



HE IS RISEN

*Devotions
for the
Season of Lent
2026*

CHRIST HOPE CHURCH
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To hold out the Word of Life as we seek to connect, grow, and impact the world with the Hope of Christ.

A Time of Preparation

“Originating in the 4th century of the church, the season of Lent spans 40 days [Sundays outstanding] beginning on Ash Wednesday and culminating during Holy Week with Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding on the Saturday before Easter. Originally, Lent was the time of preparation for those who were to be baptized, a time of concentrated study and prayer before their baptism at the Easter vigil, the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord early on Easter Sunday. But since these new members were to be received into a living community of faith, the entire community was called to preparation.”¹

Again, for our fourth year as a church family, we are privileged and blessed to share what is on our hearts during this special time of preparation. Through the words of our congregation, we will be encouraged and strengthened in our faith as we reflect on God’s love and grace in our daily lives.

In these devotions written especially for this season of Lent, you will find favorite Scriptures, stories of hope, friendship, community, personal struggles and sorrows, miracles, victories, and inspirations witnessed and passed on for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Enjoy this journey together as we anticipate and celebrate the resurrection and the life everlasting!

Contributors

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Frank Fisher	2/21	Karen Medlin	3/10	Michael and Catherine McKee	3/26
Bill Beach	2/23	Nancy Clark	3/11	Sammy Hudson	3/27
Danielle Furlough	2/24	Lucas and Christy Botros	3/12	Chris West	3/28
Laura Greene	2/25	Cameron Metcalf	3/13	Mary Cotter	3/30
Henry Hinton	2/26	Ricky Watson	3/14	Beth Griffin	3/31
Scott and Rebecca Matthews	2/27	Kearston Hudson	3/16	Michie Faulconer	4/1
Rusty Duke	2/28	Mike Shugart	3/17	Zadoc Fanning	4/2
Elizabeth Havens	3/2	Lou Hill	3/18	Rodney Hill	4/3
Walker and Vicki Allen	3/3	Tommy and Jamie Stanfield	3/19	Brian Becker	4/4
Pat Leanhardt	3/4	Monty Clark	3/20	Lennie Furlough	Easter
Hale Stephenson	3/5	Fred and Holli Williams	3/21		

¹From *The Season of Lent* by Dennis Bratcher.

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Wednesday, February 18

Ash Wednesday

1st Day of Lent

46 Days until Easter

***Mark 6:31 (NIV)*—Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”**

Busyness can rob us of so much more than rest. If we are not careful, busyness can rob us of relationships, peace, joy, contentment, and more importantly, a close relationship with God. Busyness in today's society is almost seen as a badge of honor. The busier the better. The better you can multi-task, the more efficient you appear in every area at home, work, and even church.

Busyness is really a tool of the enemy to pull us away from what is most important. Yes, there are times when we are busy. It is inevitable, but we must also get quiet and rest. Jesus, after serving so many, told His disciples to “come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.” Rest is important for us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Without rest, we are really not effective in any area of our lives. Without rest, we begin to see life from a warped perspective. Without rest, without going to our quiet place, we miss important and necessary time with God.

It is in our times with God that we have rest and peace. It is in our quiet times of rest that we get to know God and develop the relationship that He desires to have with us and the relationship we need. God has so much to give us and to share with us. It is important that we take the time with Him. When we do, everything else around us will come into a clearer perspective, and we will find rest and peace for our souls. As we enter the Lenten season, let us calm the busyness for a little while each day and focus on Him.

Becky Blizzard

Thursday, February 19

2nd Day of Lent

45 Days until Easter

***1 John 4:7, 8, 12 (NIV)*— Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love... No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.**

For many years, my beloved wife, Allison, underwent multiple rounds of cancer treatment, and she and I would often go together to multiple medical appointments a week. The other patients whom we would meet going through cancer treatment were dealing with unimaginable stress, and the people whom we interacted with working in the medical system occasionally seemed like they were overworked and strained by their important, but very difficult, role caring for those with cancer and their families.

So, to navigate this journey in the best way possible, my wife and I started saying two simple phrases to each other in the car on the way to her medical appointment. These were: “You may be the only Jesus people see today,” and “How are we different?” By reminding each other of our purpose in Christ almost every time we went to an appointment, we began to see navigating cancer as a bit of an opportunity to witness to others and to try to reflect the light of God in some dark places. It also helped us release our illusions of control, and trust God more. As a result, there were many times when we wound up praying with new friends who were facing cancer themselves, or when we would find ourselves talking about our faith with doctors, nurses, or other medical professionals.

In 1 John 4, we hear a call to live out our faith in love. The main idea is that God is love, and since we have received His love, we are designed to reflect His love to the world. In fact, our love for one another is evidence of God dwelling within us through the Holy Spirit.

Thus, our goal around others is not “perfect” ethical behavior, but rather genuinely seeing them as God may see them, and taking every moment that we have breath on this earth to reflect God’s light and love as best as we can. This can be a serious challenge in today’s world, often characterized by division, coldness, and tribalism. But as Christians, our genuine love should be a notable contrast to our culture, and a compelling invitation for others to seek a relationship with God.

Kevin White

Friday, February 20

3rd Day of Lent

44 Days until Easter

John 16:33 (NIV)—... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Lent... The Final Frontier. Wait, that’s not right... that’s from *Star Trek*.

Lent is most assuredly not the final frontier, but it is a journey that we take each year as we prepare ourselves for the coming of Easter. The 40 days of Lent involve fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as a way to connect deeper with God. Commonly observed by the Catholic, Eastern, and some Protestant churches, many use the 40 days of Lent as a time of personal reflection to prepare our hearts and minds for Good Friday and Easter.

Forty. That number has some real historical significance in the Bible:

- Jesus’ 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness.
- Moses spending 40 days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments.
- Elijah’s 40-day journey to Mount Horeb.
- The 40 days of rain during the Great Flood.
- The Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the desert.

Even for the Perkins family, the number 40 has some real significance this year. This June, Kathryn and I will have been married 40 years. Forty long, cold, hard years... for her, mainly, not so much me. As this year unfolds, I tend to side with the 40 years of the Israelites wandering around in the desert... not really sure where we’re gonna wind up.

Kathryn (hearing me read aloud to proof my work): I HEARD THAT!

Anyway, this year may be a time when we, as in Kathryn and I, really need to work on being closer to God as, well, we are embarking into a new “frontier” (I knew I’d work that in somehow!) of our own. And we will definitely need God’s guidance more than ever.

As many of you know, this past September Kathryn’s mom went home to be with the Lord. For both of us, she was our last remaining parent as her dad, and my mom and dad, died several years ago. So, in our family, when this event happened last September, it officially made us the elders on our little branch of our family tree. Kathryn and I have both had a lot of titles in our days, but this was one that we were hoping would not come so soon.

Never in our 63 years have we not had a mom or dad or, early on, a grandma or a granddad to help guide us when life gave us questions that were hard to answer. Their experience and knowledge were there for the taking. Their main objective was to help us have an easier time navigating through this mine field called life. And, lucky for us, all of their answers came with a Godly component.

Now I know some of you out there might be thinking, “Hold on, Troy. You know you should’ve also been praying to God to help you with your situation. He is our ultimate Father!” And I would reply, “You are absolutely right, and that is what I have been doing.” But how is God going to communicate with me? He’s been out of the “stone tablet” and “burning bush” business for quite some time. I truly believe that His way of telling me or guiding me in the way in which I should go was delivered through my parents and grandparents. His grace and wisdom along with their earthly knowledge is what helped guide me as I walked down life’s uncertain path.

And that is the scary part. As I mentioned before, Kathryn and I are at the “top of the heap” as far as elderly people go on our branch of the family tree. Kathryn, I can see, but me, leading and guiding people? The man who can barely put together a coherent devotion is supposed to help guide our children (now young adults) and grandchildren? That seems to have “Child Protective Services” written all over it!

But, as Kathryn and I have taken over this newfound title, we have also realized that we need to get ourselves closer to the Lord. It is an awesome responsibility, guiding the lives of young people, and we need to make sure that, during these crazy times, we have all our knowledge and advice deeply grounded in the Lord and what the Good Book says. There is no better time than the season of Lent to make that covenant and pull ourselves closer to the Lord, somewhere we should’ve been all along.

So we’ve got 40 days. Forty days to make the effort to see ourselves living under God’s light. Forty days to find our grace. Forty days to clear ourselves of our burdens. Forty days to increase our wisdom. Forty days to be more like our Savior.

Forty days...

Troy Perkins

Saturday, February 21

4th Day of Lent

43 Days until Easter

Luke 23:43 (ESV)—And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

George was, by far, the oldest guy in the gymnasium. He was also confined to a wheelchair.

But those things, as obvious as they were, were not what stood out about him. Rather, it was his look... that look on his face. It was a look of sadness; it was a look of remorse. But most all, it was a look of fear.

I walked over to introduce myself and welcome George to the weekend retreat. I confess I also wanted to satisfy a bit of selfish curiosity—curiosity as to why a man his age and in his condition was assigned to a maximum-security prison (although we are taught to never ask). George shook my hand and told me quickly and candidly that he was right where he was supposed to be, for a crime he committed a very, very long time ago. He shared that if he ever got out, he would have nowhere to go. He had not one remaining friend nor family member willing to associate with him outside the walls of that prison.

And then he told me something I will never forget as long as I live. He told me he was on this retreat because he wanted a chance to go to Heaven. The thief on the Cross did not attend Bible study. He did not serve at the food bank. He did not get baptized, and he never even recited The Lord's Prayer. All he did was trust in Jesus.

This passage, along with the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), challenges me as much as any in the Bible, because God turns upside-down my definition of fairness and equity. Why should a guy get paid the same for working one hour as one who worked twelve? And why should a convicted felon, near the end of his life, get to take the fast train to Heaven? But my understanding is not the same as God's understanding on many such topics, and maybe that is why he called me to prison ministry... to guide me onto His path, not my own... and maybe, so I could meet people like George.

I have learned that God's generosity is not to be questioned, but to be shared. When Paul tells us in Romans 10:13 that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," whether it is the Pope or the prisoner, I am to take him at his word.

I cannot tell you what became of George, other than to tell you that he attended our services regularly following that weekend retreat, and that I still think of and pray for him often. He showed me what God taught me—that everyone has a chance in His Kingdom.

Lord help me to be thankful for your generosity (because I surely still need it!), to share that generosity, and to tell others about it, every single day. Amen.

Frank Fisher

Monday, February 23

5th Day of Lent

41 Days until Easter

Luke 15:20 (NIV)—So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

I am such a hypocrite! How's that to start your Lenten devotional? Unfortunately, hypocrisy is part of me, and I probably shouldn't even be writing this.

Why am I a hypocrite? Well for one, I don't do devotionals. It's kind of funny, agreeing to write a devotional when you don't usually read devotionals. "Devo" time has never appealed to me. I'm somewhat envious of

those who say they get up and spend their first 15 or 20 minutes in the morning with a cup of coffee and a devotional. But, as much as I'm envious, I still can't get into devo time.

To be perfectly honest, I didn't agree to write a Lenten devotional. I was informed by my executive scheduler, Cindy, that we would be writing one. I grumbled a little bit, but I didn't say no. When Lennie called to verify that we were going to contribute a devotional, I didn't say no again. So, here we are.

My aversion to devo time is kind of sad because I grew up in church. When I say grew up in church, I was on the front row because my mom played the piano and organ. As you can imagine, I rarely missed a church service from infancy until I left for college at not quite 18. However, as soon as I got to college, I started running from church. From the world's viewpoint, I didn't run very far, but I did do a few things that I've never told my parents, nor do I ever plan to tell my children. Oh, I could clean up whenever I was home on a Sunday and put on a "Christian" face for everyone. But guess what—there aren't any "little" sins!

Even worse, I don't have a favorite Bible verse. There are several I like. John 3:16, of course. The 23rd Psalm and Psalm 100. But as far as having a go-to verse that just speaks to me, NOPE! That said, I do have a favorite parable and that would be Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11–32. However, for the longest time I identified with the older brother (that is probably due to having a brother five years younger).

Fact is, I'm also a skeptic. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1. Do people really have that much FAITH? I'm not from Missouri, but I am a "show me" kind of guy, especially when others say they've heard God speak (I do understand "doubting" Thomas). I can honestly say I have never heard God tell me, or even nudge me, to take a specific action. I did hear a chuckle once (actually, it was laughter) when I suggested a course of action during a period of professional uncertainty. I may not be smart, but I did know enough to not to take that course of action! :-)

But having a guiding hand at the time a decision needed to be made, I've never seemed to experience that. However, when I look back on my life, I can see His fingerprints. Why were there always limits on how far I was willing to go when I was running away from church? How can I move 300+ miles away from home for my first job and just happen to meet a young lady who had spotted me months before I spotted, and was interested in, her. On our second date I proceeded to give her my life story (warts and all) unbidden, and she went out with me again! I look now and wonder why in the world would I have told her those things? But I did, and that person became my wife.

Maybe being asked to write a devotional is kind of like going on a mission trip: You don't write one to help someone else, you write one to help yourself... hmm. But back to the parable. It doesn't matter if I've never been as low as eating slop with the pigs. I have to decide that I've had enough with doing things MY way and head home. When we do that, our Father WILL come running!

*I have recklessly forgotten Your glory, O Father;
And among sinners I have scattered the riches which You gave to me.
And now I cry to You as the Prodigal:
I have sinned before You, O merciful Father;
Receive me as a penitent and make me as one of Your hired servants.*

Orthodox kontakion (a form of hymn in the Byzantine liturgical tradition)

I'm still a hypocrite, but maybe not as big a one as yesterday.

Bill Beach

Tuesday, February 24

6th Day of Lent

40 Days until Easter

Ephesians 3:14–19 (NIV)—For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

As I pack the last few boxes and prepare to lock the door at McMillan Lane for the final time, my heart is full. This house has held 10 years of our lives—10 years of growth, noise, laughter, scraped knees, celebrations, and quiet prayers. It's where I watched our children grow up. Where we played wiffle ball, soccer, and basketball in the yard. Where the pond became our summer playground with jet skis and rafts. Where bikes flew around the paved loop, cross-country runs started and ended, and sledding down the overpass with friends and neighbors felt like the best winter day ever.

This place has shaped us. And today, as we close this chapter and step into a new one, I'm reminded of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–19. Paul says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father... that he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being."

That's my prayer right now—for all of us. That as walls change and addresses change, God would strengthen what matters most: our relationship with Him!

Paul goes on to pray, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love..." Roots matter most when seasons change. McMillan Lane has been good soil for our family. But our deepest roots were never meant to be in a house or a neighborhood—they are meant to be in Christ's love. That love has held us through every milestone here, through every beautiful memory created, and it will go with us wherever we land next.

Paul keeps praying that we would "have power... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." That love is wider than this street, longer than these 10 years, deeper than our memories, and higher than our hopes for what comes next. It's a love that doesn't stay behind when we lock the door, and—as Lennie reminds me—like our memories, it goes beyond the driveway.

And finally, Paul prays that we would "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." That's the blessing I want to speak over this next chapter in all of our lives. As we become a smaller household, but expanding to a larger family; as one child remains at home and two are married by this time next year, as new memories and milestones are formed—may our lives still be full. Not cluttered. Not crowded. But full of God, standing firmly rooted on His Hopes, His Promises, and His truths.

As we walk into this Lenten season, this 40-day journey toward the empty tomb, I'm praying that each of you would embrace the newness God is offering. That you would draw nearer to Jesus, become more rooted in Him, and trust that resurrection always follows surrender.

Prayer: *We thank You, Lord, for McMillan Lane. And we trust You with what's next. Amen.*

Danielle Furlough

Wednesday, February 25

7th Day of Lent

39 Days until Easter

Romans 8:38, 39 (NIV)—For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalm 119:89, 90 (NIV)—Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures.

In my den, I have a little sculpture of an outstretched arm engulfed in the waves. There is a spiritual-like hand with a firm grip on the arm. This sculpture is on the end table beside my chair where I always sit. It is called *The Grip of God* sculpted by J. Christopher White. It is constant reminder for me that nothing can separate me from God's love.

There are some days that I feel overwhelmed with my feelings or circumstances, but I can always find peace in God's Word. Just like that sculpture, God's Word reminds me that He has got me and that His promises endure forever.

God loved us first. He gives us life not only here on Earth, but for eternity with Him in Heaven. No matter what your day brings, you are never alone. "God is with you always" (Matthew 28:20 NIV).

I want to close with the poem by the artist about his sculpture:

"The Grip of God" by J. Christopher White

*There is a love that reaches down to us
from the throne of God Most High,
that covers all our sinful deeds,
So we don't have to die.*

*Our sins are covered by His very blood
that He shed on Calvary,
and those who will believe His Word,
eternal life receive.*

*His promises are statements
The Expression of what's true,
they illustrate His Holiness
and His love for me and you.*

*God says, 'Those who have received Me
are firm within love's grip,
I cannot let you go,
even when you slip.*

*For neither death, nor life,
nor angels dark or light,
can separate you from My love,
regardless of the fight.*

*God grips us in the Promise,
by what He gave to make us one,
by His love that truly is our life,
by the faith of God the Son.*

Have a blessed day. You and God have got this!

Laura Greene

Thursday, February 26

8th Day of Lent

38 Days until Easter

Joshua 1:9 (NIV)—Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

What sustains us as Christians is knowing that God is with us. He's always with us through the most challenging moments of our lives—a sudden illness, the loss of a family member or close friend, a financial setback, a separation from our spouse or divorce, a conflict with a co-worker. We need an anchor and God provides it when we need it most.

Being strong during challenging times is never easy. But faith is the key. God said, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

I recently attended the funeral of an acquaintance. He was someone I had recently gotten to know, but he was the very close friend of a friend. His death was sudden and unexpected. Listening to the eulogies and seeing the pain in his family and friends brought back memories of when I lost one of my best friends in 2020. It also was sudden and unexpected. It shook me to my core, and for the first time in my life it made me get in touch with my own mortality. We are only on this earth for a short time. We need to live and love daily.

We need our anchor.

After the death of Moses, God said, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave or forsake you" (Joshua 1:1-3). HE is our anchor.

Living a positive Christian life requires faith. Life is challenging. Sometimes it is not easy. Sometimes it is very hard. God tells us to be "strong and courageous." Our journey and mission can be sustained through difficult times when we know it is HE Who is our anchor.

Henry Hinton

Friday, February 27

9th Day of Lent

37 Days until Easter

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)—So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)—And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

In a time in our lives that we felt utterly lost, God whispered peace amid the storm. After an uncomplicated pregnancy, on May 6, 2022, our healthy, beautiful baby girl, Maggie Scott Matthews, came into the world. We knew she had completed our family—those eyes, wide with wonder.

Following delivery, my left leg remained numb from the knee down. No movement. No feeling. As a postpartum nurse, I knew epidurals sometimes do this; however, not the usual epidural haze—this stuck. We prayed all night. Nothing shifted. Then morning light came and I tried standing—nothing, unsteady. Scott held me and became my crutch. We looked at each other and asked, “... will this be forever?” Tears. Prayer. We wept and held each other. We held Maggie.

We had no clue then how close Jesus really was—how He would turn out to be our real crutch. Jesus was stepping in. This injury changed everything. Physical therapy was three times weekly. Walker, cane, a leg brace, shower chair. Learning to walk again. And while I could barely stand... I had two daughters. One toddler, one newborn. And somehow, our two-year-old did not melt down. She glowed. Quiet when I could not chase. Hugged when I could not bend. Loved her sister like she had rehearsed it her whole life. Perfect big sister. Perfect gifts. Balancing them both on one working leg. I learned what tired meant.

Oh, how Scott and I clung together. Prayed louder in the hallway. Fought softer together. Our marriage did not crack. It fused, faith deeper, trust louder, and love steadier. Every diaper dash, every hallway step—fought for it. With sun on two sleeping faces, gratitude drowned out every ache, every fear. Every wobble—He was there, He stood. In every shaky step, I heard Him: “Daughter, rise.”

In Mark 5:34, He told the bleeding woman her faith had made her well. And boy, did I need that. Because it was not about my legs. It was about trusting that even if I never ran again, I would still walk towards Him. You know, those little victories—like taking two steps without help, alone—felt like Easter mornings. Quiet resurrection. And four months in, sensation tiptoed back. Tips of toes first, then the foot. The whole leg woke up. Then strength flooded back. Today, I am whole, completely healed. All Glory to God. He did not fix my limb—He fixed my sight. He did not fix just a nerve—He fixed what we see now: family and faith. One marriage that leaned in, and two girls who shine. One God Who walks ahead, Who never limps.

Prayer: *Father, in the quiet dark before dawn, when our legs fail us, stand beside us. When doubt creeps in like numbness, remind us—You walk ahead. When two kids need mom and mom cannot run—carry us. Make every scar a sermon, and every brace turn into praise. Turn pain into pulpit. For every Maggie, every weary parent, every father who has cried in a hospital hall—bring feeling back. Help us to allow gratitude to grow louder than fear. Remind us that light comes, even when our knees will not hold us up. Help us trade crutches for worship. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scott and Rebecca Matthews

Saturday, February 28

10th Day of Lent

36 Days until Easter

***1 John 4:16, 17 (ESV)*—So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.**

Usually on the third weekend of each January, for the past 25 years or so, my sons have hosted at our home on Bath Creek a “Bath Men’s Retreat.” Friends from far and near come to join us for a weekend of food, fellowship, and the worship of Jesus.

The Bath house becomes a house of prayer. The men join in joyful singing and listen to four “talks” on Jesus by an invited speaker. The speaker shares with us a thought that he has about Jesus. We pray and sing and listen and play. The fellows shoot skeet, hang out around a fire pit, talk on the porch, and eat a lot of food.

This year we had guests from Afghanistan and Ethiopia and England. Asghar is a friend reared in the mountains of Afghanistan. Asghar is Persian and a Muslim. He was a guest of a friend from Annapolis.

Asghar appeared to enjoy the food, the fun, and the conversation. He appeared to listen to each of the “talks” given by a friend from England. With the friends, he shot skeet and sat by the fire and engaged in friendly conversation all around. By just being present, Asghar found himself engaged in the friendship and fellowship of his new brothers.

As the weekend was coming to an end, we gathered around the kitchen to have breakfast on Sunday morning. My son, William, asked Asghar to say the blessing in his native tongue. The young man was totally surprised, maybe shocked. As he gathered himself and bowed his head, we all did the same. He prayed a prayer of thanksgiving in Persian.

Breakfast was followed by a gathering in the big room. Different brothers stood to offer their prayers and to share their appreciation and gratitude for the friendship and for the fellowship that they had experienced over the weekend. Asghar stood and expressed his gratitude for his having been included by these followers of Jesus and for the love shown to him by his brothers.

Rusty Duke

Monday, March 2

11th Day of Lent

34 Days until Easter

John 14:6 (NKJV)—Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

No matter our age or stage in this life on Earth, we ALL need to know that Heaven is a real place where our Father resides. Jesus is our passport to Heaven, but not all of us will experience it.

The Bible, which is our authority, tells us that we must surrender to Jesus as a condition of the rite of passage. Just like a fancy hotel, we must secure a reservation. The Bible informs us that our name in The Lamb’s Book of Life secures our place.

Heaven is not a fantasy, but a reality. We ALL need to think about our eternal security and not just our temporary home here on Earth.

Heaven is one of the most joyful topics in the Word. How we view it determines how we choose to live our lives. Hopefully there will be lots of loved ones and friends there to greet us. But best of all will be our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Let’s all tell this dark world about the joy that awaits us!

Elizabeth Havens

Tuesday, March 3

12th Day of Lent

33 Days until Easter

John 2:14-16 (AMP)—And in the temple He found the people who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at their tables. He made a whip of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; then to those who sold the doves He said, “Take these things away! Stop making My Father’s house a place of commerce!”

Spring is coming soon, and it is such a wonderful time of the year, after what can be a time of bleak winter. The temperature begins to warm and the world begins to take on a fresh new look. The trees start to put out new leaves, the grass begins to turn green, and flowers sprout and bloom. Everything seems more colorful and beautiful. There are other signs that tell us spring is near: children are practicing baseball, coats and hats are left behind, and birds are building their nests.

When we were young children, our mothers planned for spring cleaning. We would see the mop, a pail, sponges, floor cleaner, window cleaner, rags and dust cloths ready for use. It was considered time to give the house a good “going over” and to get rid of things that were not needed. We helped our mothers thoroughly clean everything in the house. Dad’s part was to take care of all the yard work—fertilizing, weeding, cutting, trimming—and any outside repair work. Mother would take down all the curtains, wash them and hang them on the clothesline (we do not see those any more). Then she washed all the windows and woodwork around the windows, inside and outside. When the curtains were ironed, smelling like fresh air and sunshine, they were hung again. Next, we tackled the closets—everything was taken out, walls were wiped down, the floor was scrubbed, and any clothing not worn or not needed was taken away. After that we moved the mattresses outside to “breathe in the sunshine” while we washed the bed frames, sheets, blankets, pillows, etc. When the floors of the bedrooms were clean and drawers had been cleaned out, the bed was remade so the room smelled new and fresh. This was repeated throughout the house until all was sparkling!

In the passage from John 2, we read that Jesus did some spring cleaning of His own. It was time for the annual Passover celebration, so Jesus traveled to Jerusalem. He went to the Temple and was dismayed by what He saw—selling in His Father’s Temple and money changers! It must have looked more like a market than a house of worship. Jesus did not like what he saw, so He made a whip and drove the animals and those selling out of the Temple. He turned over the tables of the money changers so that coins were scattered everywhere. He certainly cleaned the Temple that day!

As we think of the cleansing of the Temple, let us think also about our own personal cleansing. We are in a season called Lent, a time to prepare our hearts, focusing on the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior. May we look inside ourselves and see if there is anything in us that needs to be cleaned or thrown out. Jesus might need to do some spring cleaning within us. As we contemplate the meaning of Lent, let us be mindful of “our house” and review the cleanliness of our minds, our hearts, our souls, so that we can surrender ourselves wholly to Jesus.

Walker and Vicki Allen

Wednesday, March 4

13th Day of Lent

32 Days until Easter

Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)—Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

I know many of you have heard of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Well, I had my own great depression in the 1990s, only mine was a depression of the heart.

It seemed that every year, or year and a half, for that decade, I was losing a family member. First it was Dennis's dad, then my grandma, then my dad, then my mother and my sister-in-law, and then Dennis's mother. It came so fast that it seemed like I couldn't recover from one passing to the next. But the real reason for my depression was that I was angry at God. How could God let all this happen so quickly. I was too embarrassed to tell anyone of my anger, so I kept it inside and it stole my joy for living!

Then a young woman came into my life named Haley Harrington. At age 24, she had already been suffering from MS for 10 years. She shared with me how angry she had been with God too, but through a miraculous encounter with the love of Jesus, her life was filled up with incredible joy! It came through spending time with Him every day. I spent many hours with her for the next 10 years, and I learned so much from her life that I, too, started spending quality time with Jesus. He healed my broken heart, and Haley would always say to me, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Because of her, I have learned that truth too, and I will guarantee that if you spend intimate time in a relationship with Jesus, He will take away every sorrow and give you back His peace, love, and joy.

Pat Leanhardt

Thursday, March 5

14th Day of Lent

31 Days until Easter

Leviticus 16:20–22 (NLT)—When Aaron has finished purifying the Most Holy Place and the Tabernacle and the altar, he must present the live goat. He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness. As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land.

The Old Testament describes creation, the history of God's chosen people, and lays the foundation for the birth and life of Jesus. Exodus presents the Israelites with God's plan for the Temple. Leviticus provides a handbook for the Levites and priests who carried the awesome responsibility of leading the nation in corporate and private worship.

Leviticus 16 describes the annual Day of Atonement during which the high priest enters the Holy of Holies once per year to present the sin offering of two goats to carry away the sins of the people. One goat is sacrificed, while one is anointed with the blood of the sacrificed goat then led into the wilderness, carrying “all the people’s sins upon itself into the desolate land.” Yet this ritual must be repeated every year on the Day of Atonement, as the animal sin sacrifice is not lasting.

Lent allows us to reflect on the arrest, trial, conviction, and crucifixion of Jesus. Therefore, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, Who carried our sins away for eternity as the sacrificed Lamb of God.

As we continue this Lenten season, let’s consider the truth of John 3:16 as we worship Jesus our eternal Savior: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (ASV).

Hale Stephenson

Friday, March 6

15th Day of Lent

30 Days until Easter

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)—But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,...

A huge project lately has created a need for more space in the back of my car. While deciding what to keep handy and what to stick in the garage, I came across a rope I’ve been carrying around for years “just in case.” It is a 100-foot-long nylon rope, strong enough to tow a car out of a ditch, long enough to lasso a deer fallen through a frozen pond (so common in eastern NC :-)), and heavy enough to throw to someone being swept away in a raging river. I’m an Eagle Scout. Be prepared, right?

The rope was neatly coiled, but when I picked it up, it became more like a bowl of spaghetti than a lifeline. I pictured a helpless flood victim struggling by, never to be seen again, while I stood on shore frantically untangling the rope I had carried for years to help pull them to safety. I’d have been no help at all.

We might never be called upon to rescue someone physically, but no doubt we all pass dozens of friends and strangers each week needing a “lifeline” of some sort. Could I extend a lifeline of hope to someone emotionally or spiritually? Am I willing, ready, and able? And what does that lifeline look like?

The answer is Jesus, of course. Am I prepared to share the hope of His grace and truth the way He expects from me? The Bible teaches that if we are willing, He has the power to make us ready and able. It may be as simple as giving a smile, sending an encouraging note or text, or truly praying for a person in need. At times, we are called to much more. An important question for us this Lenten season: Is our rope handy and *really* ready to serve His purposes?

Prayer: Lord, we know there are countless ways and opportunities to share the hope of Your life-saving love with others. Give us the heart, wisdom, and courage to hear their call for help and bring hope to those in need, as You would have us do, even if to only one person today. Amen.

Brad Griffin

Saturday, March 7

16th Day of Lent

29 Days until Easter

Psalm 116:1-9 (NIV)—I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: “LORD, save me!” The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The LORD protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. For you, LORD, have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

Philippians 4:8, 9 (NIV)—Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

January 17, 2020, was a stressful day. It was a payroll day at work, which always requires extra hours and major problem-solving skills. By the time I completed the submission of the final employee time card, I was exhausted and overwhelmed. I then headed home to do laundry, pack, and prepare for a 3-day volleyball tournament. I finally finished packing and headed to bed.

As I laid down and stretched, I felt a popping sensation in my head. My face started feeling warm and my lips were tingling. Within minutes, I had the worst headache of my life and began throwing up. After several hours of throwing up and no relief, my husband called 911. In the emergency department, I continued to throw up until they finally pumped enough medications in me to relieve the nausea. I was taken for a head CT. When I returned, I finally started dozing off. Sleep was all I wanted. I remember someone saying “Ma’am, ma’am.” I turned my head. In my grogginess, I saw someone standing over me, and she proceeded to say, “Ma’am, you have blood on your brain.” I turned to my husband and began to cry and panic. My mind flooded with all kinds of thoughts. Will I need brain surgery? How could this be? Why me? Am I going to die? What about my babies (who of course were not babies at 18 and 14)? I don’t have time for this. We have a volleyball tournament. Yes, in the middle of this traumatic event, I was thinking of how to get to the volleyball tournament. In my defense, I did have blood on my brain. After this flood of questions, all I could think to do was cry, “God help me!”

It was determined that I had a hemorrhagic stroke, and I was admitted to the ICU. I was frustrated, angry, confused, and scared. My head was still hurting, and all I could think of was my to-do list. I started giving my husband a list of things that had to be done. He stepped in and began taking care of me and our daughter. He would stay with me at night, and my mom would stay with me during the day. One night I had such a severe headache that I was just rocking back and forth in the bed. A friend was staying with me that night to give my husband a break. She went to ask for help and the PA came into my room. He could see I was in pain and distraught. I was about halfway through a 19-day hospital stay. He was concerned about my mental health at that point, as it is typical for those with long ICU stays to experience ICU delirium. He began to

explain to me how well I was doing. He stated that a third of the people who have a hemorrhagic stroke don't survive the event, another third die on the way to the hospital or shortly after admission, and the third that survive most likely have severe physical and cognitive disabilities. He wasn't saying this to scare me. He was encouraging me. He said, quite frankly, "You are a medical miracle." A miracle? I didn't feel like a miracle. I felt miserable. I just wanted to get out of the hospital and back to taking care of everything and everyone. I continued to recover and I experienced many ups and downs over the next few days. When I was released, I was ready to get back to what I thought was "normal." My body and brain didn't allow me to jump right back in. I had to remain out of work and try to take care of myself, which was something I had never really done.

During the recovery time at home, I began to realize that I really wasn't supposed to be here, or at least not without severe impairment. I remembered the PA saying I was a "medical miracle." I started thinking about all the people that helped me, from my husband, who stood by my side the whole time, to the paramedics, the nurses, the doctors, my family, and my friends. We had people providing meals, visiting me in the hospital, helping with my daughter, friends attending her games since I could not be there, people donating money to help us with expenses, but most of all, we had prayer warriors.

When I was in the hospital, I was so overwhelmed with the pain, the fear, the frustration, and the unknown, that I just continued to say, "God help me!" I didn't know what to say or ask for. I didn't realize that God was hearing my cries for help just as Psalm 116 states. He had mercy on me and surrounded me with so many people to help me.

As I continued to recover and had time to think and process what had happened, I realized that prior to my stroke I was focused on all my problems, all the difficulties and struggles, my to-do lists, trying to please everyone at home and at work. I was exhausted mentally and physically. God gave me a wake-up call and made me realize there is a reason I am still living. There is more for me to do. I have to shift my focus. I need to focus on the good and the positive. I need to be present in the moment and be thankful for all of my blessings. I need to hand my struggles over to God and not hold the weight of the world on my shoulders. No one knows how long we have on Earth, but we can live the life we have to the fullest by keeping God in the center of everything we do; and when life gets hard and you don't know what to say or do, just cry out to our merciful God. He will hear you!

Rosie Pasour

Monday, March 9

17th Day of Lent

27 Days until Easter

Matthew 6:30-34 (NIV)—If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Psalm 33:4 (NIV)—For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.

Proverbs 3:5, 6 (NIV)—Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Do you ever worry? Many of us worry about an assortment of things. Sometimes we worry about work or worry about what the weather might be like for an upcoming event. We worry about politics or maybe even how a sports team will perform. Sometimes we worry about more serious things like how will we afford necessities for our family or worry about a friend dealing with health problems. The fact of the matter is worrying is something we all do at some time in our daily lives.

The worst part about worrying is it gets you nowhere. Whether you worry or not, God has a plan for everybody and every situation. We are reminded so many times throughout Scripture to trust in the Lord and He will protect us and provide for our needs. God's Word and promises shouldn't be taken lightly, and great things happen when you put your trust in Him and let Him worry for you. Our time here on Earth is only temporary, so we should try our best to let our worries go and give them to the Lord.

Luke and Elizabeth Burch

Tuesday, March 10

18th Day of Lent

26 Days until Easter

James 4:7, 8 (NIV)—Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)—Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!

Romans 12:2 (NIV)—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.

During this season of Lent, while we surrender ourselves to self-denial and repentance, LET'S GO FURTHER—devoting ourselves to drawing nearer to God, so that He might draw nearer to us.

James, brother of Jesus and first Christian leader of Jerusalem, tells us to submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and temptation, and draw nearer to God. Did you know that James was called "Old Camel Knees" because he was so constantly in prayer that his knees became callused and knobby?

During this season of renewal and reflection, let's join James and get on our knees in prayer. Let's throw ourselves into Scripture. LET'S GO FURTHER than denying ourselves of worldly temptations by ADDING MORE JESUS to our days.

My prayer is that we continue to grow in our faith, so that we are not just believers, but FOLLOWERS of Jesus. I pray that we will continually seek His presence and strength. LET'S GO FURTHER than repentance, and be TRANSFORMED as we draw nearer to Him.

Karen Medlin

Wednesday, March 11

19th Day of Lent

25 Days until Easter

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)—I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

This Scripture is one of my favorite Bible verses because it has a way of encouraging me whenever I face struggles. Our weaknesses are strengthened by the One Who loves us. Sometimes we face circumstances beyond our control, but we have a faithful God Who promises to be with us and give us strength to see them through.

This story begins with a cracked toilet in an upstairs bathroom while we were out of town for two days. Unbeknownst to us, the toilet simply cracked and water began flooding rooms upstairs and seeping through the ceiling into the downstairs. When we opened the door upon return, we heard a strange noise that we quickly identified as water. Walking into the kitchen, we were shocked to see the ceiling fan slinging water everywhere, even into drawers and cabinets.

Everything in our house had to be removed and put into storage. The downstairs had to be gutted and the floors upstairs had to be ripped out. We moved into a furnished two-bedroom apartment made available to us through a friend. We were out of our home for 14 months, but not a day went by that we were not there watching the reconstruction of our home. Every day we visited our home, sometimes before the workers. On our drive over we would pray together out loud asking God to let us have a productive day, that workers would show up and supplies would be delivered. Each night we were thankful for the work that was accomplished. For 14 months we faced hurdles like finding mold and asbestos, which delayed the work, but we kept praying and repairs kept moving forward.

Finally, we got to move back into our newly reconstructed home after a long, grueling time away. It was so good to be home. One morning I was sitting quietly preparing for my daily devotion time. The day's verse was Philippians 4:13. I read this verse with a new interpretation that day as I received a Godwink. You see, the house number in our address is 413. God had heard every prayer and had been there the whole time, just as He promises!

Nancy Clark

Thursday, March 12

20th Day of Lent

24 Days until Easter

Psalm 46:1, 2 (NIV)—God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,...

We have relied on our faith more than ever this year with the loss of two loved ones within two months of each other. Without the ability to trust in God's plan despite not understanding, we would have crumbled through the pain.

My father was diagnosed with leukemia last year, and despite his sickness and pain, continued to work and take care of his patients in Wilmington. We tried and tried to convince him to retire and take time to rest and spend more time with my mom, but he would not listen. Finally, in June of this year, his cancer became more advanced and treatments were intensified to a point that made it impossible to work any longer. He finally retired and was able to rest, but less than one month later, he was admitted to the hospital and never made it home.

Watching my father leave us was horrible, especially knowing that he only had one month of retirement before succumbing to cancer. I searched for the answers to why he would be taken so soon after devoting his life to taking care of others. The Lord quickly answered me and brought peace to our family, recognizing that he passed away doing what he loved, surrounded by the people who loved him. He would not have wanted it any other way.

T Harris, one of my best friends and also Christy's first cousin, was taken to be with the Lord at the young age of 43 this year. He was happily married to Rebecca Harbin Harris, had two beautiful girls (Hunter, 11, and Blake, 8) whom he cared deeply for, and he was growing his business in Morehead City.

T was getting ready to leave for work and suffered a stroke in his house while his daughters were getting ready to leave for school. He was airlifted to ECU Health in Greenville, but never regained consciousness, and two days later he was gone.

Family and friends gathered in the hospital the entire time he was there, and while we were all devastated, hearing his wife Rebecca and mother Johnnie scream to the Lord, "WHY?" shook me to my core. His parents lost a son, his wife lost her husband, his kids lost their father, and we all lost a friend. I found myself asking the same question: "WHY, Lord?"

I have not received an answer to my question, but I know that "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."

Lucas and Christy Botros

Friday, March 13

21st Day of Lent

23 Days until Easter

Colossians 1:13, 14 (NIV)—For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 5:10 (NIV)—... and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."

I can vaguely remember walking through our church's doors every Sunday morning, alongside my parents and grandparents, since I was around eight years old. This Church was not your common megachurch, as it was in historic Bath where I would spend my summers fishing, crabbing, and most importantly learning Jesus' teachings and Scriptures with my Memaw. I was being brought up as a Jesus-loving, fish-catching, fine young man, or at least I thought I was.

Fast forward to my later high school years. I began seeking alcohol and substance abuse to try and fit in with the “popular kids” and to cope with any depression or anxiety I was dealing with. This led me down a dark road where I was seeking worldly items and objectives, while trying to live as a Christian. At this time, I thought I was unstoppable and could live and do whatever I wanted. I portrayed myself as a Christian, but I didn’t obey our loving Father. I was basically living two lives.

When I got out of my teen years, I settled down, became a lot more sober, and began working on my faith but didn’t fully surrender myself yet. I was in a toxic, abusive relationship that almost took my life and ended up in Pitt County Detention Center, which I do not recommend to anyone. But by the Grace of God, I found the kind and God-fearing ladies and gentlemen from **Victorious Living** to be preaching there.

I asked to be prayed over, and I knew right then and there I needed to fully surrender. I was on my knees balling, crying, and I heard someone whisper, “Cameron, it’s going to be okay. Just follow my lantern.” Since then, I have fully surrendered myself to our loving and caring Father, Jesus Christ, and have not looked back. The reasoning behind choosing Colossians 1:13–14 is from the hope, forgiveness of sins, and assurance of salvation Jesus Christ provides us when we have fully surrendered to Him.

Since my surrender, I feel I have been called to serve and go on mission trips to share my story and testimony. Whether it’s going to the men’s homeless shelter in Marion, or even talking Jesus to a stranger at the local grocery store, I feel as Christians we have many purposes, and one of them is bringing others to faith (Luke 5:10). Thank you, Memaw, for planting seeds, and most importantly thank you, Jesus, for saving my life.

Cameron Metcalf

Saturday, March 14

22nd Day of Lent

22 Days until Easter

Micah 6:8 (ESV)—He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)—... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,...

Many of us have a favorite verse, one for comfort maybe, another showing God’s grace. The two verses I have hanging up inside my bathroom mirror are different, at least for me. These two verses are where I feel most convicted, my areas of struggle. Knowing full well what Christ has sacrificed for me, I am given such simple tasks, yet in my human nature these seem to be my greatest struggles. My manner toward others, my witness to others, humility.

Lent is a time of reflection, prayer, and for some fasting. My prayer for you, and for myself, is these verses would give us reason to reflect on our witness to others, our relationship with God, and the tasks He has given us.

I close with one of Paul’s closings: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Ricky Watson

Monday, March 16

23rd Day of Lent

20 Days until Easter

Colossians 3:1-17 (NIV)—If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Have you ever been out running errands and had someone compliment your outfit? How did it feel? It usually feels pretty great, especially if it's someone you don't know or that had no reason to point it out. Today we will be spending some time in Colossians 3, and I want you to keep that question in the back of your mind. To begin, go ahead and read Colossians 3:1-17. This passage gives a lot of instructions, so let's jump in and discover what it means. First, read Colossians 3:1-4 again. What instructions are given in these verses? What is the reason for these instructions?

We are told to "seek the things that are above" (v. 1) and "set your minds on things that are above" (v. 2). Next, verses 3-4 explain exactly why we are to do this: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." You see, when we accept Christ, our life changes. We gain eternal life through Christ, and as a result our priorities should also change. This is the directive Paul is giving in this chapter of Colossians. Your life has changed, so your mind and your actions should also change. Let's keep reading. Read Colossians 3:5-11. What instructions are given in these verses? What are some things we are told to "put to death" or "put off"?

There is a lot of strong language and clear instructions in these verses. Verse 5 begins with "Put to death," and later verse 8 says "but now you must put them all away." Then once again verse 9 uses similar language when it says "seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices... ." Let's go back to the question I asked at the

beginning. It feels good when someone compliments your outfit, but what happens if someone points out a huge stain that you didn't notice? Or maybe you realize your clothes ripped and were damaged? If it's me, one of the first things I do is go and change. As soon as I know that my clothes are dirty or torn, I want to change them into something better. Shouldn't this apply to our lives as well? Verse 10 in Colossians 3 says that our new self is "being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." In order to do that, we have to put away the sinful practices and habits that we have. Which of the things in these verses do you struggle with the most? Are you willing to give it up and put it to death in order to look more like Christ? These last few verses were tough, but the chapter doesn't stop there. Let's continue reading Colossians 3:12–17.

What instructions are given in these verses? What are some of the things that we are told to "put on"?

The tone changes in these verses. Now instead of being told to get rid of things, we are told to "put on" some new things. Which of the things in these verses do you think you are good at? Which of these things do you think you could grow in? When we begin to look more like Christ by putting on the things in these verses, our attitudes change. We become more thankful, which is mentioned in verses 15, 16, and 17. We can also encourage one another and be the body of Christ, which is described in verses 15–17.

As we close today, I want to go back one more time to the question I asked at the beginning. One of the best compliments you can get on an outfit is when someone asks "Where did you get that?" They like what they see so much that they want to know where it came from. Friends, THAT is how we should be as followers of Christ. We should reflect Christ so well that people can't help but ask, "Where did you get that?" Then, our only response can be "I got it from Jesus, and you can too." Let's close in prayer.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Thank you for the gift of Christ and the new life that You offer us through Him. Help me to put off my sinful nature and to put on love. I pray that when people see me, they want to know more about You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Kearston Hudson

Tuesday, March 17

24th Day of Lent

19 Days until Easter

Hebrews 13:1, 2 (NIV)—Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Proverbs 3:5, 6 (NKJV)—Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

In May of 2024, after battling cancer and congestive heart failure (CHF), my mother went home to Jesus. I was her primary caregiver for several years and watched as her independence and dignity slowly diminished. In the last year or more, I rarely took her to her church because of the difficulty and time required to get ready. And I regret that. Besides God, she loved me more than anybody else ever did. I grieved that, and not in a productive way. Depression had a hard grip on me. I knew that I had to get involved in a church soon because, as the saying goes, "I was going nowhere fast."

I don't know what brought me to Christ Hope Church other than the Holy Spirit, but after the first couple of visits, experiencing heartfelt worshiping and preaching and being warmly greeted and accepted, I quickly joined in late 2024.

Soon after that, in January 2025, I was involved in a hit-and-run accident. And though I don't think He caused it, God surely used the accident to get my attention. With many broken bones, I spent a lot of time praying, listening, and sometimes crying, during the months that I healed. I was barely a member of CHC and was already contacted by the Meal Train Committee who blessed me with the meals I was unable to make for myself. Fast forward to January 2026, and God has directed my path as I sought Him. I am now on the Congregational Care Team, in a robust men's Bible Study, experiencing deepening fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ, and being blessed by God's Word.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Guard our hearts and lead us by Your Holy Spirit as we come out of seasons of hardship, illness, and loss. Even when we don't see a path forward, may we acknowledge You in everything we do and constantly seek Your guidance and Your wisdom and believe according to Your Word that You will make a path, and we will see that path and walk on it. Amen.

Mike Shugart

Wednesday, March 18

25th Day of Lent

18 Days until Easter

Matthew 11:28 (NIV)—Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

We all know “adulting” is hard and a full-time job. It doesn’t take an “emergency” event to feel tired and stressed and the need to rest, either. But Jesus is our help. He is our Father and our friend. Jesus is our everything if we accept Him, follow Him, and share (converse) with Him. If it’s important to us, it’s important to Him.

He came to Earth “wrapped” and lying in a manger, sent by God to us for a purpose: to save and give His life as a ransom for us. What a gift from God!

People in the Bible followed Him and ran to Him. Do we? Or do we take Him off a shelf when we need something, or check Him off our to-do list when we go to church or read our devotional for the day? Like the song from Josiah Queen says: “We got dust on our Bibles, brand-new iPhones. No wonder why we feel this way. . . .” WOW!

I was trying to think of the time Jesus became real to me. Yes, there are certainly those times that are quite memorable; but it’s walking with Him daily, talking and listening to Him, needing Him, and growing closer in my relationship with Him that makes Him real to me. I know Him, not just about Him, and He knows me.

He says, “Come!” to me. What an invitation! And it’s not just to His birth or His resurrection. It’s every day. It’s life—like being healthy is a lifestyle, not just being on a diet. Being God’s child is a lifestyle, a wonderful, loving, caring, everyday lifestyle, one filled with kept promises and new mercies every day.

Come! Accept His invitation. Rest in His love and His presence daily. You’ll be glad you did, and He will too!

Lou Hill

Thursday, March 19

26th Day of Lent

17 Days until Easter

Philippians 4:6, 7 (NIV)—Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Tommy and I began as college sweethearts, two young “kids” who chose not only each other but a shared journey through life. From the very beginning, we learned what it meant to follow one another faithfully, stepping into new seasons with trust, encouragement, and a belief that love grows stronger when dreams are chased side by side. We are the proud parents of three incredible children who reflect the love, resilience, and values we strive to live out each day. Through laughter, late nights, traditions, and challenges, our family has become our greatest joy and our strongest testimony.

Life has also tested us deeply. The loss of both our fathers within the same year reshaped our understanding of grief and grace. In those seasons of sorrow, anxiety threatened to overwhelm us, yet we discovered the power of prayer and thanksgiving even in pain. God’s peace, beyond what we could explain or understand, stood guard over our hearts and minds, reminding us that our family is never walking through grief alone. Our mothers are still at the foundation of who we are and how we have shaped our own family! Through their guidance and reminders of TRUSTING that everything will be okay, we have a strong feeling of peace.

Through every chapter, dreams realized, challenges endured, and faith deepened, we hold fast to this truth: when we bring every situation to God, His peace carries us. Together, grounded in love and guided by Christ, there is nothing we cannot face. Our story is not one of endurance alone, but of devotion; choosing each other again and again, trusting that unity, prayer, and faith make all things possible.

Tommy and Jamie Stanfield

Friday, March 20

First Day of Spring

27th Day of Lent

16 Days until Easter

John 15:12–14 (NKJV)—This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

From the start of the music, you know the song, one you’ve heard all your life. “Amazing Grace” is one of my favorite hymns from my time as a child growing up in a Baptist Church. As an adult, it still reigns as one of my most listened-to hymns. With the internet and YouTube available to all, you can find many renditions ranging from traditional gospel, country, folk, rock, and so on. My favorites are the gospel versions. I find myself listening to music several times a week, and “Amazing Grace” is part of this listening pleasure.

As part of my YouTube searches, I found another song with heartfelt meaning for me. The song was apparently created by artificial intelligence (AI) using the voice and style of a well-known country singer. Much like “Amazing Grace,” “The Cross Was Enough” identifies with Christian values and beliefs. I’ve included the first verse and chorus for those who may not know the song:

*I was broken, lost, and guilty,
chains of sin wrapped around my soul.
But on a hill called Calvary,
Your blood was spilled to make me whole.
Every nail drove love much deeper,
every thorn crowned You as king.
Though the world turned its back upon You,
You gave Your life to set me free.*

*[Chorus] The Cross was enough,
the grave couldn't win,
Your mercy reached farther than my sin.
Love poured out when You gave up Your breath,
Jesus You saved me through life and through death.*

“The Cross Was Enough” reminds me so much of “Amazing Grace.” God’s amazing grace was given to all of us through Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ death paid the penalty for our sin. But was the Cross enough? Christ’s resurrection completes this salvation for all sinners. The resurrection proves His victory and enables new life for all, thus making His work on Earth truly “enough” for our salvation. The Cross and resurrection is enough to answer the problem of my sin, to break the power of sin and death, and enough to give my life wholly and unequivocally to Jesus Christ.

Monty Clark

Saturday, March 21

28th Day of Lent

15 Days until Easter

1 Samuel 24: 1-7 (ESV)—When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. And afterward David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD’s anointed.” So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

The Bible is a real book describing real people in everyday situations. The backdrop to what takes place above is the complicated relationship between Saul and David. At this point, Saul is pursuing David to take his life. David has been anointed by Samuel to be the king of Israel. He has slain Goliath and is now holed up in a cave with the progenitors of the “mighty men of David” described in 2 Samuel.

David finds the man who is trying to kill him in a most vulnerable state, completely unaware. David, the mighty warrior, and his well-trained men have been given what seems to be a gift. In the carnality of man, most would strike when your enemy is most vulnerable.

David, who God describes as a man after His own heart, does not do this. He establishes a righteous principle. It is the Lord’s purvey to avenge. With his words he changes the minds of his four hundred warriors. Saul is spared. David’s desires and priorities aligned with the will of God in his life, even though he was not perfect. In this season of Lent, let David be our example of honesty, integrity, and humility as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Fred and Holli Williams

Monday, March 23

29th Day of Lent

13 Days until Easter

John 15:13–15 (NIV)—Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Have you ever had a friend who was always there to rally around you, someone who could lift you up when you were feeling down, who loved you enough to be honest even when the truth was hard to hear? A friend who walked with you through life’s hills and valleys. My best friend for more than 30 years was that person for me. We planned our weddings together, joined our family vacations, shared our pregnancies, and celebrated our children at every age. She was there whenever I needed friendship, support, or simply love.

We didn’t have any kind of argument or falling out, but life slowly pulled us in different directions. Our children grew older and busier. Vacations that once included both families shifted into other commitments. Our dinners and cookouts became fewer until they disappeared altogether. Eventually, we stopped talking, not out of hurt, but out of habit. Yet the longer the silence stretched, the harder it became to reach out. I often prayed that we would casually cross paths because I was too prideful to be the first one to make contact. Still, deep in my heart, I knew that if I truly needed her, she would be there for me.

God is that kind of friend—only closer. In John 15:14, Jesus says, “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Our friendship with God grows through daily conversation, personal prayer, and listening to His Word. It is a relationship rooted in love, not fear; one that leads to willing obedience because we trust His wisdom and know He wants the very best for us. During the season when I missed my friend, I learned to cherish my time with God more and more each day. He brings peace and understanding when I need it most. Sometimes I don’t even know what I want or need—but He does.

As for my friend and me, we have reconnected. Even though we are getting older, life does not slow down. We have to choose to make time for one another and nurture the friendships God has placed in our lives.

Sharon Angel

Tuesday, March 24

30th Day of Lent

12 Days until Easter

Matthew 25:31–46 (CSB)—When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?” And the King will answer them, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Then he will also say to those on the left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you didn’t take me in; I was naked and you didn’t clothe me, sick and in prison and you didn’t take care of me.” Then they too will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help you?”

Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Shortly after I was asked to write a devotional piece for this Christ Hope Church devotional, the word “generous” came to mind, and it wouldn’t leave. As I prayed for God to use my pen to express His thoughts, many synonyms for generous came alive to me. My crossword puzzle dictionary defines generous as “open-hearted, open-handed, charitable, unselfish, obliging, gracious, lavish, ample.” These synonyms, plus the word generous itself, describe the staff, the members, the attendees, the ambiance, the atmosphere, the intent of Christ Hope Church. Generous could be a tagline for CHC in my opinion.

Think for a moment about your definition of the word generous and your sense of generosity. How many ways can we, as believers, share or give? Maybe we begin our list with the obvious, money. Then move to prayers, then include family relationships, friendships, and don’t forget time. I question myself: Am I generous in all these areas of life? Are you?

While writing this, it hit my mind that the first devotional reading I turned to during our quiet time this morning was based on Matthew 25:31–46. Are we generous in the way Jesus describes?

Consider that Jesus' descriptions of generously serving others involves more time than money. That leads me to want to increase my Church-dedicated work time. However, I must admit age and health issues have my husband, Bob, and therefore, me, housebound. We have been recipients of numerous visits, calls, texts, cards and notes, meals, on and on—all from you, our generous Christ Hope Church family.

Thank you! Your generosity touches us deeply. You bless our lives.

Ann Griffin

Wednesday, March 25

31st Day of Lent

11 Days until Easter

Genesis 45:1–5 (NLT)—Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, “Out, all of you!” So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace. “I am Joseph!” he said to his brothers. “Is my father still alive?” But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. “Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.”

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was resented by his brothers because of the paternal favor he was shown. This same Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers after they considered murdering him, then sold into slavery in a foreign country by those brothers, the same brothers who made up a story to convince their dad that he was killed by a wild animal.

How things have changed now that this same Joseph stands in front of his brothers decades later as a dominant authority, a position of power just behind the Pharaoh of Egypt. Here, in the land of his affliction, Joseph finds himself in a weary and perilous moment where human instincts would say to act on your grudge, to boast, to get revenge. Despite that, what we see is tears. “It was God who sent me here...” Joseph could have embraced all of what came with his removal to Egypt in this moment, but instead he remained rooted in the promise of God. What radical and powerful forgiveness! What a radical and powerful perspective on trusting God’s plan.

What is that thing today that is holding us up from forgiveness in our minds? No matter that circumstance, we can thank the Lord for forgiving us more than we could ever deserve. We can lean on the Lord to help us apply that same radical forgiveness to others as we remember how He covers us with His sacrifice.

How could Joseph possibly forgive after all of that? He was rooted in the promises of God. That position in Egypt was not his true reward; rather, it was the opportunity to spend eternity with the Creator of all. It was God’s plan for him to be there for a greater purpose. Today, as we remind ourselves to stay rooted in the promises and eternal perspective that lead us to honor Christ, let us never forget our “why” in the circumstances of life.

Josh Register

Thursday, March 26

32nd Day of Lent

10 Days until Easter

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (ESV)—... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Philippians 4:6 (ESV)—... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Ephesians 5:20 (ESV)—... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)—In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Proverbs 22:6 (ESV)—Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 1:8 (ESV)—Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.

In today’s world, parenting can feel overwhelming. At times, it may seem as though we are losing our grip, watching our children step further into a world that feels loud, confusing, and often unsettling. When our children were young, life felt simpler. We decided what they watched, what they listened to, and who they spent their time with. We believed we were in control.

As our children have grown—especially as they enter their teenage years—we have come to realize how quickly that sense of control fades. They are forming their own opinions and making their own choices, shaped by the “real world” around them. Some of what they see and hear can be shocking, frightening, or deeply troubling. There are moments when we feel discouraged, wondering if we have failed or fallen short as parents. During this season of reflection, the Lord has gently reminded us of a humbling truth: we are never meant to be in control—He is!

Through prayer and time spent in Scripture, we have learned to let go of our fears and trust more fully in God’s wisdom. Over the past few years, we have intentionally listened to His Word, allowing it not to be an addition to our parenting, but its foundation. Lent calls us to let go, and to lean more deeply on Christ—and this has never felt more true than in our journey as parents.

There is peace in knowing that we are striving to lead by example, planting seeds of faith, gratitude, and love in our children’s hearts. Though they are growing and finding their own way, our role is to help them build a strong foundation—one rooted in Christ, shaped by gratitude, and guided by Christian values. Scripture brings us comfort and hope as we walk alongside our children: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4 NKJV).

Each day, we lift our children up in prayer, asking God not only to protect and guide them, but to guide us as well. We pray for wisdom, patience, and humility as we prepare them to live as faithful followers of Christ. We rejoice when we hear them speak truth, reject the evils of the world, and live with hearts that reflect God’s love.

This Lenten season, we pause to reflect on the sacred gift of parenting, on our Heavenly Father's constant love and guidance, and on the joy our children bring as they continue to grow in faith. May we embrace this season as an invitation to trust more deeply, love more fully, and walk faithfully with our children toward the light of Christ.

Michael and Catherine McKee

Friday, March 27

33rd Day of Lent

9 Days until Easter

Nehemiah 8:4, 5 (NIV84)—Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

What a moment in history this was! Ezra was the high priest who had recently completed restoration work on the Temple, after being exiled to Babylon. His friend Nehemiah has also now just finished repairing the wall around Jerusalem and the Temple mount. More than 50,000 Israelites returned to their homeland because the Temple was now restored and secure. This was a joyous occasion and one that was filled with great anticipation. The book that Nehemiah is speaking of... is the Book of the Law. We also discover in this chapter that Ezra stands and simply reads aloud from God's Word from daybreak until noon as he faced the city square.

The response of the Israelite people amazes me. It's as if the very words of this book were stirring them in such a powerful way that all they could do was worship with a repentant heart. They all bowed down and worshiped with their faces to the ground. It was such a deep and sincere cry to God that later in verse 9, Nehemiah instructed the crowd: “This day is sacred to the Lord your God, do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. He then assures them in verse 10: “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

I have two thoughts on these verses:

First, God's Word is powerful! One cannot earnestly read it without being moved to tears and repentance. I think this is why Satan is so resourceful when it comes to keeping us out of God's Word. A family, church, city, or nation that spends time in God's Word will forever be changed by the truth that it contains. This is why “To hold out the Word of Life” is at the forefront of our mission as a church. As long as we hold fast to God's Word, we will experience this same joy that Nehemiah speaks of.

Second, much like the Israelites, we too are preparing to move into a church building that is being prepared for us to worship the King of Kings. It is to be a sacred and holy place, a “thin place,” where we draw near to God as He draws near to us. I can't wait to gather together as a Church in this new building that God is preparing for His children.

My prayer is that, as we open God's Word and read it, we will also experience the same movement of the Spirit that was felt on this day in Jerusalem as Ezra read aloud the very words of God. Amen! Amen!

Sammy Hudson

Saturday, March 28

34th Day of Lent

8 Days until Easter

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)—So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)—... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith...

Psalm 16:8 (NIV)—I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

How freeing is it to know that we have an all-powerful, all-knowing God that is our advocate in everything we do! I was riding in my truck on the way to lunch in early January, listening to the radio, and that feeling came over me. I felt like it was something I needed to write down. Lennie had emailed us and asked us about writing a devotional. My wife and I were worried because we weren't quite sure what to say, much less what to write, but in that moment, God put this on my heart for us both:

I spend a lot of time in the outdoors and on the water with my children and my wife (sometimes, Ha!). There we have a chance to really appreciate all that He has given us and the beauty that He's created around us. It hasn't always been like that for me. I was almost always more concerned with how many fish I was going to catch or how many ducks we did or didn't bag. My experience was scored on my catch or "harvest," not the blessing of being able to enjoy His creation. I didn't always keep my eyes on Him.

Recently, a good friend told me a story he heard in a podcast that detailed how one particular individual trained their service dog. The dog was taught to focus on its master when given the command "all eyes on me." That's what Jesus wants, and we have to continually remind ourselves of that. I know I do.

My hope for all of us is to look for Jesus in everything we do. It doesn't matter if it's work, kids, sporting events, golf, fishing/hunting, or simply riding down the road. He's there, even in the challenging circumstances we all face. Just keep telling yourself "all eyes on Him!"

Chris West

Monday, March 30

35th Day of Lent

6 Days until Easter

Acts 4:30 (NIV)—“Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Steve Cotter, Jeff's younger brother, was born in 1955. He was a very sweet and loving young man. His life came crashing down in his early 20s. He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder (a chemical imbalance of the brain). Steve was put on medications and was doing well, but he just really wanted to be normal. Steve learned to live and deal with his mood swings and the lows of severe depression.

One night in his late 20s, he was in a severe motorcycle wreck which left him in a coma for six months. Their mother, Linda, prayed over him day and night. God was good and let him live. A long road of recovery was ahead of him to learn to walk, talk, and feed himself again. Steve had a traumatic brain injury (TBI), like a football player hit head on. It took time to heal and lots of prayers. His mom took care of Steve for many years. After Steve was diagnosed with TBI and bipolar together, the doctor said he would not live a long life. After 16 years of their mom taking good care of him, she passed away from a heart attack at the young age of 66. Jeff and I were living in Greenville, so we decided to move to Jacksonville to help Steve. After two years, we all moved back to Greenville. Steve lived with us for 17 years before he got very sick. He was diagnosed with hydrocephalus (the gradual build up of brain fluid), leaving him unable to walk or communicate. The doctor at ECU gave him only two weeks to live and decided to put him in palliative care, so we could visit every day. We read him the Bible, played him music, and just sat with him and prayed. Steve passed away at 60 years old, April 1, 2016. God was good by letting him live 33 years after his accident.

God was with Jeff and me as He wrapped His arms around us and let us know we are loved and will see Steve in Heaven one day. We know Steve is in Heaven watching over us. Never give up on God; He will always be with you in good times and bad times. In this Lent season remember this verse: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).

Mary Cotter

Tuesday, March 31

36th Day of Lent

5 Days until Easter

Proverbs 16:9 (CSB)—A person’s heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps.

Jeremiah 29:11 (CSB)—“For I know the plans I have for you”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“plans for your well-being, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Proverbs 3:5, 6 (CSB)—Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.

Have you ever experienced having God answer your prayers in a uniquely powerful way? On May 25, 2025, God answered my prayer requests for our oldest son, Jake, in a very powerful way.

Since the COVID era began six years ago, Jake had drifted further and further away from us, from other family and friends, and from living the life the Lord wanted for him. During this time, I have focused on praying two specific verses over him and his situation: Jeremiah 29:11 and Proverbs 3:5, 6.

I quickly realized that I did not have control over his life, that I needed to rely completely on God, on Jake’s behalf, and to look for His guidance on how to handle the whole situation. Proverbs 16:9 helped me focus where the Lord was guiding him. I needed to release my “control” of the situation and give God space to direct Jake’s path.

God truly delivered on His promise. Last Memorial Day weekend, under miraculously arranged and blessed circumstances, Jake suffered multiple seizures during a family vacation at Lake Gaston. He had to be sedated and intubated on his ambulance ride to the local hospital to stop the seizures. He was airlifted to ECU Health to provide the emergency care he needed. He spent three days sedated in ICU until his medical staff felt it was safe to “wake” him up. He remained at the hospital a full week to monitor the seizure activity and help him recover from the injuries sustained during the initial event the Sunday before.

Since that time, as Jake has lived with us during the adjustment period, we have grown closer than we have ever been before in his adult life, and Jake is present with us again in ways we never could have imagined.

We do not have all the answers yet, but we KNOW the Lord will continue to have His hand in Jake’s life as he learns to navigate his new “normal.” I will continue to follow the Lord’s lead as Brad and I help Jake through this change to the future God has planned for him.

Beth Griffin

Wednesday, April 1

37th Day of Lent

4 Days until Easter

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)—I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)—Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

It is amazing how God provides in the seasons of our lives and how “favorite” verses can change as we move along the timeline of our lives. I just crossed over the “Rubicon” of 70. By God’s grace, and only His grace, I have made 70 trips around the sun. I have experienced a lot of life and have found, as I have aged, that though I expected life and decisions would get easier, they really have not. As a small business owner, I am looking forward to retirement, hopefully soon. And as a now “seasoned” citizen, I know that my time on this earth is getting shorter. Letting go of what I have done “forever” has been hard to do. The contentment that I long for with that decision has been elusive.

As usual, most of my thoughts have been driven by me. I pray, but then I jump right up and do it “my way.” I just have a hard time letting it go. My business has been my life for a long, long time. Though it is small, it is mine. Or so I thought....

I work out twice a week at Youngs Physical Therapy. Following my knee replacement in 2019, I decided to invest in my health. Knowing that time is getting away, I have been trying to put the health odds more in my favor. And though I do feel fairly good most times, the soreness is still there and the issues of my life post-employment haunt me daily. One day, as I was walking through Youngs worried about retirement and whether I was ready for the next chapter, I stared up on the wall and there it was in big BOLD letters as if speaking directly to me: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” And then later, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” At that moment I felt some of the weight lift. It is still there, but I find now that as I pray, He is telling me it is going to be okay.

These are my challenges, but we all have them. Paul wrote to the people of Philippi from prison, under immense persecution. I don't think I will ever have to deal with that. But Scripture speaks to us at defining moments in our lives if we search and are willing to be open and listen. Health, marriage, work, family relationships, etc.—all of us have challenges. But through prayer and seeking guidance from Jesus, I think we can all find the level of contentment that we are looking for.

I thought I owned my business, but now I know that God put me here to steward and help others. A writer said that Paul's letter is assurance that we can overcome trials and suffering with His help, but not a guarantee against tough times. And those times come. And, like a good father, I have been reminded that He will not leave or forsake me. No matter what happens, He will be there. These verses really speak to me.

Michie Faulconer

Thursday, April 2

Maundy Thursday

38th Day of Lent

3 Days until Easter

2 Samuel 23:10 (NIV)—**But Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.**

Early in my walk with Jesus, I struggled to understand why life remained difficult even after I chose to give my life to Him. I had grasped passages like James 1, but it didn't give me the mental image God wanted me to see. Then He revealed a verse about Eleazar to me.

Eleazar, son of Dodai, was one of David's mightiest warriors. In 2 Samuel 23, Eleazar opposes thousands of Philistines when the rest of the Israelite army had run away in fear.

Eleazar demonstrates unwavering faith before his fellow soldiers in this moment. Even as the battle becomes overwhelming and physically exhausting, he refuses to retreat and stands his ground. In the same way, Christians who come face to face with temptation are called to remain steadfast because we find peace and courage in knowing that we are guided by a faithful Shepherd Who has already secured victory over whatever we face.

As the hundreds of Philistines charged across the battlefield, Eleazar, by pure instinct and habit, takes up his sword and fights. Because Eleazar used his sword so much, it becomes fused to his hand in an amalgamation of blood and sweat. In the same way, running to God in the midst of our trials builds spiritual endurance, a discipline essential to growing faith. As described in Ephesians 6, believers are equipped with our own sword that is the Word of God. When we run to our Father and use our sword, it becomes so much of a habit and second nature for us. There is no enemy or battle that is too great for God.

Most importantly, the verse emphasizes that “the LORD brought about a great victory,” reminding us that while Eleazar fought faithfully, the ultimate outcome depended on God, not human strength alone. This single part of the verse sums up the key to overcoming spiritual battles: It is to seek God first and surrender it to Him. Eleazar in Hebrew translates to “God has helped,” and God will do the same in your story.

Zadoc Fanning

Friday, April 3

Good Friday

39th Day of Lent

2 Days until Easter

2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV)—Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

About a week into the new year, our children were playing in the front yard and our oldest daughter found a brownish bud on the ground that she initially thought was an acorn. But when she picked it up, she quickly discovered it was something much different. Being curious, she began to pick and peel at the outer layer, trying to determine what it was. She peeled back several layers and ultimately revealed a beautiful pink Camellia flower that had fallen off the bush.

This reminded us of the familiar “peeling back the layers of an onion” analogy that is often used to describe how God might peel back the layers of our lives. I’ve heard this analogy used in a few different forms, such as looking past all the baggage, character flaws, and circumstances in our personal lives to examine our true inner selves, or shedding our sinful nature to reveal our new selves redeemed by Christ.

I’d like to relate our daughter’s Camellia flower in a similar fashion. Though we are all sinners and may be rough around the edges, our salvation through Jesus transforms us into something new and beautiful on the inside, just like that flower. But it takes a relationship with the Lord to reveal that beauty; with Him we truly blossom.

As my 91-year-old grandmother recently passed away, I would be remiss to not share her as an example. She was a strong-willed woman and had a certain way she thought things should be. She was quick to share her opinion and could come off as blunt to those who had never met her. However, after getting past your initial impression of Granny and peeling back her layers, you could easily see how kind, loving, and faithful she was. It was evident that her opinions were rooted in her belief in Jesus and her personal relationship with her Savior. Her inner beauty was in full bloom through Him.

Only with Jesus can we become new and truly blossom, allowing us to make a lasting impression on those we encounter. May we share the beauty of God with those around us and in all that we do.

Rodney Hill

Saturday, April 4

Holy Saturday

40th Day of Lent

1 Day until Easter

Philippians 4:4–7 (NIV)—Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How on earth could I be at peace as I sat there being interrogated by yet another interrogator? I think it was my fifth trip to the Middle East. I was traveling alone as usual and in the process of crossing another border when the security team detained me. I sat there thinking, “A large security team versus me and Jesus... that’s not a fair fight.” And I smiled because when Jesus is on your side, no force of evil can prevail against you.

During the various trips I have been on to the Middle East, I have experienced such things as traveling through Hezbollah’s turf in Beirut, attending a mosque service in Tehran with approximately 3,000 Muslims, being turned away at a refugee camp because the risk of me being kidnapped was too high, being detained and questioned for hours, smuggling Bibles into a country where they are illegal, seeing a car that was burnt in front of a church I attended, experiencing the doors of a church being knocked open during a worship service and someone yelling into the church at the Christians, being rushed off the sidewalk by Israeli SWAT Team members on horses, standing on an Iraqi street in the dark by myself praying that a taxi would drive by, and having to hide behind a car during a rock fight between Palestinians and Israeli police. From a worldly perspective, these are terrifying scenarios that would understandably put a person into a very unpeaceful state of mind. Yet, through all these experiences, God blessed me with a peace that is beyond comprehension. And that should be no surprise—because God promises us in His Word that as we live a life of prayer and thanksgiving and present our requests to Him, He graciously blesses us with an inconceivable peace that will guard our hearts and our minds in His Son, Jesus.

Are you at peace today? During this season of Lent, let us seek to bless the Lord with our prayers and thanksgiving as we call out to Him. When we do, He will graciously give us the awesome gift of incomprehensible peace no matter what our circumstances. And what a beautiful gift that is from a loving Father.

Brian Becker



Sunday, April 5

Easter Sunday

John 10:10 (NIV)—The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Driving down the road, I glance at my fuel gauge—25 miles to empty. Anxiety creeps in as I start scanning for a gas station. I don’t want to run out. Later, packing up a home I’ve lived in for 10 years, I collapse into bed, exhausted, wondering how much more there is to move and how much I have left to give.

These are moments when being “empty” feels like there’s nothing left at all.

But on Easter morning, when the stone was rolled away from the tomb, empty was anything but empty. Jesus was not there. His broken, beaten, lifeless body had risen. The miracle of an empty grave became the source of a full and abundant life for all of us. *Cont’d on back cover...*

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Through this move, I've come to understand that empty can be a gift. An empty tomb reminds me that I am not alone. It tells me I am deeply loved and valued. It assures me of eternal life with Jesus. And it empowers me to live boldly for Him now, sharing His love with everyone I encounter.

That empty gas tank? It carried me through the adventures I needed and will soon be filled for new ones. Leaving a home behind allows me to cherish sweet memories while making room for what's next.

The empty tomb reminds me that when we empty ourselves of everything which we cling to, Jesus is faithful to fill us—fully and completely.

Lennie Furlough

HE IS RISEN!

Luke 24:1–12 (NKJV)—Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’”

And they remembered His words. Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.



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