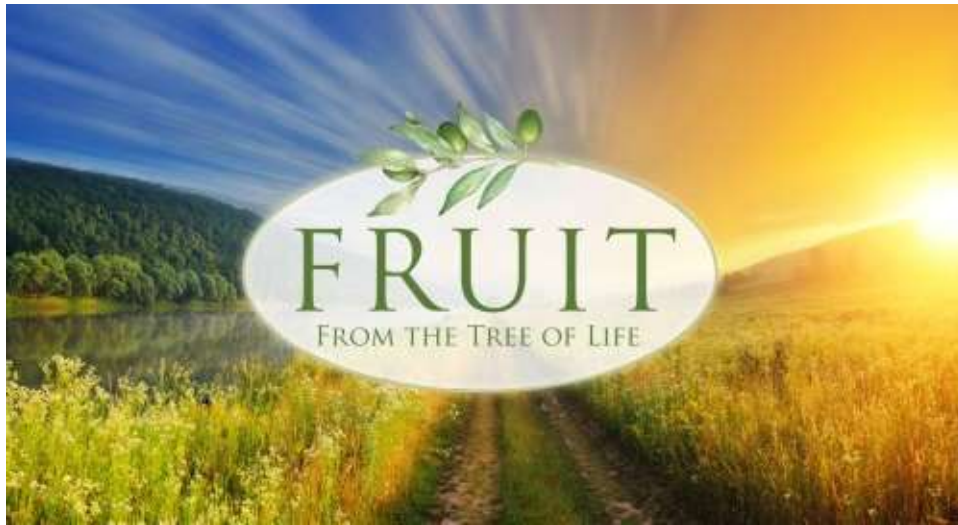




PREPARING FOR EASTER



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What does it mean to PREPARE for Easter?

For me, it means to prepare my heart for all that God
has
for me to receive this Lenten season.

If I see myself as a "receiver" in God's Kingdom,
then God is the Great Giver.

It is during this season that I reflect on
God's greatest gift—His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is a time for me to reflect on what Jesus has done in
my life.

This is also a time to reflect on what Jesus is about to do
in my life.

When I concentrate on Jesus,
I can expect Him to do great things in my heart.

Through Jesus, I learn that all my desires
are nothing without Him.

Through Jesus, I learn that my entire life--all that I am—
is dependent on Him.

Through Jesus, I learn what Easter is all about--Easter is
about learning that Jesus is the LIFE that transforms my
life.

Enjoy these Lenten devotionals as we prepare for Easter!

SOLITUDE

SOLITUDE IS BEING WITH GOD

**This week, I am exploring what God says about SOLITUDE.
As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Be still and know that I am God."**

Lord, teach me today about getting alone to listen to You.
I desire to receive Your instruction and share it with others in my life.

Let me consider the Words of God from Matthew 4:1-4

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The devil mistook Jesus as being alone in the desert with no food to give him strength. However, Jesus was not alone, *He was led by the Spirit*, and proclaimed, "the Father is in me" (John 14:11).

Jesus showed His Divine strength to the devil by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, a passage on humility. The entire verse reads, "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

**Lord, help me to humble myself before You today.
As the world presses around me and I feel weak,
allow Your humility to strengthen me.
For when I am weak, You are strong.**

I desire Jesus to fill me with His humility. Wherever I go, the Holy Spirit goes with me, and I feel Jesus leading me. Just as Jesus prayed to His Father, I can do likewise. This fills me with His strength and allows me to combat, with His Holy Word, the things that cause my weakness.

**Father, help me to live by Your Word today.
Help me to find Your strength in my weakness.
And help me see the desert is a place to be fed by You.
In Jesus' Name, Amen**

SOLITUDE IS WALKING WITH GOD

**This week, I am exploring what God says about SOLITUDE.
As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Be still and know that I am God."**

Lord, teach me today about getting alone to listen to You.
I desire to receive Your instruction and share it with others in my life.

Let me consider the words of God from Matthew 4:5-7

⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city
and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.
⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:
"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."
⁷Jesus answered him, "It is also written:
'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

The devil is very deceptive in His temptation. He quotes Psalm 91:11 out of context, which states, *"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."*

Jesus could have debated Satan on this point but instead proves that the Bible does not refute itself by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. This passage not only talks about not testing the Lord, but also describes how we are to fear and serve God alone (Deut. 6:13).

**Lord, help me to revere You alone as my God.
As the world twists Your words out of context,
show them that Your Word cannot be used against itself.
Please guard me in all my ways!**

I desire the Lord to guard me. *I must make Him my dwelling and my refuge* (Psalm 91:9). He will protect me from the evil one when I choose to dwell in Him.

**Father, help me to live by Your Word today.
Help me to find Your strength in my weakness.
Help me to see the desert is a place to be fed by You.
In Jesus' Name, Amen**

SOLITUDE IS NOT BEING ALONE

**This week, I am exploring what God says about SOLITUDE.
As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Be still and know that I am God."**

Lord, teach me today about getting alone to listen to You.
I desire to receive Your instruction and share it with others in my life.

Let me consider the words of God from Matthew 4:8-11

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil tries to convince me to surrender to him things I already have. In this temptation, he attempts to convince Jesus that Satan owns the kingdoms of the world, when Jesus is the Creator of all!

Jesus does not debate Satan on the ownership issue, but on the more important topic: I should worship God and serve Him alone. While angels come and attend to Jesus in His weakened state, Satan leaves confused and frustrated. Jesus at his weakest is still immensely more powerful than Satan!

**Lord, I confess to You that I am weak,
and I am tempted to succumb to the notion
that Satan has power over my life.
Please show me Your power in my life.**

I must carefully examine all aspects of my life and confirm I am not bowing down to any part. Are there things I have valued more than the Lord?

We all need accountability. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts my heart. Jesus comes and sees me as I am, lifts me from the heap, and declares I am His child chosen from the foundation of the world! I am overcome because Jesus died for me so God the Father would see me as holy. I do not want to sin, but, when I do, I can be assured Jesus is watching over me.

**Father, help me to live by Your Word today.
Help me to find Your strength in my weakness.
And help me to see the desert is a place to be fed by You.
In Jesus' Name, Amen**

GOING TO A SOLITARY PLACE

This week, I am exploring what God says about SOLITUDE. As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Be still and know that I am God."

Lord, teach me today about getting alone to listen to You.
I desire to receive Your instruction and share it with others in my life.

Let me consider the words of God from Luke 4:40-44:

⁴⁰At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. ⁴¹Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

⁴²At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. ⁴³But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." ⁴⁴And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

There are many reasons Jesus needed to get away.

He needed rest. Healing people from *sickness and demon-possession* takes a lot of energy. While Jesus was 100% God, He was also 100% human and felt the effects of the stress on the human body.

He needed to commune with His Father. Jesus looked forward to taking time in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As the Second Person of the Trinity, He was refreshed through this Divine interaction.

He needed to pray for the next mission. Jesus was preparing to travel to the next town. What would He preach? How would they respond? All of this He lifted to the Father in prayer.

Lord, thank You for showing me that Jesus needed to get away to be refreshed. That gives me hope when I also get tired.

When will I take time to get away to *a solitary place*? If I plan ahead, I can mark the date and time on my calendar to give me hope and blessing to look forward to!

Lord, I also need to be refreshed in the Lord. Allow me time to get away from my regular duties and help me return refreshed. Amen.

PRAYING DILIGENTLY

**This week, I am exploring what God says about SOLITUDE.
As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Be still and know that I am God."**

Lord, teach me today about getting alone to listen to You.
I desire to receive Your instruction and share it with others in my life.

Let me consider the words of God from Matthew 6:5-8:

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The first instruction from the Lord about prayer is *not to be like the hypocrites*—He does not want conversation with Him to be like an actor in a play. An actor acts to entertain and to receive applause, and if that is why I am praying, then *that will be my reward*.

Instead, the Lord guides me to a solitary place where I can be alone *to pray to my Heavenly Father*. As I enjoy conversations with close friends, I should place conversations with God as my highest priority and find it easy to talk with Him alone.

My reward from my Heavenly Father for my obedience to His instruction is the blessing of the Holy Spirit in my heart to guide me, to convict me, and to look after me each day.

Lord, thank You for helping me know how to pray. I desire to make my daily time with You a priority in my life.

I come to the Lord to praise Him, to repent of my sins, to thank Him for blessings, and to ask for the things I need: strength from Him along with His love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control.

Lord, You know what I need before I ask. Please bless me today for my obedience to You by filling my heart with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SELF-DENIAL

SETTING MY MIND ON THINGS ABOVE

This week, I am exploring what God says about setting my mind on things above. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."**

Lord, I desire to focus on You. Allow my mind to be transformed by the reading of Your Word.

Let me consider the Word of God from Colossians 3:1-4, 12-14

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

If *I have been raised with Christ*, He wants me to think differently. Why should I be concerned about the affairs of this world instead of eternal things? He wants me to think more about what He cares about than worrying about earthly things.

When *I am raised with Christ*, I die to myself, and my life is now not my own but belongs to Christ. This is what it means to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. My life is now His life; *He is my life*.

**Lord, I desire to totally surrender my life to You.
Transform my heart and mind to focus on eternal things,
not the temporary things of this world.**

Transforming my life takes time, and I slip up all the time. My goal, though, is to be holy as God is holy. I show this through my actions toward others as a representative of Christ here on this earth. I should reflect Christ and the love He has shown me.

**Lord, may I reflect Your love for me.
I desire others to see You living in me today. Amen.**

FOLLOWING GOD'S PERFECT WILL

This week, I am exploring what God says about setting my mind on things above. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."**

Lord, I desire to focus on You. Allow my mind to be transformed by the reading of Your Word.

Let me consider the Word of God from Romans 12:1-3:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

The foundational thought in self-denial is a desire for the Lord. I must admit that I am fed up with the world; the way of the world is not fulfilling. Instead, my desire is fulfilled when I keep God's Word continually in front of me, which reminds me of His promises of salvation and eternal life.

Self-denial also means I am willing to sacrifice the life I thought I had and exchange it for a life fulfilled in Jesus—a life that is *holy and pleasing to God*. *This is my act of worship* to Almighty God. I have not lost anything in leaving my old life behind. Before Jesus changed me, I thought *more highly of my old life than I ought, and my judgment was not sober*.

Lord, thank You for continually allowing me to see Your mercy in saving me from my old life by transforming my mind.

If I want to know God's will, I apply a three-fold test. This helps me distinguish between the self-control God desires and the self-fulfillment the world promotes. In every decision, I ask, "Is it good? Is it pleasing to God? And is it in God's perfect will?" Through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, I discern what is from God versus what is from the world.

**Lord, thank You for helping me to have self-control by denying the pattern of this world and setting my mind on things above.
I desire to do Your will, Your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Amen.**

DENYING MYSELF

This week, I am exploring what God says about setting my mind on things above. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."**

Lord, I desire to focus on You. Allow my mind to be transformed by the reading of Your Word.

Let me consider the Word of God from Mark 8:34-38

³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸ If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

If I truly want to follow the Lord, these instructions teach me. He tells me to do three things:

1. *Deny myself:* In my human condition, I act selfishly and put myself first. Jesus said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).
2. *Take up my cross:* I need to take up the life of Jesus which includes suffering. Once I deny myself, the Holy Spirit invigorates my life with the life of Jesus and His sustaining power through trials.
3. *Follow Him:* In my humanity, I am tempted to follow the world. Jesus states this is the wrong path. I need to follow Him if I want to stay on track with Him.

**Lord, please help me in each of these areas!
Today I desire to deny myself, to take up my cross, and to follow
You.**

Jesus understands that I will still wander off track from time to time. The point is that I recognize my actions during these times and confess them as sin.

**Lord, I confess my human sinful desires including anxiety, fear, anger, unforgiveness, selfishness, and pride.
Please continue to teach me how to seek You in all things. Amen.**

GOD IS WATCHING OVER ME

This week, I am exploring what God says about setting my mind on things above. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."**

Lord, I desire to focus on You. Allow my mind to be transformed by the reading of Your Word.

Let me consider the Word of God from Psalm 121

¹ *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?*

² *My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

³ *He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;*

⁴ *indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵ *The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand;*

⁶ *the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*

⁷ *The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life;*

⁸ *the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

I recognize the Lord desires *to help me*. His Word reminds me of this fact often. My first thought when I need help, however, is usually "How can I help myself?" The Lord's thoughts are infinitely higher than mine, and more effective. He tells me:

1. He is available to help me 24/7; *He neither slumbers nor sleeps.*
2. He is not going to let me fall; He is able to guide me through the most stressful times.
3. *He watches over me* constantly. *He is my "shade"* (or shadow) and is *at my right hand*. He is always with me.

Lord, thank You for watching over me and guiding me through life. You are always with me and can help me much more than I can help myself.

I cannot receive better care; my Caregiver is the Creator of all things. He *watches over my coming* and *watches over my going*. He will not cease to watch over me *both now and forevermore*. I especially appreciate His constant presence, especially when I need *help*. In my distress, His overarching presence provides calmness, stability, and hope. I know I can count on the Lord to supply what I need.

Lord, Your presence in my life is a constant blessing to me. Thank You for all You give me and all You do in my life. Amen.

KEEPING MY EYES FOCUSED

This week, I am exploring what God says about setting my mind on things above. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."**

Lord, I desire to focus on You. Allow my mind to be transformed by the reading of Your Word.

Let me consider the Word of God from Philippians 2:1-4:

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

When I am *united with Christ*, He lives in me, and I live for Him. I want to be *like-minded with Him* and those who love Him, *being one in spirit and of one mind*.

There are a few things which get in the way of this pursuit. *Selfish ambition* tells me to value my goals above God's goals for me. If I pursue my goals with *selfish ambition*, I will likely fall into a life without worth or purpose.

Vain conceit tells me to *value myself above others*. If I pursue this path, I will find myself reaping what I have sown, a lonely existence.

Lord, allow me to exalt You in every facet of my life and with every fiber of my being.

I want what You want for my life.

Encouragement fills me when I am *united with Christ*, and *my joy becomes complete*. The gift of *humility* allows me not to forget my interests, but to *look to the interests of others*. When I do, I find that either my interests have changed, or God has used *the interests of others* to show me what *His interests are for me*.

By pursuing *the interests of others in humility*, I wrap myself in *the comfort of His love* and enjoy the *common sharing of the Spirit*.

Lord, may I experience true humility as You fill me with the gift of humility, encourage me in Yourself, and comfort me with Your love. Amen.

REPENTANCE

OVERCOMING ANGER

This week, I am exploring what God says about REPENTANCE.

As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Lord, I repent of my sin and am blessed by Your forgiveness.
Thank You for Your grace and mercy in my life.*

Let us consider the Word of the Lord from Jeremiah 15:6, 15-16, 19.

⁶ "You have rejected me," declares the LORD. "You keep on backsliding. So, I will reach out and destroy you; I am tired of holding back."

¹⁵ "LORD, you understand; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering—do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake."¹⁶ When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, LORD God Almighty." ¹⁹ Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them."

When I sin, my first thought is anger. I often project my anger onto others when I should be directing my anger at myself. Even though I was born with a sinful nature, I am the one who sins, and I must take responsibility for my sin—I cannot deny it is anyone's fault but my own.

The anger which burns inside me comes from pride; I long for control over my life, but it evades me. Pride, left unchecked, turns into self-righteousness, or a "holier-than-thou" attitude. If, in my pride, I think I am always right, I will soon believe it is true. Through such times I learn, once again, that the Lord reigns and understands. I ask the Lord to *remember me and care for me*.

Lord, thank You for not leaving me nor forsaking me. I desire to give up sinful ways and ask You to cleanse my mind and heart.

The Lord promises *if I repent, He will restore me*. He restores me to reunite me with Himself and do what He created me to do: to worship Him. I serve Him when *I utter worthy words*: He calls me to be *His spokesman* and allows His Holy Spirit who lives in me to work and speak through me.

Lord, may You, the Righteous One, be praised. Come close to Your servant and restore my heart, then I will praise Your name forever. Amen.

NO MORE QUARRELLING

This week, I am exploring what God says about REPENTANCE.

As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Lord, I repent of my sin and am blessed by Your forgiveness.
Thank You for Your grace and mercy in my life.*

Let us consider the Word of the Lord from 2 Timothy 2:14-19.

¹⁴ Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. ¹⁶ Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷ Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

I am prone to forgetting and need to be prodded along. I regret things I say—it all becomes a war of words in which no one wins! Any words I speak about myself and gossip about others *are godless chatter and have no value*. The more I engage in these things, the farther I distance myself from God to such an extent that my desires *become increasingly ungodly*.

This *ungodly chatter* may *destroy the faith* of people I love and care about. When *I depart from the truth*, I take others down with me. My downfall is public knowledge—known to all but hidden from me. *God's solid foundation stands firm* in my heart, which is *sealed with His inscription* that it belongs to Him. If I confess the name of the Lord, I have the desire to repent.

Lord, I repent of my sin. I am aware sin destroys my soul and crushes my spirit. When I spot it, I ask You to cast it out.

I wish to be *approved by God, a worker who is not ashamed* of the Lord's work *and who correctly handles the Word of truth*.

Lord, I know only You can cleanse my heart of sin and my mouth of idle words. I seek You with all my heart and all my mind and all my soul. Conform me to the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

HE WILL GUARD MY MOUTH AND HEART

This week, I am exploring what God says about REPENTANCE.

As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Lord, I repent of my sin and am blessed by Your forgiveness.
Thank You for Your grace and mercy in my life.*

Let us consider the Word of the Lord from the Psalms and Proverbs.

*Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips
(Psalm 141:3).*

*Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly
will come to ruin (Proverbs 13:3).*

*Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from
calamity (Proverbs 21:23).*

*Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it
(Proverbs 4:23).*

My lips are like a *door*. I must keep them shut for offensive and harsh remarks yet open them for endearing and encouraging words.

If I guard my lips, I am preserved from rash remarks which lead to ruin. This happens when I stir up trouble or mimic the harsh words I receive from others with the same foul attitude. Having a guarded tongue requires me to think before I speak and provides me time to respond in words that build up and encourage rather than tear down.

Lord, I desire to stop feeding my mind with worthless things, so the fruit of my lips sings Your praises and not mine.

It is time for a heart checkup. Today, is my heart full of greed? Pride? Anxiety? Anger? The Lord wants me to carry my heart heavy with evil to Him for His cleansing. Nobody wants to walk around with a heart full of these things.

Lord, guard my heart and prompt me when these things sneak in. I confess they do not belong. I repent of these sins and ask You to help me think clearly about them. Amen.

A TASTE OF HIS GOODNESS

This week, I am exploring what God says about REPENTANCE.

As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Lord, I repent of my sin and am blessed by Your forgiveness.
Thank You for Your grace and mercy in my life.*

Let us consider the Word of the Lord from Hebrews 6:4-8.

⁴ It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age ⁶ and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. ⁷ Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸ But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

Experiencing the *goodness of God* means I have:

Been enlightened: As goodness equates to holiness, I "see the light" of Christ, and it shines within me.

Tasted the heavenly gift: I experience the gift of God, which is His grace through faith, given to me in salvation. By tasting this gift, I experience God's grace in a supernatural way which gives me full assurance of hope until the end.

Shared in the Holy Spirit: I enjoy the products of the fruit of the Spirit and use the gifts of the Spirit.

Tasted the goodness of His Word: I experience the active Word of God, which He breathes into me to transform me.

Lord, once I have tasted Your goodness, why would I want anything else? *Those who have tasted it* repent of their sin.

Once I receive the Holy Spirit, I should no longer want sin in my life. If I experience the Holy Spirit and decide to *harden my heart* to the point of *unbelief*, then I "bury" Him beneath my hardened heart.

Lord, please soften the hardened areas of my heart to bring me to repentance. Nothing is impossible for You! I seek You with all my heart and ask You to cleanse me and make me pure and holy in Your sight. Amen.

MY PRAYERS AND GOD'S PROMISES

This week, I am exploring what God says about REPENTANCE.

As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

*Lord, I repent of my sin and am blessed by Your forgiveness.
Thank You for Your grace and mercy in my life.*

Let us consider the Word of the Lord from Psalm 51:1-4.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

God is excellent at giving mercy. In these verses, King David grieves deeply over his sin; he just confessed to his acts of adultery and murder. He feels filthy and deserving of punishment, yet he seeks God and His mercy.

Instead of running away from God in fear of punishment, I should run toward God in search of discipline that will lead to my heart-change. Good leaders are not sinless, but they are repentant.

David asks God to be compassionate with him, not to withhold punishment, but to *blot out his transgressions*. He is not trying to hide; *he knows his transgressions*. His sin convicts his heart and is still *always before him*. He also does not blame anyone else for what he has done. He accepts his punishment and acknowledges God is *right and just*.

Lord, when You convict me of my sin, which way do I turn? Do I try to point the blame to someone else, or do I *acknowledge my sin*? Do not let me forget to honor You with my prayers and with my actions.

God disciplines me, so I will become a better disciple. Learning obedience is the key to my successful discipline and being a good disciple. God disciplines those He loves and offers forgiveness for repentance and obedience. Parents who love their children set boundaries for them. God's discipline is proof He loves me; His forgiveness tells me I am His child.

Lord, thank You for Your discipline! I desire to learn from my mistakes and to exhort others in my newfound lessons. The only thing I have to offer You is myself! Amen.

CONFESSION

MY SINS ARE COVERED

This week, I am exploring what God says about CONFESSION. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And You forgave the guilt of my sin."**

Lord, teach me today about confession. I desire to be obedient to the grace You give to me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from Psalm 32:1-5

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.² Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

The Lord tells me *my sins are covered* when I confess and seek forgiveness, and through His holiness I am blessed. Without confession, I carry the guilt of my sin: *my spirit is deceived, my bones waste away, and I groan all day long.* By carrying this *heavy load, my strength is sapped.* In not confessing, my intent is selfish: I desire to hide my sin in my heart.

The Lord does not want me to carry this heavy burden. If I acknowledge my sin, instead of *covering it up,* He forgives my sin and applies *His covering on it.* The Lord *covers my sins* with His righteousness; He clothes me with His holy garments. Rather than my sins being hidden, they are forgiven.

Lord, You alone can forgive my sins. I confess each one to You and ask to be covered in Your righteousness.

The Lord tells me I am blessed because of Him. I was guilty of my sin, then I confessed. Because of Jesus' atoning work on the cross, the Lord forgives my sins. If I begin to carry the *guilt* of my sin, I am *deceived for it is a heavy burden that saps my strength.* The Lord desires me to be free from this burden. Confession leads to forgiveness, which frees me by lifting my load and restoring my strength. When I start to hide sin in my heart, I want the Lord to shine His light on it and initiate this cleansing process.

Lord, may Your power and Your grace remind me of Your prescribed process of confession and forgiveness. You died for me, so when I confess, I will be forgiven. You rose again, so I can have eternal life. Amen.

I WAIT FOR THE LORD

This week, I am exploring what God says about CONFESSION. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And You forgave the guilt of my sin."**

Lord, teach me today about confession.

I desire to be obedient to the grace You give to me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from Psalm 38:13-22

¹³ I am like the deaf, who cannot hear, like the mute, who cannot speak; ¹⁴ I have become like one who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply. ¹⁵ LORD, I wait for you; you will answer, Lord my God. ¹⁶ For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip." ¹⁷ For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. ¹⁸ I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. ¹⁹ Many have become my enemies without cause; those who hate me without reason are numerous. ²⁰ Those who repay my good with evil lodge accusations against me, though I seek only to do what is good. ²¹ LORD, do not forsake me; do not be far from me, my God. ²² Come quickly to help me, my Lord and my Savior.

If I cannot hear, *my mouth offers no reply.* I wait for the Lord, and He answers me. He speaks in such a way that only I can hear. If I cannot speak, how will I worship? He gives me a voice that only He can hear.

My feet are bound to slip; I do not doubt I will fall. And when I do, *the pain of my sin is ever with me. I am troubled by my sin;* it writhes within my heart as a burden too heavy to bear. How do I respond to a holy God when I am covered with sin? Though I am burdened, I look to the Lord and *wait for Him. I confess my iniquity, and when I do, the Lord forgives me.* Why is my confession so long in coming? Honestly, I falsely believe I can overcome my adversity on my own.

Lord, continually convict me of my need for You. I can do nothing on my own; I am lost and weary, seeking my Savior.

As I continue, my enemies increase. While I seek only what is good, they seek to repay my good with evil. I cannot bear this alone. I cry, "Lord, do not forsake me; do not be far from me, my God."

Lord, though I wallow in hardship and heartache, I continue to tread where You lead me. I cannot bear thinking of life without You. May Your grace see me through the many trials to come; I will trust in You always. Amen.

WORDS OF WISDOM

This week, I am exploring what God says about CONFESSION. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And You forgave the guilt of my sin."**

Lord, teach me today about confession.

I want to be obedient to the grace You give to me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from James 5:13-16

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Words of wisdom come in many forms. *When I am in trouble*, my heart grows anxious and tired. A prayer to the Lord refreshes my soul and helps me to know that He is in control. *When I am happy*, I share my joy with others. By *singing songs of praise*, I rejoice in the Lord and invite others to rejoice with me. *When I am sick*, I seek healing. I *call near to me* those who are near to the Lord; they lift me in prayer *and anoint me with oil*. The Lord hears *their sacrificial offerings of prayer* and *raises the sick person*. No matter what the cause of my trouble or my sickness, if I *confess my sins*, *they will be forgiven*. While I am commanded to confess my sins to God, I must also *confess them to one another*. A confession to another tells them what is in my heart and allows them to pray for me.

Lord, may Your joy come to me as I confess my sins before You and others. Heal my heart, so I can return to You rejoicing as before.

As others hear my confession and pray for me, the Lord invites them to take part in my healing. I confess their prayers result in conviction in my heart, and the Lord heals me through forgiveness. Through my faith, I see how the Lord blesses each of us to do His will. After praying with a troubled heart or with a body full of sickness, the Lord restores me to rejoicing in His name with those He sent to surround me with His grace.

Lord, thank You for sending Your children to surround me in my time of need. I am blessed by their prayers, which are powerful and effective. Amen.

NO MORE DARKNESS

This week, I am exploring what God says about CONFESSION. As **I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And You forgave the guilt of my sin."**

Lord, teach me today about confession. I want to be obedient to the grace You give to me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from 1 John 1:5-10

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

There is no darkness in a room full of light, just as there is no light in a totally dark room. The same applies to my heart; each bit of darkness I let in corrupts my entire heart. When the light of Jesus Christ comes into my heart, my sin is revealed, and I am convicted.

There are three scenarios listed in this set of verses about sin:

- 1. If I claim to have fellowship with Jesus yet walk in the darkness, I lie and do not live in the truth. To whom am I lying? I am lying to myself. I am walking in darkness but telling myself I am living in light.*
- 2. If I claim to be without sin, I deceive myself, and the truth is not in me. There is only One who is without sin, and He is the Truth. Anything less is a deception.*
- 3. If I claim I have not sinned, I make Him out to be a liar and His Word is not in us. This is the classic, "I did not do it." Sin is not a list of rules, but a heart of rebellion against God and His Word.*

The Lord says *if I confess my sin, He is faithful and just, forgives me of my sins, and purifies me from all unrighteousness.* God hates sin and wants me to hate it because I love Him. Confession means to "say the same" about sin as God says. If He says that sin is bad, I need to recognize it in my life and run from it! God is my Judge. He sent Jesus to purify me from sin.

**Lord, the things humans lack are *light, truth, and the Word.*
Thank You for the precious gift of Jesus who cleanses my heart from sin. Amen.**

I AM BLESSED

This week, I am exploring what God says about CONFESSION. As **I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And You forgave the guilt of my sin."**

Lord, teach me today about confession. I want to be obedient to the grace You give to me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from Psalm 41:1-10

¹ Blessed are those who have regard for the weak; the LORD delivers them in times of trouble. ² The LORD protects and preserves them—they are counted among the blessed in the land—he does not give them over to the desire of their foes. ³ The LORD sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness. ⁴ I said, "Have mercy on me, LORD; heal me, for I have sinned against you."

⁵ My enemies say of me in malice, "When will he die and his name perish?" ⁶ When one of them comes to see me, he speaks falsely, while his heart gathers slander; then he goes out and spreads it around. ⁷ All my enemies whisper together against me; they imagine the worst for me, saying, ⁸ "A vile disease has afflicted him; he will never get up from the place where he lies." ⁹ Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me. ¹⁰ But may you have mercy on me, LORD.

At the heart of a sinner saved by grace is a soul which has been hurt by the world yet redeemed by God. This sinner knows that *God forgives him* through Christ and his confession of faith. Unbelievers heap insults on me with the intent to bring trouble and *slander*. When I am afflicted, they believe *I am defeated*. Even a close friend loses faith and *turns against me*.

Lord, where the world sees defeat, I see opportunity for You to work. May You bless me and deliver me from this time of trouble.

The Lord sees my situation differently, and He wants me to see it differently also. When I see myself as *weak*, the Lord shows me He is my Deliverer. When my foes seem to be getting their way with me, the Lord shows me He is my Protector. When everyone has left me for dead, the Lord shows me He is my Healer. The Lord delivers, protects, and heals me because of my faith in Him. When I confessed to Him that *I sinned against Him*, He changed my heart and said *I am blessed* because of who He is. He changed my identity; I am *His child*. He changed my purpose; *I work for Him*.

Lord, I no longer believe what the world says; I do not belong to the world any longer. Thank You for having mercy on me and being my Deliverer, Protector, and Healer. Amen.

SUFFERING

I AM NOT WORRIED

This week, I am exploring what God says about SUFFERING. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction from 2 Timothy 1:8, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Lord, teach me today about suffering. I desire to be receptive to the grace You give me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Psalms 55:9-11

⁹ Lord, confuse the wicked, confound their words, for I see violence and strife in the city. ¹⁰ Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. ¹¹ Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets.

These are a few behaviors the Lord wants me to learn to achieve in my life:

- ***Be alert and sober minded.*** *The devil is always on the prowl, looking for someone to devour. His desire is to kill, steal, and destroy my life (John 10:10). If I want to avoid the devil, I must stay alert and keep my mind clear, then I will recognize unclean thoughts and actions entering my mind.*
- ***Resist the devil by standing firm in the faith.*** *I must recognize that many people all over the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering as I am. Along with alertness, I can also resist the devil by pouring into my mind all the good things God desires. Prayer, rejoicing, confessing sin, and reading the Word of God please Him and help me stand firm in the faith.*

When I stay focused on what the Lord wants me to do, even during oppression, *the wicked are confused*. When their *destructive forces surround me*, the wicked expect me to respond by cowering before them. When I do not respond in the way they expect, it *confuses them*. The Lord calls me to live differently. Even during *suffering*, I am called to *stand firm in the faith*. Instead of responding negatively to people, I should ask, "What does God say about that? How does He want me to respond?"

Lord, thank You for leading me to pray and respond with Your Word. In doing so, I can stand firm and resist the temptation to respond without grace. Thank You, Lord, for blessing me! Amen.

GUARDING MY HEART

This week, I am exploring what God says about SUFFERING. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Lord, teach me today about suffering. I desire to be receptive to the grace You give me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from 2 Timothy 1:8-14

⁸ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹ He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹ And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. ¹² That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. ¹³ What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

The Lord did not create me to be happy—He created me to live *a holy life*. A holy life is one which is constantly shaped and molded into the Lord's image by eliminating those pieces which do not conform. Removing these habits, thoughts, and behaviors which cause suffering helps me to realize that what I have lost are not the best things for me. I also experience emotional suffering by watching God do the same process in people I love—my family and friends. I want to save them from their suffering, and in doing, so I intervene. When God prompts me to intervene by showing compassion, then my gifting of the Holy Spirit shines into the world.

I should realize that the Great Physician is the surgeon I need to seek for my life and for the lives of others. Through *Christ Jesus, God has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light*. I am to proclaim His light, since I do not have a light—I cannot shine at all without Him. I try to hide in *shame, but this too is without cause*. *I know I believe Jesus*, and I need to show that I trust Him. Just as a bank vault needs to have a guard, I am called to be a security guard over *God's deposit* inside me.

**Lord, please help me be a good steward by guarding
Your gift inside my heart!**

GIVE ME HOPE!

This week, I am exploring what God says about SUFFERING. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Lord, teach me today about suffering. I desire to be receptive to the grace You give me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from Psalm 119:49-56

⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. ⁵⁰ My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. ⁵¹ The arrogant mock me unmercifully, but I do not turn from your law. ⁵² I remember, LORD, your ancient laws, and I find comfort in them.

⁵³ Indignation grips me because of the wicked, who have forsaken your law.

⁵⁴ Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge. ⁵⁵ In the night, LORD, I remember your name, that I may keep your law. ⁵⁶ This has been my practice: I obey your precepts.

God's Word gives me hope. This is one thing I need to remember when I am suffering, *God's promise of hope preserves my life.* Nothing and no one can threaten my eternal life, for I am eternally secure in God's hands.

Even if *the arrogant mock me unmercifully*, I resolve to stay grounded in God's Word. Through His Word, *I find comfort.* Even so, *I am consumed with anger because of the wicked, who have forsaken Your law.* To calm myself, *I sing of Your Word*, which soothes my heart. I sing of *Your Name*, so I may *remember Your decrees and obey Your law.*

No mountain is too high for the Lord. If I feel my problems are larger than life, I only need to remember that the Lord is greater than my problems. My suffering is eased when I remember the eternal hope the Lord has given me. The Lord desires to comfort my heart in times of trouble. Do I let trouble scare me, so fear riddles my mind and distracts me from looking to the Lord?

Today I resolve to experience God more than I did yesterday and allow God to be all He wants to be in my life. I confess those things which make me anxious and angry and ask Him to remove them from my heart. Then, I rejoice in the Lord and remind myself How great He is!

Lord, thank You for Your eternal presence in my life. Without You, I would be nothing and hopeless. I want You to be all that You desire to be in my life.

HOLD ON, AND DO NOT LET GO

This week, I am exploring what God says about SUFFERING. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Lord, teach me today about suffering. I desire to be receptive to the grace You give me, so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from 1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Am I still surprised that I am in the middle of a war between good and evil? I should not be. This passage says it is just a test. Jesus does not test me for the purpose of flunking me, but for my benefit. When I *participate in the sufferings of Christ, His glory is revealed, and I become overjoyed. When I am insulted because of the name of Christ, the Holy Spirit rests on me, and I am blessed. Whenever I suffer for being a Christian, I should not blame God or be ashamed, but instead praise Him because I bear the name of His Son.*

It is hard to suffer, but the more I suffer, the more I should praise God's Name. When I suffer, *I should commit myself to my faithful Creator and continue to do good.* Committing myself to God means I am presenting my life as an offering to God. God wants to wash me with His grace, so I can see what He sees—His Son Jesus living in me. I know I do not suffer like some people, but I may suffer more than others. No matter how I view my level of suffering—God's instruction is the same: cling to Him, and do not let go.

Lord, as long as I am clinging to and abiding in You, You supply me with the grace I need to endure the suffering. Thank You, Jesus, for suffering for me!

HOPE FOR TODAY

This week, I am exploring what God says about SUFFERING. **As I enter prayer now, I reflect on God's instruction, "Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."**

Lord, teach me today about suffering. I desire to be receptive to the grace You give to me so my heart can be full of Your Holy Spirit.

Let us consider the Word of God from Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Since I trusted Jesus as my Savior, He now lives in me. When God looks at me, He does not see my sin, instead He sees His Son. In God's eyes, I have been *justified through faith* and have the right to be called a child of God. My relationship with Jesus gives me confidence to *boast in the hope of the glory of God*. I want to tell everyone I know that Jesus lives in me and is working in my life. My relationship with Jesus also helps me to *glory in my sufferings*. I desire for everyone to see that my sufferings are not punishments, but simply opportunities for God to show me and others how He is working in my life.

Suffering is a hard thing to accept, but it becomes a matter of perspective. I know God needs to work in my life to shape me, so my faith can grow, and I can be cleansed. To achieve His goal, God ordains circumstances that the world produces as opportunities to guide and direct me to Him. I can feel sorry for myself, be ashamed, or give up in hopelessness, or I can open my eyes to see *God's love being poured into my heart through the Holy Spirit*. This act of love produces *perseverance*, which allows me to pursue God all the more, even in the midst of suffering. This gives me strength and endurance to focus on Him while I am going through a trial. This builds my *character*, allowing me to show others how God is working in my life. And through all of this, my *hope* is strengthened. Because God is at work in my life, I can see Jesus living in me.

Lord, help me through this trial today, because I can only endure it by knowing You are working to build *perseverance, character, and hope* in my life.

HOLY WEEK

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

This week, I am exploring HOLY WEEK. **Let us consider the Word of God from Luke 19:37-44:**

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Known as "the Triumphal Entry," the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem represented a turning point in His ministry. After three years of ministry, people desired to celebrate and announce Him as a king. It was common to give praise to the king. David acknowledged King Saul as "the Lord's anointed." In doing so, he acknowledged loyalty not only to the king, but also to the Lord.

The Pharisees did not appreciate people announcing Jesus as their king. Doing so would usurp the power that they had. They wanted Jesus to tell His disciples that the message of declaring Him king was wrong. Jesus' reply told the Pharisees that the message was not only true, but if His disciples didn't declare it, God would allow inanimate stones to proclaim the message.

Jesus knew what lay ahead for Him. He wept for the people, as they *did not recognize the time of God's coming to them*. Do I recognize the time of God's coming? Am I prepared to receive Jesus as my King? While God sent Queen Esther for *such a time as this*, God has likewise prepared me for such a time as now. First, I need to recognize *God's timing*. Do I see Jesus moving for my purposes or for His kingdom? If I'm not shouting about *His peace and glory*, will *the stones cry out*?

Lord, allow me to proclaim You as the *Eternal King* who reigns forever! Through You there is *peace* in my heart as *Your glory* shines in my life. Amen.

THE LAST SUPPER

This week, I am exploring HOLY WEEK. **Let us consider the Word of God from Matthew 26:17-30:**

17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. 20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" 23 Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so." 26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus started his ministry with the sacrament of baptism and ended it with the sacrament of communion. Communion allows me to commune with God and remember Christ's sacrifice for me on the cross. The *appointed time* for Jesus meant the time when Jesus was to return to His Father, and He determined to mark the occasion with a *celebration with His disciples*. Today, we celebrate communion with fellow believers in Christ. Communion is also a time for *truth*. Jesus declared, "*One of you will betray me.*" Communion is a remembrance of Christ's offering for me, I can also remember His desire for me to be holy. Jesus commanded the truth to be told before He gave instructions for communion to be taken. I know I am only pronounced holy by *the blood of Jesus Christ*. Taking communion helps me to remember that *the Holy One died for me*. Jesus *gave thanks over the bread and the cup*. He knew His is body was about to be broken and His blood about to be poured, *and He thanked God for this*.

Lord, today I thank You for suffering for me. Please allow me to commune with You as I remember You offering Yourself on the cross for me. Amen.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

This week, I am exploring HOLY WEEK. **Let us consider the Word of God from John 19:16-18,28-30:**

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus didn't die alone. He was crucified between two common thieves. Each had an equal opportunity at the end of his life to confess Jesus as his Savior. One accepted Jesus, and the other rejected Him. I'm fairly certain I know where each ended up.

Jesus declared "*It is finished.*" Translated from the original language, this also showed, "*the debt is paid.*" Jesus was sent to earth for this purpose—*God in the flesh came to earth to reconcile man to Himself.*

In the midst of their personal crises, the two thieves had an equal chance to accept Him, yet only one did so. One saw Jesus as a defeated man and insulted Him; the other saw Jesus as an eternal King and praised Him.

The thieves were sinners, yet Jesus never sinned. Am I different than the thieves? I also am a sinner. Just like the thieves, I need a Savior. Only the Messiah can save me from my sin.

Today, through all my worrying and suffering, I need hope. That hope is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who died for me, so I could have eternal life with Him. Praise God—Jesus paid the debt for my sin!

Lord, throughout my crisis, I accept You as my Eternal King. I don't want to insult You by choosing to worry. By worrying, doubt reigns in my heart. By my accepting You, I choose to rejoice! Amen!

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

This week, I am exploring HOLY WEEK. **Let us consider the Word of God from John 19:36-42:**

³⁶ These things happened so that scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." ³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Jesus desired to glorify His Father, and His heart delighted in fulfilling the prophecies in Scripture. Three times this passage mentions that Scripture was fulfilled: Jesus declared His thirst and they gave Him vinegar (Psalm 69:21), His bones were not broken (Psalm 34:20), and they will look on the One they have pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

God had a plan for where Jesus was to be buried. God called Joseph of Arimathea to provide his own tomb for Jesus. A man called Joseph was chosen to be present at Jesus' birth, and another man named Joseph was to be present at His death.

When someone close to me dies, I grieve. My grief arouses many emotions, which leads to feelings of denial, anger, and depression. How much greater is my grief when I believe that my hope has died. Feelings of hopelessness overwhelm me, sending me into a very depressed mindset. However, God knows my state of weakness and shows me that my hope is still alive: my Hope is in Jesus Christ. I have a reason to hope today, and I know this hope in Jesus has the power to overcome my current state of mind. For He has led me through trials before, and though this trial is enormous, He has the power to get me through it.

Lord, I desire to focus on You today. I pray to You today and read Your Holy Word. I confess I am a sinner and rejoice in Your Holiness and Goodness. Through all of this, I put my hope in You alone. Amen.

THE RESURRECTION

This week, I am exploring HOLY WEEK. **Let us consider the Word of God from John 20:11-18:**

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary's tears were the result of her grief: she believed she had lost her Savior. She was asked twice, "*Why are you crying?*" She asked where the body of Jesus had been taken. When Jesus replied to her, her tears of grief became tears of joy. Jesus instructed her to tell the others that He would be ascending to the Father. I'm sure Mary ran all the way. She was full of excitement and rejoicing. She declared, "*I have seen the Lord!*" The resurrection of Jesus is the most miraculous and celebrated event in all of history. It is through the resurrection that my hope is realized.

I have hope because Jesus declared He would die and rise again. I shouldn't be surprised when things turn out the way Jesus said they would.

I have hope because through His death and resurrection, I have salvation and eternal life. If I keep my eyes focused on Jesus, He will keep my hope in focus on eternal life.

I have hope because Jesus overcame death, and He desires to resurrect my life and accept me into His Kingdom as His child. As a child of the King, I enjoy the benefit of talking to Him about everything, including my love for Him.

Lord, today I declare my hope in You. Allow me to focus on You through this Easter, and allow me to rejoice in You, my one and only Savior! Amen.