionary. But if He appears to support Rome and its oppressive taxation, His influence with the people will surely flag. What will Jesus do?

Once again, He removes the danger by asking a question in return for theirs. When they admitted their money bore the image of Caesar, logically, Rome could ask for it back. It is Caesar’s

property. Here, Jesus not only sidestepped danger But also made a powerful point.

Ever so subtly, Jesus reminds the listener whose image we bear. He points out our first allegiance is to our Maker and true King. We care about local laws, zoning restrictions, building codes, and homeowners associations. We participate in primary elections and Tuesdays in November. But don't be confused; our worship and loyalty are first and foremost, and always to God. Our national pride is good until it is wound too tightly to our faith. No country, ethnicity, or wonderful politician should stand in the place of God.

Luke chapter 20 lands at the perfect moment in time. As we anticipate the upcoming political events of the year with dread or excitement, don't forget the hope of our lives, communities, and families is Jesus—no one else.

As Psalm 121:1-2 reminds us :

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
where does my help come from?
2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

1. How do you feel as you anticipate the political discourse in your country this year? Why?
2. Is there something that stresses you about money? What?
3. What is Jesus (who sees through duplicity) talking to you about right now?

DAY 18

Luke 20:4-9

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.

10 At harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

13 “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

14 “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “May this never be!”

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

“ ‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone’”?

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

As we unpack this passage, it is helpful to reference verse 19 for understanding. The parable of the vineyard in verses 9-16 and the metaphor of the capstone in verses 17-19 are understood by most listeners as a rebuke of Jesus’ opponents who show up in the first verse of our chapter. Why is this?

The parable includes a vineyard and its owner, who has servants and a son. But some tenants have been given care of the vineyard. These tenants enjoy its privileges. But when the owner wants some of the fruits of his property, the tenants treat him, his servants, and his son as intruders, as if the vineyard is theirs.

You can start to appreciate the meaning. The Jewish nation was given charge over precious truths and a knowledge of God designed to be shared with the world for salvation. But the Israelites hoarded their understandings rather than share them. Then, when God sends His servants (a likely reference to the prophets), they are ill-treated and beaten as enemies. Finally, God sends His Son to confront the tenants (Jesus foreshadows His crucifixion in this parable). The tenants (religious leaders and people of Israel) believe they own this spiritual community. And when God's Son, Jesus, shows up, they have a lethal reaction.

A satisfied smile comes over me as I read this passage. "Good one, Jesus," I think to myself. But as I sit with this parable, I begin to consider that Jesus is talking to me, not just the Hebrew nation of old. I love my church, Crosswalk. And, while there is an appropriate way to say, "my church." There is a constant temptation to claim something that is God's as my own. Weirdly, the tenants are in the story because God shares His vineyard with them. He seems regularly interested in taking His things and making them "ours" with Him. But we struggle with a selfishness that is grasping, possessive, and exclusive... "mine."

The realization that Jesus shares His kingdom with me stirs something profound inside. He intends His kingdom to include all who are interested. But, as I create categories of exclusion, Jesus reminds me through this parable that such a mentality eventually winds up killing the Son of God, Himself.

So, throw wide the doors of Crosswalk or any other church bearing the name of Christ. This is His church, which He shares with us. So we need not be stingy with His grace. It is meant to be given away rather than hoarded to ourselves.

1. Is there someone you think of who needs the grace of Jesus right now? Is there some way God might use you to share it? How?
2. What is a way you have experienced the Grace of Jesus recently?

3. Is there something else you are impressed to give away that you have been holding onto tightly? What is that?

DAY 19

Luke 20:27-40

20 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. 28 “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. 29 Now, there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30 The second 31 and then the third married her, and in the same way, the seven died, leaving no children. 32 Finally, the woman died too. 33 Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

34 Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children since they are children of the resurrection. 37 But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” 40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Yet again, Jesus faces questions designed to dent His credibility with the people. This time, it comes from a group of Sadducees whose theology didn’t include the hope of resurrection. It bears noting that bitter ideological enemies, the Pharisees, and the

Sadducees, had become allies in their attempt to damage Jesus. It is incredible how often hatred unites.

The Sadducees hope to humiliate the countryside preacher with an over-the-top case study of an unfortunate, childless woman who wed and buried seven husbands. They frame their question through the vehicle of marriage and remarriage. But the thrust of their interest surrounds their disbelief in the resurrection and the hereafter. They build the case study to insinuate the impracticality of such notions. This hypothetical has probably befuddled their Pharisee opponents in conversations of the past. But today, they have severely miscalculated. They stand before the one who *is* the resurrection.

In Matthew's telling of this interaction, Jesus begins His response by saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). Ouch... strong opener for sure. He briefly addresses marriage in heaven (we'll have to save that for another time) and faces their primary concern head-on. Jesus reminds the listeners of the voice of the Almighty in the Exodus story with Moses at the burning bush, saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). Jesus' brilliance is to point out the voice of *I Am* speaking in the continually active tense, which implies Abraham will exist in the future and not just the past. Yahweh has power over our inception, our redemption, and our resurrection. Luke says, "Some law teachers responded, 'Well said, teacher.'" (20:39). I'm guessing they were Pharisees. And with this, the questions cease. The opponents slink away.

The core of the Sadducee's question continues reverberating in many ways. It resurfaces in our doubtful moments. We wonder, "Is this all there is? Will we be rescued? Is it safe to hope there is more than this life and death?"

Hear this clearly: God's rescue is no short-term, momentary grace. The voice of God thunders His power at a burning bush, a fiery furnace, and a lion's den. He shouts through Jeremiah's prophecies, at Nehemiah's wall, and even the whispers of Elijah's cave. He proclaims a once-and-for-all, start-to-finish, eternal

resurrection. And Jesus caps it with an exclamation point. “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies...” (John 11:25).

This is a game-changer. We will live!

1. Consider 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. What stands out about Paul’s argument for the resurrection?
2. Is there a way in which you feel dead or dying right now? What is it?
3. Who are you praying will experience the resurrecting power of Jesus’ presence?

DAY 20

Luke 20:45-47

45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 47 They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”.

“Beware of the teachers of the law.” Why does Jesus say this? It seems clear that they are full of themselves. This is common among religious gurus, company owners, team leaders, and employees of the month. Honestly, it is common among humans in general. Sure, we might swing back and forth between self-doubt and arrogance. But here lies a reasonably predictable pitfall.

Our successes can generate a sense of entitlement and a desire for special treatment. Feeling good about ourselves can morph into a desire for attention and undue affirmation. And, if we are not careful, we begin to see people as a means to our ends. Conceit usually leads us to devalue others. Sometimes, we turn toward dehumanizing anyone who threatens our success or public image.

Walking with Jesus is the antidote to these kinds of behaviors and sentiments. He is the one who shows us how to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39), go last in line, even behind those less deserving (Mark 10:31), and lay our lives down for others (John 15:13). In Matthew 5:5, Jesus says, “Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.” This humility frees Jesus to ask forgiveness for His torturers while He hangs dying on a cross.

At this point, you may be thinking, “None of this applies to me. My inner voice leans towards self-loathing rather than arrogance.” But thinking too lowly of oneself bears nearly the same fruit as thinking too highly. In both cases, we are consumed with ourselves.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis says, “... if you meet a humble man... He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.”

The world of the prideful and the self-disgusted grows smaller and smaller as we center our vision more directly on

ourselves. Meanwhile, the eyes of the humble are open to see the awe and wonder of a world filled with possibilities, not of our own making. Humility gives us the bandwidth to value and respect others and the energy to do good. Self-concern spends wasteful time consumed with image preservation, minor slights, and the affirmation of strangers.

Christ calls us to a place of security and confidence devoid of grasping self-interest. This is freedom. And as Jesus says, “If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:36).

1. How would you describe your inner dialogue regarding your self-image? What do you think Jesus would say to you about it?
2. What is something you wish you had more time for? What can you do about that?
3. Who have you thought lowly of that Jesus might ask you to elevate? Why do you think you have felt this way?

DAY 21

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

If you were to describe who Jesus is to you, what word or title would you use and why?

HEAD

1. Read Luke 20: 1-19 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. There is so much to unpack in that verse, but let's start with why you think it was hard for the Pharisees to accept that Jesus had authority.
3. Were the law teachers trying to answer Jesus' question honestly, or were they thinking about themselves and what others might think of them? How do you think Jesus would have preferred them to respond?
4. Read Luke 20: 20-40 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
5. Why were the teachers so jealous of Jesus?
6. Do you think Jesus meant that God would come and kill the teachers of the law in verse 16? If so, how does that picture of God fit with the image of the God who was about to give His life for all on the cross?

HEART

1. How do you think Jesus was able to steer clear of the traps of the teachers of the law time and time again? How did He know them so well?
2. In verse 21, even though they were trying to trap Jesus, they spoke the truth - Jesus taught the truth, which wasn't always what people wanted to hear. This whole chapter is entirely of the law teachers being concerned over what people thought of them or their speaking to what the people wanted to hear. How do you and I avoid the trap of caring more about what people think of us than what Jesus thinks of us?
3. Who has the ultimate authority in your life? Is it Jesus? Is it your pursuits of worldly accolades, or are you living simply to please a parent or spouse?

4. How can you surrender your life today to Jesus as your ultimate authority?

HANDS

In another prayer time, open your palms and turn them down, facing the ground. As you pray, let go of all the things in your life you've given authority to, all the voices you listen to that aren't from God. Once you've let all that go, turn your palms up and ask God to speak the truth of who you are and how He truly feels about you into your heart. Then, sit and receive what He has to give you.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen."
1 Timothy 1:17 NLT

DAY 22

LUKE 21:1-421

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people drop their gifts in the collection box. 2 A poor widow came by and dropped two small coins.

3 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest. 4 For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

Again, we see Jesus recognizing those small gifts from those who don't have much to give. We have seen this reversal often, but in this particular text, we know the power of sacrificial offering to God. And to be clear, this is not an issue of money but of submission and commitment.

The poor widow was willing to give all she had, and that volume of giving had nothing to do with the value of the coins she gave. It was the commitment to provide all she had that was honored by Jesus. It was the acknowledgment that the best we have to offer God is well-received, deeply appreciated, and marked by God. But is this about money? Are we supposed to give all the cash we have on hand to the church? While the widow seemed to, I am not sure this applies to today's financial households. Of course, we should give. The church functions on the goodwill of those who find meaning, community, and hope in these places of worship.

However, if we expand this example to what can be seen as the discipleship of our lives, things change pretty profoundly. It doesn't let us off the hook; instead, it drives the hook in even more deeply. We are then called to give “all” we have and all we are. This is a much greater commitment than giving money. It is a much deeper and more profound commitment to Christ than putting our hands

in our pockets, pulling out a few coins, or even going deeper and writing checks we can seemingly hardly afford. It is a commitment that every part of our lives might be sincerely given in submission to Christ and his precepts.

We call this discipleship. Sitting at the feet of Jesus, abiding in him, and remaining to learn from Jesus, not just about Jesus. To do this, we must seek a more significant commitment. This commitment happens after we “taste and see” that the Lord is good. (Psalm 34:8) It is the place we go next after seeing how good God is to us.

1. When have you given everything you have?
2. What do you need to submit to God?
3. What are you holding back?

DAY 23

Luke 21:5-7

5 Some of his disciples began talking about the majestic stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls. But Jesus said, 6 “The time is coming when all these things

will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!"

7 "Teacher," they asked, "when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to take place?"

"The believer becomes essentially one who hopes. He is still future to "himself" and is promised to himself. His future depends utterly and entirely on the outcome of the risen Lord's course, for he has staked his future on the future of Christ." —-Jurgen Moltman.

Why is it important to talk about the future of things? We call these conversations "eschatological," meaning we study the end of things in theology. Whether it is life, the end of the world, or anything else, we engage in eschatological conversations when we recognize that the end of things is the focus. We need to talk about these to fully understand what it is that Jesus was doing here on earth, to grasp with a tighter grip onto what is ahead for us as believers, and also to find a deep assurance that we are saved by what Jesus came down to do when he was here so long ago.

Jesus leads into this discussion by letting his disciples know the things they were looking at were nothing but temporary. He leads them to a greater understanding that not everything will be around forever, and as it should, this bothers them a bit.

In verse 7, we see them asking for specific signs to know where we are on the timeline of the end.

Have you ever felt this way? Coming from the SDA tradition, we have been fascinated and focused on the end of everything. If you were like me, when you were a little child, these thoughts of eschatology and what would happen to us were tattooed on my consciousness in a less-than-healthy way. I worried that things were getting worse and worse and that the world was going to be thrust into a war that would end all wars.

I remember watching "The Day After" on television and being frightened at seeing a nuclear winter we would all have to live through. Coming from a faith that affirms most of those ideals as

truth, announced in scripture and prophecy, was a frightening time. All this assembled in my heart to create fear and trepidation for what was coming next.

Before this happened, I didn't think I would graduate high school. I figured I would never be married, make it out of college for sure, and we would see Jesus come in that hand-sized cloud that we were taught about. I can remember sitting on a branch of a big tree at recess, not wanting to go back into the classroom because I swore I saw that cloud that would bring Jesus back. Maybe I was a weird kid, but some of you have had that same experience growing up.

So what do we do with eschatology, and how do we teach it to those we are studying with? That is our task this week!

1. Have you had any experiences like the one mentioned above?
2. How often do you think about the end of all things?
3. How do you reconcile that fear with all that is happening today?

DAY 24

Luke 21:8

He replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and saying, ‘The time has come!’ But don’t believe them. 9 And when you hear of wars and insurrections, don’t panic. These things must occur first, but the end won’t follow immediately.” 10 Then he added, “Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be great earthquakes, and there will be famines and plagues in many lands, and there will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven.

Okay, this is a lot. Jesus jumps right in from the beginning. He gives us words of encouragement as well as words of warning. Let's break them down quickly.

1. He tells them that people will be coming, saying they are the messiah. At that time, some even used the mysterious divine name (ego eimi-in Greek) to prove their point. Jesus is letting his disciples know these people should not be listened to. Jesus advises not to follow them, which will lead to nothing good.
2. He tells us that there will be wars, and nations will fight against nations. Also, many lands will have earthquakes,

famines, and plagues. There will likely be a lot going on. But much of this is always going on.

Now, this is just the beginning. But a few things that we might take note of here. Many of these things have been happening consistently over the last two millennia. Often, when we read this kind of eschatological literature, we feel the urgency of the moment as it feels like Jesus is speaking into today's situations around the world. It is safe to say he is, but he also talked to their situations in the 1st century. So there is a bit of a Both/And situation happening here.

It should also be noted that every generation reading these words felt like Jesus was speaking to them. And, of course, he was talking to them as a warning as much as for any other reason. To remind them that the end of things will happen as their lives end.

I used to have an app called "Ring of Fire" with all the earthquakes currently happening around the Pacific Rim. I had to delete that app because it was notifying me too often, as there are a ridiculous amount of earthquakes happening worldwide every day, seemingly every hour.

What I mean by all this is that we are wise to think and study about the end of time as Jesus spoke to it, but we can take a cautious attitude toward it rather than be moved to anxiety. This is not to say that things will not end, but we need to find the principles in the words of Jesus. The principle we see here is that things are tough and could get more arduous, and we are to lean into the peace and security of Jesus.

1. Have you ever studied End Times? How did it make you feel?
2. How can we read these words and not be anxious?
3. Who should we put our trust in at times like this?

DAY 25

Luke 21:12

“But before all this occurs, there will be a time of great persecution. You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand trial before kings and governors because you are my followers. 13 But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. 14 So don’t worry in advance about how to answer the charges against you, 15 for I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you! 16 Even those closest to you—your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends—will betray you. They will even kill some of you. 17 And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish! 19 By standing firm, you will win your souls.”

I love these texts. I find so much comfort in them. Does that make me crazy? Does that make me someone who has a persecution wish? Let me explain:

While Jesus spoke of a great persecution, he also said of the opportunity to witness the goodness and greatness of Jesus. While persecution certainly seems worse than uncomfortable, our faith in Jesus is put to the test, and Jesus indicates it will be worth it. We will have the opportunity to give witness to God, to his grace and love toward us and others. We have the opportunity to share what is closest to our hearts.

Now, I get it that no one wants to be persecuted; no one wants to suffer. But how often do we get clear opportunities to talk about Jesus so profoundly and sometimes under such scrutiny? Also, remember that Jesus was speaking to those in Jerusalem, looking at a challenging time as Jesus was about to go through the trials and tribulations that would end in his crucifixion and resurrection. So, there was an urgency to these words back then.

Is there an urgency to these words today? And if you are studying these words for the first time, what should you do with them? Do we have to feel that we will be persecuted? Do we have to look forward to our families betraying us? Should we be excited about the prospect of dying?

Of course not. The urgency comes from the understanding that no matter what, it seems that Jesus is telling us that he will be with us, whether there is persecution or not, whether there is betrayal or not. The truth is, we don't live in a world with the same situation that his followers were experiencing at the time. For most of us, Christianity is the culture we come from, or at least a part of it. We may not have as much to lose at this point in history, although some reading this may face cultural pressure to conform away from Jesus. Those who don't meet that kind of persecution should use these texts to understand that we, too, can give ourselves over to Christ and live in a way that recognizes and is willing to sacrifice for Christ.

1. Do these words make you nervous?
2. How do you teach this to someone and not scare them away? Should you lean into those texts that speak of God's promise of safety?
3. Should you ignore these texts and leave them alone? Let's use the poor widow's story at the beginning and leave it at that.

DAY 26

Luke 21:20

“And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you will know that the time of its destruction has arrived.²¹ Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. Those in Jerusalem must get out, and those out in the country should not return to the city. ²² For

those will be days of God's vengeance, and the prophetic words of the Scriptures will be fulfilled.²³ How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. For there will be disaster in the land and great anger against this people. ²⁴ They will be killed by the sword or sent away as captives to all the nations of the world. And Jerusalem will be trampled down by the Gentiles until the period of the Gentiles comes to an end. ²⁵ "And there will be strange signs in the sun, moon, and stars. And here on earth the nations will be in turmoil, perplexed by the roaring seas and strange tides. ²⁶ People will be terrified at what they see coming upon the earth, for the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!"

Rather than exegete every thing that is mentioned in this text, I want to talk a little philosophically about these kinds of texts.

Firstly, this happened at the destruction of the temple in 70AD. Rome destroyed the temple, and the children of Israel had to disperse and become the Diaspora throughout the world after this event.

Secondly, since the time of Jesus, people have been trying to hang certain events within nature on these particular comments. Signs in the sun, moon, and stars, roaring seas, and strange tides are things that people have tried to pin down to say, "Look, the time of the end is coming!" SDA's even had a magazine called the "Signs of the Times" that often focused on end-of-time prophecies.

Should we then do the same thing, study these texts, trying to see where they are happening in the world today?

I would say no, and let me tell you why. . .

The time spent on this kind of work does some things to people. It scares them; they expend much intellectual energy and focus on figuring out where we are in this timeline. We have said Jesus is coming "soon" for many years. While this pursuit can be beneficial, since the time of Jesus, anyone who has predicted he

is coming has been wrong. SDA's even have had a brush with this in our history.

Therefore, let's spend our time working to have the world see a better expression of the love of God through our work, care, compassion, and deep desire to continue to be as close to Jesus as possible. This busies our hands in a way that keeps us out of trouble and lowers our anxiety about the end of time.

Lastly, the promise that Jesus will be with us through everything we go through should tell us that we will be better than okay through it all. Even if things go badly for us, we are citizens of the Kingdom of God, and what happens here on this earth, while important, is minor compared to what we have waiting for us in the future. Whatever heaven might be, we will be in God's presence, which should give us peace!

1. Have you ever known someone distracted by trying to figure out when God was coming?
2. How much love did they bring into the world?
3. How much love can you bring into the world today?

DAY 27

Luke 21:29

“Then he gave them this illustration: “Notice the fig tree or any other tree. 30 When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. 31 In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. 32 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

34 “Watch out! Don’t let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, 35 like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. 36 Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man.”

37 Every day Jesus went to the Temple to teach, and each evening he returned to spend the night on the Mount of Olives.38 The crowds gathered at the Temple early each morning to hear him.”

So, we end this chapter with a parable, a warning, a promise, and the commentary that people loved what Jesus was saying to them.

The Parable:

Jesus reminds us that we know when the seasons change due to the effects of a fading season on nature. We know when spring is coming as we see winter fading. The same is true of summer to fall. So, we should be aware of what is happening around us, our communities, and the world. Sometimes, this can be overwhelming, especially when living in contentious times. Remember, Jesus did not have access to the internet or all the ways we get information nowadays. Therefore, as we keep track of current events, we should also track how God works in our immediate world, community, and families to see how God is still involved in our lives.

A Warning:

Jesus tells us to watch out and not be dulled into not paying attention to what is happening around us. This warning is to stay engaged in the world and your family and let nothing dull you from being an engaged and active Christian.

A Promise:

He promises that “this generation will not pass away” before seeing these things happen. And the truth is that we all see these things happen around us constantly. We see Jesus come into people’s lives, we see horrible disasters, and we see people leave and fade away from the faith. Everything Jesus had mentioned has come to pass today! So these words are just as present today as they were 2000 years ago as the disciples heard them.

Lastly, people were drawn to his words as they offered hope, compassion, peace, and joy, even amid all the suffering and persecution. People instinctively knew they should come closer to Jesus when the going gets rough.

And that is the word for this week and what you need to help those studying with you know. No matter what happens, we should move closer to Jesus anytime. This will be our home, safety, sustenance, and joy!

1. Have you ever taught end-time stuff before? Are you nervous?
2. Have you ever thought about the end of time happening every day for someone around you?
3. How can we help new believers understand that the end of time is not something to fear but to experience with Jesus?

DAY 28

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

What was one of the most unique gifts you've ever been given? Maybe it was a birthday, Christmas, anniversary, or just because, and perhaps it wasn't because the gift was expensive, but because it meant so much to you.

HEAD

1. Read Luke 21: 1-6 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. The receptacle they dropped money into would have made noise when coins were thrown into it. Because of that, it's like the widow slid her small offering in to go unnoticed. What do you think her first response was to getting called out by Jesus?
3. Do you think Jesus is saying that it's a sin to be wealthy? Explain your answer.
4. As the disciples admired the temple's glory, Jesus told them it would be gone one day. Especially in light of the story about the widow's offering, what point do you think Jesus is trying to make? What matters in the kingdom of God?
5. Read Luke 21: 7-38 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
6. Does any of this passage scare you? Or has this passage been used before to scare you?

7. Is there good news in this passage? (see verses like 15, 28, 31, 33)
8. Speaking of fear, knowing Jesus has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age, and knowing He who is in us is more significant than he who is in the world (I John 4:4). Should we ever fear? Explain your answer.

HEART

1. Concerning the widow's small gift, have you ever felt that your gifts or offerings to God were inadequate, too small, and unable to make an impact? What courage do you find in Jesus admonishing the widow for your own life?
2. Does knowing that Jesus has promised to be with you always offer comfort when reading passages like this one? Why or why not?

HANDS

On a clear night, take some time to wander outside and look up at the stars. Don't focus on the challenges of the end times, but spend some time using your imagination to imagine Jesus coming on a cloud surrounded by angels. What will it be like? What sounds will you hear? Who will you see? What will you feel? Just spend time in that moment.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

“Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:18-20 NLT

Week 5-PADDY MCCOY

DAY 29

Luke 22: 1-6

“The Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is also called Passover, was approaching. The leading priests and teachers of religious law were plotting how to kill Jesus, but they were afraid of the people’s reaction.

Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he went to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to

them. They were delighted, and they promised to give him money. So he agreed and began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus so they could arrest him when the crowds weren't around."

I don't know if you've ever been betrayed by someone you love, but I believe it's one of the most painful experiences a person can experience. Maybe a spouse cheated on you, or a friend broke your trust and shared something with another that was supposed to be kept confidential, or a family member stole money from you. Betrayal hurts.

And I know Judas Iscariot always gets a bad rap for what happened on this night, but from his perspective, he was forcing Jesus' hand. Judas believed Jesus was the Messiah, the new king of Israel; he just got the details wrong. Jesus hadn't come to be a warrior king who would overthrow the Romans and put the Israelites back on top. No. Jesus came to establish his kingdom here on earth as it was in heaven. Jesus would have to die to do that, but that wouldn't be the end of the story, for in three days, he would rise again.

Judas had heard him repeat this repeatedly, but he couldn't accept it. He wanted a warrior, and every time Jesus forgave an enemy, especially a Roman, it upset Judas more and more. And every time Jesus had the chance to show the Romans his power but didn't, Judas got more and more bitter.

So after Jesus came into town on a donkey and flipped the tables in the temple, Judas thought that now was his time. Now, Jesus would take his throne by force, and Judas was willing to die to help make that happen.

So, by turning Jesus in, all Judas thought he was doing was forcing Jesus to show his power. Little did Judas know at the time that his betrayal would lead Jesus to the end that he came to this earth to have, the end of dying on the cross so that all could be saved.

Jesus still gets betrayed today, especially by those of us who should know better. I betray Jesus every time I choose sin over him. I betray Jesus every time I take back control over my life and

tell him that he's not needed. But thankfully, Jesus' well of grace and forgiveness never dries up.

Through the disciple John, we are told, "But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." 1 John 1:9 NLT

And Paul told us, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins." Romans 3:23-24 NLT

We've all betrayed him in one way or another, yet his grace and forgiveness are also available to us all. Let us have the strength and courage to admit our sins and ask forgiveness so that we may find freedom in his love.

1. Questions to consider:
2. Have you ever betrayed someone? What did it feel like?
3. Did someone ever betray you? What did that feel like?
4. What sins do we need to confess to Jesus, the One who died, to set us free from those same sins?
5. **PRAY TOGETHER** - We are told to confess our sins to one another, so confession is both a private and a public spiritual discipline. Sharing our secrets takes the weight off of us and onto Jesus, who removes that sin from us as far as the East is from the West. So share, confess, and pray to receive God's forgiveness and grace.

DAY 30

Luke 22: 14-22

“When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, “I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won’t eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.”

Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.”

He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.

“But here at this table, sitting among us as a friend, is the man who will betray me. For it has been determined that the Son of Man must die. But what sorrow awaits the one who betrays him.” The disciples began to ask each other which of them would ever do such a thing.

Then, they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, “In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called

'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves."

I've spent many an hour reflecting on the scenes of this night, from the last supper described above to the foot washing that the apostle John tells us about in His book, to Jesus' desire to spend more time with his disciples on the night before one of the most horrific circumstances anyone who has ever lived or ever will live had to endure.

I've seen this as the calm before the storm in the scheme of things. Jesus and his closest friends enjoyed the Passover meal and what would become known as the Last Supper.

First, the emblems of the bread and the wine.

When you and I partner with Jesus, as is his design for us, we eat the bread with him for at least two reasons. One, by eating the bread, we receive the gift he gave us of his broken body for our healing and reconciliation. Two, by eating the bread, we also are committing to allow our body to be broken, as he was, for the world's healing.

The same is true for the wine. The wine represents his blood poured out for us to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to all. When we drink the wine, we accept his gift for us and all of humanity and commit to partner with him so that our blood will be spilled for the world's healing.

What does this mean? Is this literal? Figurative? What if it's both?

Jesus calls us to be willing to lay down our lives for Him, for His children. In my work over the last 3.5 years planting a church in Portland, you better believe there have been times when my blood was spilled, and my body was broken - metaphorically and

literally. But all for Jesus and because of all that He's done for me.

The other aspect of this night that I love is that while the disciples argue about which one of them was the greatest (Luke 22: 24), Jesus stands up quietly, walks over to the corner of the room, pours water into a basin, wraps a towel around his waist, and he shows the disciples what the kingdom is all about (John 13: 1-17). Why? Because in the kingdom of God, it's not about greatness but service. It's not about accolades; it's about love. Everything that Jesus does, all that He is and says, comes from love.

Questions to Consider:

1. It may seem like a simple question, but take some time to think about it and answer honestly: do you believe that Jesus unconditionally loves you? Why or why not?
2. Jesus calls us to allow our blood to be spilled and our bodies to be broken for the world's healing, but he doesn't expect us to do it alone. He did it first and partners with us as we do it for him. What does his partnering with you mean to you? What do you think it looks like?
3. **PRAYING TOGETHER** - Do you have a servant's heart? Are you trying to climb to the top of your organization, or are you seeking ways to serve? Ask God to reveal your heart's condition and teach you how to live and love like Jesus.

DAY 31

Luke 22: 31-34

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to

prison with you, and even to die with you.” But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

We’ve already tackled the idea of betrayal this week, but it’s an ongoing theme leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, just like it’s a constant theme in our lives. Time and time again, we betray the One we love, even though we tell ourselves we’ll never do it again.

But in this text, Luke introduces us to the person behind our fallen nature. Satan is also known as the devil and the adversary. Jesus tells us that Satan is the “Father of lies,” a “murderer” who seeks to “steal, kill, and destroy,” and that he “hates the truth” (John 8:44 and John 10:10).

You and I are in a battle between good and evil. Thankfully, when Jesus died on the cross and rose on the third day, the war between good and evil was won, and the devil’s fate was sealed. But Satan is not going down without a fight. He wants to take with him anyone who reminds him of his enemy, and in case you didn’t know, you and I were created in the image of his enemy.

Peter wanted to remain strong and fight by Jesus’ side, even if it meant dying by the sword. Peter didn’t realize on that night that for Jesus to win the war, He would have to die. We, too, must die to win the battle, but we are not alone. Jesus is with us, praying over us.

The apostle Paul wrote about this struggle in his letter to the Romans when he said, “I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But another power within me is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 7:21-25 NLT

You and I must continually surrender our way for Jesus’ way, but we won’t always get it right. We will always need the grace and forgiveness of Jesus, no matter how hard we try to get it right.

Thankfully, Jesus is on our side, cheering us on and offering His strength and forgiveness all along the way.

Questions to Consider:

1. When have you experienced doing something you didn't want to do but did it anyway?
2. The devil may be an adversary, but who is more significant, more powerful: Jesus or Satan? (if you need help with this one, read I John 4: 4) Why is this truth important?
3. PRAYING TOGETHER - You may live in a sinful world and have a sinful nature, but Jesus died to set you free. That doesn't mean you'll never sin again. Someone once said that with the cross, Jesus won the battle over sin and death, and though sin remains, it no longer reigns. What sin do you need to let go of and hand over to Jesus? Confess, pray, find freedom in Christ...together, and receive His strength.

DAY 32

Luke 22: 39-46

“Then, accompanied by the disciples, Jesus left the upstairs room and went as usual to the Mount of Olives. There he told them, “Pray that you will not give in to temptation.”

He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” Then, an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

At last, he stood up again and returned to the disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted from grief. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so you will not succumb to temptation.”

Because of the significance in this story, we're going to spend two days reflecting on it from two different perspectives.

For today, we're going to look at the agony Jesus experienced in this moment.

Notice verse 44, which says, "his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood."

This is an actual medical condition experienced by someone who shares extreme anxiety. You can feel it so strongly that blood can come from your pores. And this is what Jesus was feeling just hours before his death on the cross.

Rest assured, the devil was on full attack in the garden. We were told that after Jesus' temptations, the devil had left Jesus until a more opportune time (Luke 4:13). Well, that time is now.

Jesus is wondering if he has the strength to make it through the following hours if he can endure something he's never felt before - separation from the father if the pain is something he can go through and still resist tapping into his divinity (because if he does tap into his divinity to save himself, the battle is lost).

What-ifs drive anxiety: what if I fail? What if I'm not good enough? What if I can't take it? And the devil knows how to make those voices louder so you can no longer hear the voice of reason.

Why does it matter to us that Jesus endured this kind of struggle?

I think the author of the book of Hebrews puts it best, "This High Priest (aka Jesus) understands our weaknesses for he faced all of the same tastings we do, yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4: 15, NLT)

Jesus was tempted way worse than us because he could have tapped into his divinity but chose not to for our sake.

That said, whatever we go through in this life, Jesus knows. Whatever we feel, he has felt. Jesus is the Prince of Peace we can go to when our world is falling apart, for he can be with us like no one else can because he knows what it's like.

Questions to Consider

1. Can you think back to a particularly challenging experience you've been through - a move, the loss of a loved one, a career change, a battle with mental health? Did you feel Jesus in that battle? If not, what do you think it would have meant to know He was there, AND He knows what it's like?
2. Jesus comforts us in our troubles and asks us to comfort others in theirs (2 Corinthians 1: 3-4). Who do you know that is going through a tough time, who could use a word of encouragement, a call, a text, a hug, so they may be reminded in word and deed that they are not alone?
3. PRAY TOGETHER - Take some time together to sit at the feet of Jesus with all your feelings, good and bad, and listen to Him tell you what's most true about you - 'You are His child, in whom He loves, and with whom He is well pleased.'. Then pray this truth over each other as you end.

DAY 33

Matthew 26: 36-44

”Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, “Sit here while I go over there to pray.” He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed.

He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, “My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.”

When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open. So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.“

For our second day of reflection on this text, albeit from a different gospel, we will reflect on prayer and unanswered prayer.

Three times, Jesus prayed for God to take this cup from him. The cup, of course, was what was about to happen. Jesus was about to be betrayed, humiliated, tortured, and spit on by the very ones he came to save. He would look into the faces of those nailing him to the cross and ask the Father to forgive them. He would suffocate slowly, over hours, while his arms, legs, and lungs felt like they were on fire as they were all exposed to the harsh elements of wood, air, vinegar, and more.

He knew he came to the earth for this very moment, but if there were any way to avoid it, he’d love not to have to go through with it.

And the above was all the things he was going to experience physically. Think of what he was going to go through spiritually. For the first time since forever, the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit would be severed. How could Jesus endure such a thing?

So Jesus cried out three times for the cup to be taken, but we know what happened. That prayer wasn't answered.

If we're praying for people, we've all had unanswered prayers and left with hurt, questions, and maybe even scars. And some of us leave faith altogether when this happens because it seems either God doesn't care or He's not there.

I've told this story before, but it's such a good reminder regarding prayer. On day one in this series, Jesus taught us a parable to teach us to pray and never give up (Luke 18:1). He doesn't say that's easy.

My in-laws prayed for six years for a child. They tried all the natural methods, and when those didn't work, they tried a couple of alternatives, but they didn't have the money to spend the big bucks it would take to do that well. They also didn't have the funds for adoption, but they did check into it.

The seventh year of their journey was the toughest, spiritually. They were angry with God and each other, and it was ever-so-difficult to keep going spiritually. But they tried.

At the end of that seventh year, to make a long story short, news came about a potential baby, but the price tag was still too much. Then they talked to a friend who asked what they needed to make it happen. My in-laws didn't tell them a number; they just said it's too expensive. Their friend said that one year ago, God impressed them to put money away for them in case an opportunity arose. They then handed my in-laws a check for the exact amount of money needed, and within a month, they were in a hospital room, holding their baby just moments after it was born.

So here's what I've learned about unanswered prayers: I don't know why some get answered and some don't, why God seems

active for some and quiet for others. But I have chosen to believe that God knows best, that He is always up to something for our good, and my job is to trust in Him. And when I struggle to do that, I need my faith community to help hold me up.

Jesus never said following Him would be easy; He just said it's what we were made for and that He'd be with us every step. This, I believe.

Questions to consider:

1. Are there unanswered prayers that are still tough to think about?
2. Do you believe God wants what's best for us no matter what prayers get answered? Why or why not?
3. What do you think the purpose of prayer is?
4. PRAYING TOGETHER - Read together Proverbs 3:5-6, then pray that prayer over each other, that you can learn to trust in God more and more whether He answers your prayers or seems to go silent; help us count that He is always there, always listening, always loves.

DAY 34

John 18:1-6

“After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. The leading priests and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. “Who are you looking for?” he asked.

“Jesus the Nazarene,” they replied.

“I Am he,” Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) As Jesus said, “I Am he,” they all drew back and fell to the ground!”

I know we’ve departed from Luke’s account of Passion Week several times this week, but with good reason. We’re simply using these other accounts to fill in the picture for us further.

Today, I couldn’t think of any better way to end one of the most challenging weeks in history than with a reminder of who the main character in our story was and is.

After Jesus spends his last hours with the disciples in the upper room, after Judas leaves the room to complete his betrayal, after they walk to a place that was often a retreat from the craziness of the rest of the world for them, the Garden of Gethsemane; and after wrestling with the powers of darkness only to be strengthened by the presence of His heavenly Father, we come to the doorstep of what Jesus came to this earth to do.

Scholars say there may have been as many as 1,000 soldiers who followed Judas up to the garden that night. That may seem a tad excessive to face off against 12 men, but it was Passover in Jerusalem, and the Romans were always ready to eradicate any threats or attempts at violence. After all, there would have been up to two million Jews in Jerusalem, so 1,000 soldiers sent to put out a potential threat seems like an appropriate response in most circumstances.

But these circumstances weren't normal. Little did they know it at the time, but they weren't just coming to arrest another man; they were coming to arrest the Son of God.

I'm sure the adrenaline was pumping as they approached the garden. The soldiers were ready for a battle.

Jesus didn't cower in this situation. He fully knew what was happening and what was going to happen, but just moments ago, He resolved to go through with the plan, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.". Jesus was going to save the human race, and in this moment, he stepped up to the challenge.

When Jesus asked who they were looking for, knowing precisely who they were looking for, Jesus stood firm and said, "I Am He!" The English misses what Jesus said. Jesus said the sacred name of God, Yahweh. This is why the soldiers, all 1,000 of them, drew back and fell to the ground. They expected a fight; what they got was a revelation. They expected a criminal; what they saw was divinity.

Jesus wasn't just another man; he was and is God in the flesh. You and I desperately need this God/Man to save us from our sins. To begin this journey, each one of us must answer one of the most critical questions of our lives, "Who do you say that I am?" (Jesus asked this of his disciples as recorded in Luke 9:20)

If Jesus is who He says He is, the story must be true, and we must be loved more than we can imagine.

So what's your answer? Who do you say that Jesus is?

Questions to Consider:

1. If you are studying this with another person, take a moment to tell the other person who you think Jesus is. Unpack that thought. What does He mean for you and your life if He is Lord? If He is the Savior, how does that impact your life today?
2. What do you think would have been going through the minds of the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus?
3. If you believe that Jesus was who He said He was, what does it mean to you that He was willing to go through the Garden and the cross for you?
4. PRAYING TOGETHER - When we realize who Jesus is and all He's done for us, we are often led to worship and praise. So take some time to share why Jesus is worthy of your worship and your praise, then together, if you feel led, offer up your lives to the only One who is worthy of it, just as He gave up his life for you.

DAY 35

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

If you knew your next meal would be your last meal on earth, what would that meal be? Share in great detail, but be careful if you're hungry.

HEAD

1. Read Luke 22: 1-30 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. Why do you think Judas wasn't betraying Jesus but helping Jesus fulfill his destiny?
3. Do you think the disciples understood what Jesus meant when he said that the cup was his blood and the bread was his body?
4. We know that the disciples argued on this night about which one of them most deserved to sit at the right hand of Jesus in his kingdom, which they thought would start soon (little did they know what his kingdom was, right?). So how do you think you would have felt, fighting over the seat of honor while your king went around the table and washed your feet?
5. Read Luke 22: 39-46 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
6. How would it have helped Jesus if he had found the disciples awake and praying instead of asleep?
7. Read John 18: 1-6 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
8. Why do you think 1,000 men fell to the ground when Jesus said, I Am He (Yahweh)? What does it mean to you that even on the darkest night, the light of Jesus still breaks through?

HEART

1. Judas was often put in a horrible light and disliked by the gospels' authors because of the way they wrote about him. But put yourself in Judas' sandals. Was he trying to force Jesus to do what he wanted? Is that so wrong? Do you and I ever do that in our lives?
2. What does it mean to you that Jesus was willing to go through the garden experience, sweat drops of blood, and fight the devil with all his might, all for you?
3. Have you struggled with unanswered prayers? If so, what helps you keep going?

HANDS

If you're with another person, partake in communion together. If you're not, you can do it alone with some bread (preferably unleavened) and grape juice. Before participating, pray to thank God for all He's done for you and ask for the courage to be willing to do the same for Him. Then read through I Corinthians 11: 23-26 and enjoy the emblems, reflecting on Christ as you do.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

John 3:16-17 NLT

Week 6-Timothy Gillespie

DAY 36

Luke 23:1

Then the entire council took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor.
2 They began to state their case: “This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king.”

3 So Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”
Jesus replied, “You have said it.”

4 Pilate turned to the leading priests and to the crowd and said, “I find nothing wrong with this man!”

5 Then they became insistent. “But he is causing riots by his teaching wherever he goes—all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!”

6 “Oh, is he a Galilean?” Pilate asked. 7 When they said that he was, Pilate sent him to Herod Antipas because Galilee was under Herod’s jurisdiction, and Herod happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

This interchange is fascinating. Pilate, the governor of the province of Judea from AD 26-36, was responsible for maintaining order in the region. This case comes before him, but he is reluctant to want to deal with it.

Sometimes, we have to deal with things that we don’t want to deal with. When this happens, we often look for ways to pass the buck. Pilate was no different. He sought to move this case out of his courtroom and elsewhere. His whole attitude is one of disengagement. Whether he knew that the accusers were lying about the taxes or not, we don’t know, but we do know that he was happy to move this issue forward to someone else.

When he asked Jesus whether or not he was king of the Jews, Jesus was cagey and responded with, “You have said so.” Rather than call out his messianic role, he allowed what was said to stand independently. Jesus always outsmarts his accusers in this way.

When Jesus responds to Pilate, he knows this will be in a sticky situation, so he says that he finds nothing wrong with Jesus. While that does not settle the issue for the Jews, he believes that his decision should be final. However, the Jews were still pushing their accusations into something that would have affected Pilate: riots around his territory.

One glaring omission is that if there were riots in his region, Pilate would have known about them much earlier. As he was given the governance over this area, riots would not have occurred without his knowledge.

But when he heard that Jesus wasn’t from his region, he punted as quickly as he could to Herod Antipas.

What does this story tell us about Pilate, Jesus, and His accusers?

First, it tells us that Pilate wanted nothing to do with this internal struggle between the Jews and Jesus. Second, it tells us that Jesus wasn't fighting back but seemed resigned that this must be how things will happen and how things need to happen. Lastly, we see that the accusers were willing to say anything at this point, whether it was real or not, to get rid of Jesus.

Sometimes, the hard work of doing the right thing puts us in jeopardy, and Pilate must have felt this. He didn't want to cause issues with his reign, so he moved the discussion away as quickly as possible.

1. Why do you think the Jews were so adamant about getting rid of Jesus? Was it just because they didn't like him, or was there more involved?
2. What would you have done if you were a follower of Jesus then?
3. What would you have done if you were Pilate? One of the ways that we meditate on scripture is by putting ourselves into the story and seeing it from one of the characters' point of view.

DAY 37

Luke 23:8

Herod was delighted at the opportunity to see Jesus, because he had heard about him and had been hoping for a long time to see him perform a miracle. 9 He asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus refused to answer. 10 Meanwhile, the leading priests and the teachers of religious law stood there shouting their accusations. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers began mocking and ridiculing Jesus. Finally, they put a royal robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. 12 (Herod and Pilate, who had been enemies before, became friends that day.)

13 Then Pilate called together the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, 14 and he announced his verdict. “You brought this man to me, accusing him of leading a revolt. I have examined him thoroughly on this point in your presence and find him innocent. 15 Herod came to the same conclusion and sent him back to us. Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. 16 So I will have him flogged, and then I will release him.”

18 Then a mighty roar rose from the crowd, and with one voice, they shouted, “Kill him, and release Barabbas to us!” 19 (Barabbas was in prison for taking part in an insurrection in Jerusalem against the government, and for murder.) 20 Pilate argued with them, because he wanted to release Jesus. 21 But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Wow, a great many things are happening in our text for today. So, let's break it down quickly.

Pilate sends Jesus to Herod, who is excited as he has heard about the miracles that Jesus is doing. He interrogates Jesus, and

Jesus refuses to answer or to do any miracles. This makes Herod slightly angry, so he mocks Jesus, puts on a royal robe as a joke, and sends Jesus back to Pilate.

I have always found it interesting that Herod and Pilate became friends that day through their shared experiences with Jesus. I don't think it is because Jesus made them friends, but they played a game back and forth in their judicial roles. It seems that they both figured out the joke and played it together. Both of them were working to find ways to get out of having to decide about Jesus that would be unpopular.

When Jesus comes back to Pilate, Pilate tells the Jews that neither he nor Herod had found Jesus guilty of anything, so he would just beat Jesus (Perhaps he thought this would appease them), and then he would let Jesus go. Even in ancient times, Pilate was under Roman law that would not simply allow the death penalty for someone innocent.

The Jews would have none of this. They were adamant that Jesus be put to death by crucifixion. So convinced were they that they needed to be rid of Jesus that they were willing to ask for the release of Barrabas, a known insurrectionist and murderer. Pilate seemed to allow this to quiet the crowd that had gathered and was becoming unruly.

Why were they so adamant about getting rid of Jesus?

Jesus was not just a new religious figure. His revolution was undermining everything that their society had been built upon. His gospel was changing the very economics of their culture. It was such a revolution that his detractors knew that life would never be the same for them if this message were allowed to take hold in their region. The threat to them, their position, and their profits was real; it was tangible and came from Jesus. Something had to be done.

So they lied, they cheated, and they used subterfuge to get Pilate to release the murderer and sentence Jesus to death.

1. What would you do if your way of life were threatened?

2. Do you think you would have heard the good news that Jesus was spreading, or do you think you would have seen it as a threat?
3. Do you still think that the Gospel can change society, that it should, and what effect would it have on you and your family?

DAY 38

Luke 23:22

22 For the third time, he demanded, “Why? What crime has he committed? I have found no reason to sentence him to death. So I will have him flogged, and then I will release him.”

23 But the mob shouted louder and louder, demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their voices prevailed. 24 So Pilate sentenced

Jesus to die as they demanded. 25 As they had requested, he released Barabbas, the man in prison for insurrection and murder. But he turned Jesus over to them to do as they wished.

In Matthew 27:24, there is this picture of Pilate washing his hands of this whole ordeal. The Lucan account does not picture this. But you can see what is happening. Pilate is not convinced of Jesus' guilt; instead, he is confident that Jesus is innocent of all the accusations. In the Matthean account, Pilate washes his hands of the situation so as not to be sullied by this farce of a preceding.

On our leadership team here at Redlands, one of our members is a Superior Court Judge, and man, I hope he never does this in one of his cases. (For the record, he is one of the most conscientious and thoughtful people I have ever met; I know this would never happen in his courtroom!) But watching this happen with our Savior is tragic, and the blame should sit both on Pilate and his cowardly nature, as well as the bloodthirsty nature of those who would see Jesus put to death.

There was a mob mentality that was happening. I don't know if you have ever been involved in a mob that was becoming unruly and was beginning to have a mind of its own. I was stuck in a mob one time, and when the shared nature of the group started to change and move toward violence, it was a shocking and pretty unnerving situation. I could extricate myself before something happened, but the crowd quickly went from pleasant to antagonistic. You could feel the undercurrent of something about to happen.

This is what Pilate began to feel, and they realized it was easier to give them what they wanted than to stand on the precedence of truth. We do this sometimes when giving in becomes easier than standing for what is right. I hope we will never "go with the crowd" when it means sacrificing what is pure, accurate, and correct, but you never know until you get into that situation.

Through all of this, we see that Jesus remains quiet. He doesn't stand up for himself; he doesn't call down the angels to save him. He doesn't plead his case. I have often wondered why this was the case. I am sure that he knew these things had to happen for

his cause to move forward, but can you imagine the temptation Jesus must have felt to bring down heaven's righteousness on these people?

Remember, Jesus dealt with this temptation at the beginning of his ministry. Luke 4 reminds us that Jesus had dealt with this previously, and he wasn't going back.

Temptation is like that. When we thwart temptation in our lives before the crisis, we handle the situation much better than we would have had not been tested. Remember that every little decision we make to stay within the will of God makes the more significant decisions that much easier!

1. When have you been tempted and were able to stay strong?
2. Did you have that temptation prior and have built up a resistance?
3. Why do you think Jesus was able to stay his hand when it came to protecting himself?

DAY 39

Luke 23:26

As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and, put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. 28 But Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the days are coming when they will say, ‘Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child, and the breasts that have never nursed.’ 30 People will beg the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and plead with the hills, ‘Bury us.’ 31 For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” 32 Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. 33 When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

35 The crowd watched, and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” 36 The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. 37 They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38 A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

39 One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!”

40 But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? 41 We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” 43 And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

While this is too much to unpack in one day, we may take an approach that asks you to meditate on these texts today. So much is happening, from Simon of Cyrene to the ominous warning to the Daughters of Jerusalem, to Jesus asking for forgiveness, to the king of the Jews' statement, to the thieves on either side of Jesus. It is a packed pericope to which we cannot do justice in one day.

This is why I want you to read it several times over the day as we come toward this Easter weekend. All this happened on a Friday morning and afternoon. Jesus had a long day before, and he must have been exhausted. He could not carry the cross, and we see the Cyrene, Simon, a black man from Africa, jumping in, albeit under duress, to take the cross beam from Jesus. We could go on and on about simply the Cross and its use in the punishment of slaves and murderers. We could talk long and hard about the way Jesus took this tool of destruction and made it into a symbol of hope for us.

Then, on the Cross, we see Jesus still being mocked and misunderstood. We hear Jesus asking for forgiveness for those who are doing this. Jesus maintains his gracious nature amid significant adversity. Is that something that we can do? If you are

like me, the fight instinct emerges before the benevolent instinct emerges. This is why I love being surrounded by people with different gifts than me; we help each other.

Above all, we see a God so invested in his love for his people that he is willing to die for us. I know that sounds weird, that I was ready to become death, but that is how we say it. It is like cross multiplication. We deserve death, but we acquired life through his sacrifice. He earned life but took on our death. What an amazing God.

Now, I know some don't like the idea that we deserve death for our sins. I get that; it makes me uncomfortable as well. I also don't think God needed a blood sacrifice to save us. But I think this is an incredible moment to understand God has love for us. When we realize what Jesus was willing to suffer for us, how can we do anything but love and trust Him?

One last thing, the previous phrase Jesus says in this text: "I assure you today that you will be with me in paradise. . ." This phrase has made a great many people think that Jesus was talking about an immortal soul that is transferred to heaven when this person dies or anyone dies. Is that what this text was saying?

Our tradition doesn't think so. We believe that death is like sleep, and scripture speaks to that 42 different times. So, was Jesus not telling the truth? To be clear, this is a much deeper conversation, but we can assume this: the next thing we see when we die is Jesus. So, regardless of the timeline (we believe it is at the second coming), we see Jesus next!

Take time to reread this text, and let these interactions sink in!

DAY 40

Luke 23:44

By this time, it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 45 The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. 46 Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" And with those words, he breathed his last. 47 When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshiped God and said, "Surely this man was innocent." 48 And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. 49 But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.

Here are some logistics about what happened that day, and they are significant. Each one is a sermon unto itself. But Jesus was laid on the cross by noon that day. Then, the sun went out for 3 hours, and the temple curtain was torn from the top down, which is a big deal. That curtain separated the holy place from the Most Holy Place in the temple; it was what kept people away from the presence of God. The fact that it was torn from the top means any human did not tear it. It is a metaphor and a powerful visual that everything has changed.

If you know anything about that curtain, you know it took close to 100 priests to take it down and wash it. It was a few feet thick and was not easily torn. Because God wanted to show us that there is now no longer anything that keeps us away from Him, he pulled the curtain so we would have access to Him forever.

Even in death, Jesus' countenance convinced people that they should follow him. The example of the Roman officer who claimed Jesus was innocent and went down and worshiped Jesus should show us that this was no regular man. The crowd seemed to

realize something had changed, and they went home in what scripture says was “deep sorrow.”

Those who followed him did not come close. Perhaps they were scared to be recognized. Maybe they were heartbroken and didn't want to be close witnesses to this horror show. Regardless, some of the entourage of Jesus were present to see his death, and they must have been feeling many different emotions.

I don't know what you feel about this scene, but the brutality and the harsh conditions always take me back. Our Lord and Savior came to love us, and we killed him with a bias we usually leave for those who have done the worst things to other people. He was misunderstood and was undoubtedly feared. If I were one of those followers, I would have fallen to the ground and wept, not knowing what steps to take next.

Have you ever been to that place of despair? What did you do? That weekend must have been a weekend full of anxiety, weeping, hopelessness, and loss.

Thank goodness that no matter what, we never have to feel that hopeless again!

1. Have you ever had deep sorrow for something? Why was that?
2. Why did Jesus shout out at the end?
3. Did you ever wonder why Jesus died so quickly on the Cross when it usually takes significantly longer to pass on a cross?

DAY 41

Luke 23:50

Now, there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, 51 but he had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and he was waiting

for the Kingdom of God to come. 52 He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took the body down from the cross and, wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock. 54 This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation, as the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body. But by the time they were finished, the Sabbath had begun, so they rested as required by the law.

This just about wraps up this part of the story. The crucifixion is brutal, it is frightening, and it is tragic and horrifying.

But it is also the beginning of a new kind of hope. It is the interaction of the divine and human. It is death that brings life, and life that replaces death. It is what we had been waiting for, without realizing that we had been waiting for this. It is so different from what we expected that we can hardly believe it today.

We don't celebrate the Cross, but we do acknowledge the importance of it. We recognize that all we believe stands in the shadow of the Cross, and this standard judges every love we have ever felt or given. Love that is sacrificing, love that is overwhelming, and love that is sanctifying are all wrapped up in this scene.

These last texts deal with the logistics of what they did with the body of Jesus, which sets things up for the next part of the story.

However, I want you to linger on the darkest Sabbath in history for a moment. Let us not move to Sunday so quickly that we forget what it was like for those moments when Jesus was in the grave when the disciples felt as if all was lost, and in the tragedy of what happened.

Sometimes, people tend to diminish this part of the story. They say Jesus knew he was returning, so what was the big deal? I tend to think that Jesus went into the grave, at least at that moment, fully believing that he might not come back to us. It was a sacrifice that

he was willing to make for us. And I don't think we see that kind of love very often.

Last thought for this week: How much love does it take to sacrifice yourself for someone you love? How about someone you don't yet know? Jesus was willing to be that sacrifice for you and me because that is how much he loves us.

Some people are uncomfortable with this kind of love. That makes sense, as we don't often have that kind of love. But rather than be uncomfortable with it, let us learn to live in it, as it is the greatest thing God could do for us!

1. What do you think about the Cross?
2. Is it essential to understand this journey of faith you are on?
3. How can we help with any more understanding of it?

DAY 42

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

It may seem like a trivial place to begin this week's conversation on such an important topic, but to get us talking, share about a time you've been pulled over or cited for the appearance of breaking the law. What was it like to be standing before the person in authority?

HEAD

1. Read Luke 23:1-25 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. What feelings and emotions do you experience as you read how Jesus was treated in these final moments?
3. Why do you think Pilate was going to have Jesus flogged and then released? If he was innocent, why hit him?
4. Isn't it odd that everything the crowd accused Jesus of was all the things Barabbas was guilty of? Why are we willing to compromise to get what we want?
5. Read Luke 23:26-56 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
6. Look at how often Jesus thought of others in this time of unspeakable and indescribable pain (both physically and spiritually): he tried to encourage the weeping women, he prayed for forgiveness over those nailing him to the cross, and he raised himself on the nail in his feet to pardon the criminal on the cross. How could he continue to think of others even in these moments?
7. The Roman officer who oversaw the execution had witnessed 100's, if not 1,000's, of these before. What do you think was so different about this one that made him exclaim, "Surely this man was innocent (or righteous, or the Son of God in other accounts)?"

HEART

1. When you stare at the face of the Savior who willingly gave up His life for you, what thoughts go through your mind? What feelings go through your heart?
2. Watching the One who created everything, breathed life into everything, and took His last breath is hard. What are some ways that you and I can practice remembering His gift to us beyond Easter?

HANDS

If you haven't done this in a while, or maybe ever, what would it take to dedicate or rededicate your life to Jesus today? If you haven't done it before, what's keeping you now? Call a friend and tell them you want to give your life to Jesus. Reach out to a

pastor with the question of the Eunuch in Acts 8 - "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" (Acts 8: 36)

WORDS TO LIVE BY

"So let everyone in Israel know that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts of the Apostles 2:36-38 NLT

DAY 43

Luke 24:1 But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.

“If one refuses to believe in the possibility of miraculous occurrences altogether, the resurrection will seem an absurdity. But large numbers of ‘modern, scientific’ people recognize that science itself is merely descriptive rather than prescriptive. If a God exists, it is only natural to expect him to have powers beyond that which science has discovered or can explain and to be able to use them for his purposes. It is arguable that of all the alleged miracles in ancient history, the resurrection is actually the one with far and away the most historical support.” –Craig L. Blomberg

This quote makes us understand that what we discuss is essential and outside what we see as usual. However, it also helps us to recognize that if we are to believe in a God as we have been studying, the idea that this God can move outside of natural law shouldn't surprise us. Not only shouldn't it surprise us, but we should be expecting this from a God full of compassion and power for his people.

We enter into the text with the women wanting to go and prepare the body for burial. Because of the proximity to Sabbath when Jesus died, they were unable to prepare the body properly. At the earliest moment, they went to the tomb to do what needed to be done. However, the stone had been rolled away from the entrance when they arrived.

Other accounts seem to have a more detailed rendering of this story, but Luke's account is brief. There are not a lot of details, but the story gets across. As Luke spoke to eyewitnesses, he did not

elaborate as much as some of the other Gospels. But we do get the point. This is a foreshadowing that something unexpected is going to happen.

Have you ever come to your car and realized something is wrong? My son had his car broken into a few months ago, and he said that when he walked up to the car, he knew something was wrong, but he just wasn't sure what it was. As he walked around the car, there was a sense of transgression, of something not being right and someone had been where they shouldn't be. They had broken out a window and stolen his backpack. The most valuable thing they stole was his homework, but he still felt violated.

Perhaps this was the feeling of the women as they approached the tomb. That something was amiss, something was wrong, but they couldn't know until they walked in.

Have you ever felt like there was something amiss in your life? Like there was something that was supposed to be there that was missing? Did you expect to find God somewhere, but God never showed up? Or maybe you didn't show up?

We often wonder why things are wrong and not how they are supposed to be. In his book *Pensees* VII(425), Blaise Pascal said this: *“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.”*

Perhaps this is what you have felt, and maybe the recognition of this God-shaped hole is the recognition of an empty tomb.

1. Have you ever felt as if your life were not quite complete?
2. Do you think the women were concerned as they approached the tomb?
3. What have you tried to fill the God-shaped hole in your life with?

DAY 44

Luke 24:3

So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus.⁴ As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

To continue the illustration from yesterday a bit. Have you ever walked into your home and felt that things have been moved around? My wife is fantastic at setting up our home in a way that works wonderfully with our furniture. However, there are times when she wants to try something new that might work better. She often does this when I am at work. Therefore, I come home to a house that has been moved around and reorganized, and while it feels familiar, it is different somehow.

Sometimes, she takes furniture out of the home previously there; other times, she moves some furniture from one side to the other. I come in knowing this is my house, but it feels different. (The wildest realization is that my wife can move all our furniture by herself, and I certainly couldn't do that!)

As the women stood before the empty tomb, they were confused that the huge stone had been rolled away. So they went in to investigate. Standing there and looking at an empty tomb did nothing to quell their puzzlement, but then two men appeared to them. These two men did not look like they belonged in a tomb. The NLT says they were in “dazzling robes,” while the NIV says they were in clothes that “gleamed like lightning.”

I don't know precisely what that means, but it sure seems like these guys were dressed for the occasion. They had worn their best and seemed to sparkle somehow, at least in a way worth mentioning. Have you ever overdressed for an occasion? Or perhaps the robes of heaven seem to glimmer in a way that regular robes don't. Either way, it was worth mentioning.

What this means is that the women were about to have an encounter with something other-worldly. They were about to be entertained by angels and messengers, and they were about to hear some excellent news.

I wonder if people felt this when they opened their doors to see the guys who give away the publisher's clearing house sweepstakes. They would open the door to see the spokesman and the cameras in front of them. Those seconds between opening the door and hearing the words they had won must have been pretty exciting.

I wonder if the women felt that way when they saw the bedazzled men that day in the tomb.

1. Have you ever received good news that you weren't expecting? What was it?
2. How did you respond to it? Did you tell others?
3. What did you do immediately after hearing this good news?

DAY 45

Luke 24:5

The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, “Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? 6 He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee,

As we well remember, people are afraid whenever a messenger from God shows up on the scene. The women this day were no different. Some would say that the word “terrified” really should be translated as “reverential awe,” but perhaps the word “terrified” captures their emotions much better. When we come in contact with those who make their home in heaven, we are usually surprised and terrified as well.

The women bowed their faces to the ground, and some translations say they fell to the ground. Either way, they tried to show respect to these men in dazzling robes. What position do you find yourself in when you are confronted with the presence of God?

The men asked the women, “Why are you looking for the living amongst the dead?” Which seems like almost a sarcastic question. Where else would they have gone? They were looking to take care of the body of the one that they had loved and had died.

However, this reminded them of what Jesus said about rebuilding the temple in 3 days. The dazzling men took Jesus at his word that he would be back. We have a more challenging time believing that what Jesus said could be true. Perhaps because we do not live in the constant presence of Jesus as those who make a home in heaven had for so many years. Our experience of the presence of God is much slighter but no less powerful when we recognize it.

What would it be like to take Jesus's word and live accordingly? Would it change how we interact with one another, God, and ourselves? Would we find a way to trust more completely, believe more firmly, and walk forward in faith, trusting totally in the words of Jesus?

Let's try it! Let's try to live as if we are in the presence of Christ every moment, and we can trust in the words that he says to us daily. I want to experience the good news on a different level than I ever have before. I want to learn to trust completely and without hesitation.

1. Would you like that as well?
2. Would you join me on this journey to trust in the words and life of Jesus more profoundly?
3. What would that change in your life each day?

DAY 46

Luke 24: 7

...that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.”⁸ Then they remembered that he had said this.

These are the words that Jesus said to his disciples and those following him. He would be betrayed, crucified, and raised again on the third day; as the men spoke these words, the women immediately remembered them, and the whole thing must have started to make sense.

What an epiphany, or awakening, this must have been for these women to realize that everything Jesus had said must be accurate and that they were witnesses to the most fantastic thing that had ever happened in the world.

I wonder if any chastising of self went through their minds, remembering the words that Jesus had said and realizing they hadn't taken them as seriously as they should have. Jesus was speaking literally, and they had missed it.

We overuse the word “literally.” I hear people say it in instances where it has no place or experience. People misuse it every single day, literally. . .

When Jesus said he would once come out of the tomb, they must have thought that those words, while nice, were probably not 100% going to happen in a literal fashion. When he did just that, they were caught off guard. However, they were willing to accept it because they had gotten used to seeing Jesus do impossible things.

From healing to turning water to wine to raising Lazarus from the tomb, they had been privileged to experience what it means to live near the one who can make all things possible.

Do we believe we are in the presence of one who can make everything possible?

1. What do you need Jesus to make a miracle out of for you today?
2. What words of Jesus do you need to take more literally?
3. Are you willing to believe in the promises and ready to make changes that allow Jesus to work miracles in your life?

DAY 47

Luke 24: 9-10

So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. 10 It was Mary

Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened.

You can imagine the scene: these women running back to the group gathered during the worst hours of the burdensome Sabbath. They can barely contain themselves as they run around to tell everyone about what happened to them at the tomb.

I wonder if they needed to embellish this story or make it more believable. They must have known how crazy this story would sound to anyone else. I have always thought that they might have wanted to tone it down a little, or maybe they would have wanted to try to create a narrative that wasn't so unbelievable.

However, they didn't want to change the story in their rush to get home.

I say all this because there is always a desire to make this story seem more reasonable and logical and not lean into the supernatural nature of what had happened. We do this when we become nervous that those we speak to about the resurrection might not want to believe something as unbelievable as this sounds.

I mean, men with dazzling white robes, an empty tomb, and even women being the first to be told about his rising from the dead. Remember, this wasn't a resuscitation, like Lazarus. This was a resurrection, something no one had experienced before. This was on a whole different level, something new, something unbelievable, and something so out of the realm of possibility that it either had to be a lie or it had to be God!

Is it so hard to believe that the God who created everything could do something like this? And should we shy away from telling others about the power that God has over life and death?

I don't think we should water it down. I don't think we should make this story into something it is not. I have this sneaking suspicion that when we speak of the power of God, that power somehow shows up to convince, convert, and collect the people who might be open to hearing it as good news.

Let's allow God to be God in all of the unbelievable. True faith isn't always looking for proof; it is looking for open hearts from those willing to take that leap of faith!

1. Have you ever tried to water down the story of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus?
2. What was the result of that?
3. Why do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus? What convinced you of it?

DAY 48

Luke 24: 11-12

But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. 12 However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then, he went home again, wondering what had happened.

Well, that was the outcome that was to be expected. This story is sometimes hard to believe, mainly until Jesus shows up to confirm the narrative in our lives. The disciples struggled to understand it, but they couldn't be convinced otherwise when Jesus showed up later in the story.

They were so convinced that each of them kept the truth of the resurrection on the tip of their tongues until they all found themselves being martyred for the Good News of the Gospel.

This, if nothing else, should give us pause before we brush this idea of resurrection under the carpet. The disciples never recanted, and we should take it as seriously.

I won't belabor the point, as we are leaning into our Easter services on the weekend. But I would admonish you in this direction, and as you teach this story to those you are studying, let it stand in the way it is written. Don't try to explain it away. Trust that the story of Jesus in his death and resurrection is just what we see.

It is the story of a God who loves his people so much that he is willing to go to any length to show them what love is.

It is a fact that Jesus loves us and loves us well. In this way, we see the expanse of the greatest love that has ever existed coming through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

1. Do you believe that Jesus died for you?
2. Do you believe that He loves you that much?
3. Do you believe He also rose from the grave, conquering death and securing our salvation forever?

We are so excited to be your church family on this amazing weekend. Thanks for taking this journey with us and leading someone to the cross!

DAY 49

Small Group Study

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN QUESTIONS

If you could have 10 minutes with someone you've lost, or maybe someone you never knew personally but wanted to talk to, who would it be, and what would you talk about?

HEAD

1. Read Luke 24: 1-12 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. If you saw the stone covering the tomb rolled away and the body was gone, what would have been your first thought about what happened?
3. Jesus told the disciples numerous times that he would be killed but raised on the third day. Why don't you think they heard him, or if they heard him, why didn't they believe?
4. Why do you think Peter and John, as we're told in other accounts, went running to the tomb? Did they not trust the women?

5. It's not a coincidence that women were the main characters of this story. Not only did it happen that way, but in Biblical times, if you wanted to make up a story, a lie, you wouldn't have used women as the main characters. The part in this story is one of the proofs that this all happened. But again, in this moment, why was it so hard for Peter to connect the dots that Jesus was alive?

HEART

6. The resurrection of Jesus was seen by the women at the tomb, by the disciples, and by more than 500 others after his resurrection. Why do you think so many of the religious leaders failed to believe these eyewitnesses and continued to go to great lengths to cover up this story?
7. If Jesus was resurrected and alive now, then everything He said was true, and everything He did happened. What does knowing this Jesus mean to you? How does the invitation to follow this Jesus change you?
8. Because of His resurrection, we have hope in the coming resurrection. Take some time to share what you look forward to about resurrection day. What's the first thing you want to do when you see Jesus? Who is one of the first people you want to see? What's something you think you'll be able to do on the new earth that you can't do now that you want to do?

HANDS

Because Jesus loved you so much, He died for you, and because He is alive and well and therefore we have hope that we too will see Him again, why don't we celebrate by doing that which Jesus asked us to do: "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." John 13:34 NLT. Think of something nice you can do for a friend, a neighbor, or someone in need to show them the love of Christ in a tangible way.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

“We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died, for the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then, we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words.”

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 NLT

Pastor Tim and the Crosswalk Teaching Team.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tim', written in a cursive style. The signature starts with a large, sweeping horizontal stroke that curves downwards and then loops back up to form the letter 'T'. The rest of the signature is more fluid and less distinct, ending with a horizontal line that tapers off to the right.