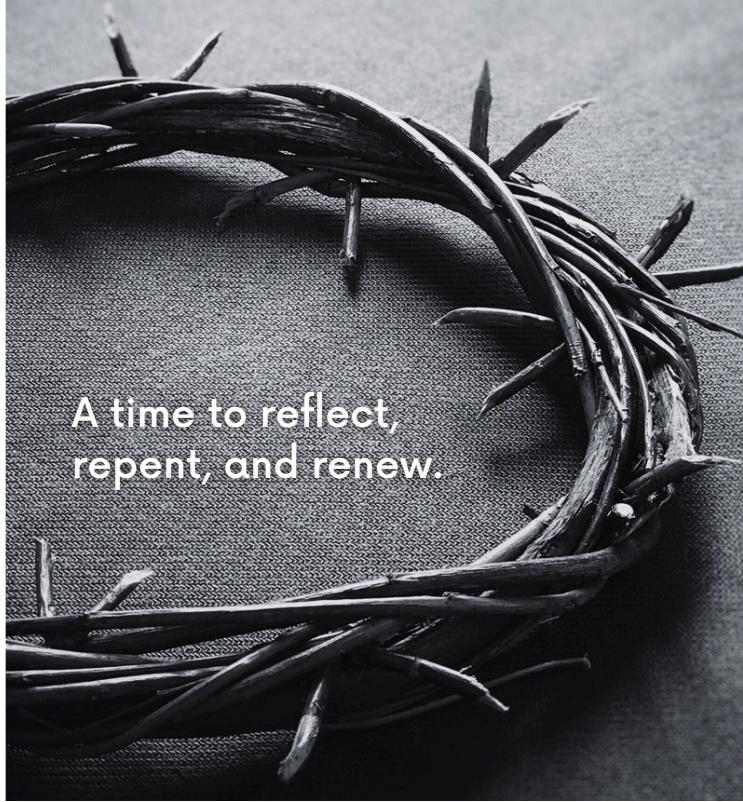


MEMORIAL PARK CHURCH

LENT

DEVOTIONAL



Feb 18, 2026 – Apr 3, 2026

Introduction

While Lent is not a biblical command or event, it is a time for the practice of many biblical disciplines. It is a season of penitence, prayer, meditation, and reflection. It provides intentional time to pursue a renewed relationship with God and to cry out to God about the brokenness around us and within us. Lent invites us to refocus on our spiritual life.

We don't have to look very far before we recognize that our world (and even ourselves) are not always the way God meant them to be. All of creation and all of humankind are sin scarred. When we read the book of Romans, we can summarize the first 2 ½ chapters in 3 words: we have failed. But in the middle of chapter 3 we read these words: "but now..." After Paul tells us that we're all a bunch of guilty sinners, he says "but now." Marvelous words— in spite of all we have done, indeed there is hope. There is grace. There is an opportunity to repent.

Repentance is about returning to God— returning to His will, His truth, His call on our lives as His children who have been redeemed. It is both a return of the heart and a commitment to obedience to His word and will. This requires that we recenter on Him in complete dependence upon Him. It means to set aside the idols and to worship the one true God. God's call to obedience and the call to repent/return, is an act of mercy and grace.

We start by admitting our sin— confessing our ongoing battle with sin. We mourn over it as we confess that there are places where our hearts still wander. Then the mourning has a wonderful result. The sad reality of sin that causes us to mourn also causes us to cry out for the rescue, forgiveness, and deliverance that can only come from our great Redeemer.

Repentance is about letting go of the things in this world that have too much of a hold on us. It is the opportunity to lay down the chains that try to recapture us as slaves and to live into the freedom that He has provided by His great sacrifice. It is a posture of healing, restoration and worship – both to glorify Him and to heal in His loving presence.

During Lent, we follow Jesus to the cross. We embrace His forgiveness. We renew the commitment of our heart.

This devotional brings to you a brief reflection for each day of Lent. We invite you to meditate on each Scripture, to prayerfully read the page, and pray the written prayer perhaps adding your own words of repentance. Each day may you be blessed and renewed in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turning Back with the Whole Heart - February 18

Eric Phillips

1 Kings 8:47–48 (ESV)

Context:

First Kings 8 records Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, offered after God fulfilled his promise to establish Israel in the land. In this prayer, Solomon anticipates Israel's future unfaithfulness and the reality of exile as covenant discipline. Yet even as he names judgment, Solomon pleads for mercy, trusting that God's covenant faithfulness extends beyond Israel's failure. The passage reminds us that God's warnings are never ends in themselves but invitations to return.

Devotional Reflection:

Whenever God warns His people of judgment in Scripture, it is always accompanied by a call to repent. God's heart is that the pronouncement of judgment would move our hearts toward repentance—to stop doing the wrong thing and to begin walking again in obedience. This call is not rooted in cruelty or impatience but in the grace and kindness of God, who desires restoration rather than destruction.

In 1 Kings 8:47–48, Solomon envisions a people who come to their senses in a foreign land. They repent "with all their heart and with all their soul," turning back toward the God they have offended. True repentance here is not merely sorrow over consequences; it is a reorientation of the whole person—heart, will, and direction—back toward God. Repentance means returning to the Lord Himself, not merely escaping discipline.

What is striking is that God initiates this possibility. The door of repentance exists because God is merciful. He allows space for reflection, confession, and return. Even exile does not nullify His covenant love. Repentance, then, is not a burden imposed on sinners, but a gracious gift offered to rebels. It is God loosening the chains of idolatry and inviting His people back into the freedom of obedience.

For us, this call reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ. He secures the forgiveness that makes repentance possible and hopeful. Because our sins are truly forgiven, we are emboldened to repent honestly and continually. We do not return to God fearing rejection, but trusting the grace already secured for us at the cross.

Reflection Question:

What patterns or attachments might God be calling you to turn from so that you may return to Him with your whole heart?

Prayer:

Gracious God, thank You for Your kindness that leads us to repentance. Turn our hearts back to You and help us walk in the freedom Christ has secured for us.

Amen.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving - February 19

Jessica Wendlandt

And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Acts 2:38 (ESV)

When we first accept Christ into our lives through repentance, we receive the gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit enables us to continue repenting throughout our lives, allowing us to re-experience these gifts on a daily basis.

Do we recognize the gifts that repentance brings us?

In Acts 2, a crowd of people is bewildered at the behavior of the disciples after they are filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time. The helper, which Jesus had promised to the disciples before his death, caused them to speak in other tongues, an impossible act for ordinary people. To explain to the crowd what they are seeing, Peter preaches to them and proclaims that Jesus, who lived, died and rose again, is the same Messiah spoken about in the Old Testament. Astonished, the crowd couldn't think how to respond except by asking a question. "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Hearing of Christ's Lordship for the first time invokes a response. The crowd did not know what they should think or seek, but they knew they couldn't remain in the same position they currently existed in. Peter simply explains all that is required for our salvation, to repent and be baptized (outwardly proclaim faith) in the name of Jesus. Salvation and the forgiveness of sins are the greatest gifts we could ever receive. And yet, amazingly, in this moment of baring our sinful souls to the Lord, He offers us another gift: the gift of His Spirit to dwell in us, guide us and sanctify us.

We have such a generous God! When we first repent of our sins and confess Jesus as Lord, we receive the gift of forgiveness. There is such freedom in knowing our Lord's mercy and sacrifice covers our every mistake. When we repent of sin and confess Jesus for the first time, we also receive salvation. This is something we are promised can never be taken away. It gives us access to our holy Father in spite of our sin. The third gift we receive at first repentance is the Spirit. That's the gift that keeps on giving, because it is the Spirit who prompts us to seek repentance before the Lord each day. When we are led by the Spirit to confess sin and repent, we get to re-experience the gift of our salvation and let it wash over us again and again. Gifts are meant to be enjoyed, so let's open them up and thank God for them this Lenten season.

Dear Lord, We thank you for the gracious gifts you offer us when we repent, the gifts of forgiveness, salvation and the Holy Spirit. We pray the Spirit would prompt us to repent each day, so we can experience your generous gifts again and again. Amen.

Knowledge Without Words - February 20

Janey Mather

When we come to the end of ourselves, it is the beginning point for God to work in us.

Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.
Job 42:6 (NIV)



It is often in the arena of artwork that we can find a distinct perspective not realized by words alone. This is perhaps true when one takes a measured study of the masterful prints, engravings, and watercolors of English poet William Blake (1757-1827). Through Blake's visual retelling of the Old Testament narrative within a series of twenty-two illustrations, also titled The Book of Job, one is able to draw near to not only the internal and external suffering of Job himself, but also to his prideful questioning and ultimate surrender to the God whom he does not, and will not ever fully understand.

Interestingly, scholars confirm that Blake related to the trials and pain of the character of Job because the poet-artist too felt misunderstood and maligned by friends and contemporaries. Though he believed that Job's sin did indeed exist in not recognizing the 'spirit of the law' over the 'letter of the law,' Blake continued to credit these Biblical stories as key sources to the root of much of his creative inspiration.

To us as well, from "out of the storm" (38:1), come hauntingly direct questions from an omnipotent God:

"Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?" (38:12)

Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew?" (38:28)

"Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will it stay by your manger at night?" (39:9)

Repentance reveals itself to each of us through such unique circumstances and experiences. Yet when all actions have been taken, all resources exhausted, all words spoken, the only posture remaining is one of relinquishment and acceptance by faith. There must be a settling in that space of "dust and ashes." The full weight of the Lord's query "Where were you when...?" must have time to echo, then re-echo until a human heart aches for restoration from the Creator. Then, and only then, does despise turn to redeemed.

REFLECTIVE QUESTION: Like Job, in what ways might I persevere in my desire to know God more intimately?

CLOSING PRAYER:

*Have Thine Own Way, Lord! Have Thine Own Way!
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still*

Desiring to Change - February 21

Jan Walsh

My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God will not despise. Psalm 51:17 (NIV)

This verse deals with brokenness, repenting, and seeking after God.

As I write this, it is nearing Valentine's Day, a day about love and the heart. I have always been interested in the heart, maybe because I was born on Valentine's Day. You definitely want a strong pumping heart physically, so you work out. You certainly want a heart wholly devoted to God, so you read scriptures and pray continuously.

To get that godly heart, there will be brokenness. Brokenness can be so strong at times that it can change you drastically. Brokenness can be God's way to change you and also bless you. Brokenness breaks our spirit. In this verse it is a desire of a broken spirit and a broken heart that will change one to then be pleasing to God. On the cross Christ bore our sins but also bore our brokenness and sorrows.

The heart is also contrite in this verse. The definition of contrite is feeling or expressing remorse— being regretful, feeling sorry, possibly even having guilt. So having a contrite heart means recognizing our sinfulness and brokenness. It means being humble and teachable.

You sacrifice, give up, and surrender to what God wants. Only a heart that has turned towards God in repentance and supplication is an acceptable offering. Repenting and believing require that we turn to the Lord with our broken spirit and our broken and contrite heart.

Have you done a spirit and heart check recently?

Lord, please reveal to us our sins. Lord let us have a strong desire to repent. Change us to bring us closer to you.

Reflection

Sunday, February 22, 2026

Repentance is the process by which we see ourselves, day by day, as we really are— sinful, needy, dependent people.

Charles Colson

Reflection questions:

1. How aware are you of the depth of your sin? When was the last time (if ever) you wept over your sin? (Not just the things you have done, but the inherent sinfulness that is present in our hearts.)
2. What is there within yourself or in the world around you that breaks your heart the most?
3. What is there within your own brokenness that frustrates or grieves you?
4. Have you humbly viewed yourself through the lens of Scripture, both to see the depths of our sinfulness and also to be assured of the greater depths of His grace?
5. How is God's glory being made visible in your weakness and brokenness?

A Bit of Wisdom - February 23

Joyce Ruzanic

Wisdom identifies sin and calls sinners to repent. Wisdom warns one not to fall into the trap of complacency rather than trust God.

If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. Proverbs 1:23 (NIV)

God is the ultimate source of wisdom and is available to all who respond or hear Him. If you had responded to my rebuke I would have poured out my heart, which means that the pouring of His heart is like a fountain of water or words that refresh and strengthen and are always a source of life of peace, and joy.

The failure of not responding to God's rebuke and His word leads to disaster or falling into others craftiness, where there is no moral direction. The sinner may not find the wisdom which could lead to being set free after repentance.

Where is our obedience? God in all his wisdom is waiting and wanting us to respond to Him with complete faithful, trusting obedience.

Can you imagine what our ordinary days would become, as we are strengthened by our Creator to live meaningful lives of love and compassion to all.? Or if you did not hear God speaking to you and what were the consequences? How much time do we need? Isn't now the moment?

Hear our prayer Oh Lord— Our Almighty God. Be merciful to me a sinner. Our hearts may know, but we need you to help us respond in repentance and be free to honor this life with which you have blessed. May we glorify you. Amen

Wisdom produces the divine presence— joy and peace in the believer.
(Proverbs 3:1-26)

Are You Ready? - February 24

Deb Gallo

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3:1-2 (ESV)

We need Jesus for our repentance to be successful and lasting.

My Community Bible Study class studied Matthew last year. Our study said this about chapter 3, "To repent means to 'change your mind' and turn away from what is wrong. In calling the Jews to repent, John was summoning them to get ready for the kingdom by renouncing their sinful ways. John's message challenged them to consider their ways and shift their thinking. John's job was to prepare the way for God's coming and exhort the people to 'make [the Lord's] paths straight' (Matthew 3:3). I don't know about you, but I am guilty of needing a "thinking shift". I regularly attend church, volunteer, and contribute and have made life changes based on what I've learned in sermons, fellowship groups, and Bible studies, but I all too often find myself doing a "repeated" sin where I do or say something that shows I did not repent.

This became clear reading the commentary in my Life Application Study Bible on Matthew 3:1-2 which says, "Repentance means doing an about-face – a 180-degree turn – from self-centeredness that leads to wrong actions such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality. A person who repents stops rebelling and begins following God's way of living prescribed in His Word. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin. Then God will receive you and help you live the way He wants.

Remember that only God can get rid of sin. He doesn't expect us to clean up our lives before we come to Him."

It's hard to admit that while I've made some changes, somehow my heart and head find an approach to doing the actions another way. As an example, I was a terrible gossip. An encounter with a beloved aunt after I gossiped about my cousin (her daughter) was overheard and reported back to her. She called me out on it. The calling out and these Romans 1:29-32 verses caused me to evaluate my behavior: They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

I took great pride in having eliminated gossip from my life, but as time went on, I found myself thinking ugly thoughts about people who I judged as foolish or weird. While I did not verbalize the thoughts, they still had the same effect on how I responded to those people - a mental gossip if you will. This brings home what the commentary says about needing God to repent. There are multiple areas of my life like this where I need God to do the right thing – to repent.

When you repent are you doing it yourself and repeating sin(s) or are you relying on God and being prepared for the kingdom of heaven?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please help me to always engage you in all attempts to repent from my sin. Help me to turn to you first before trying to do it myself and ending up reverting back to sinful behaviors which separate me from you. Amen

Transparency - February 25

Chris O'Rourke

We cannot enjoy the full blessings of God without being fully transparent and honest about our human failings and then committing to the work to turn away from our sin.

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Proverbs 28:13 (NIV)

CONCEALING: It is natural for us as humans to want to hide (conceal) our sin, to pretend it does not happen, to appear to be self-righteous and more 'perfect' or 'good' than we are. First, who can really hide from God? After all, he is omniscient! Second, do we really think others do not recognize our failings? Third, there is the fallacy of thinking we are better than we are inside our own minds and hearts.

CONFESSING AND RENOUNCING: So, although God KNOWS where we have gone wrong and where we have been disobedient, he clearly calls us to 'full disclosure' – to Him, to others, to ourselves. The first step toward true repentance is confession as it calls not just to the admission of sin, but then to the whole-hearted effort to turn away from it and to turn toward obedience to His commands. Surely that is easier said than done in our own strength but it is only by calling on God to help us on the path forward.

PROSPERING: This verse in scripture references 'prospering' but not in the monetary sense. Rather, it implies that we miss the benefits of a healthy relationship with God, others, and ourselves when we fall into that human inclination of concealing our sin. Proverbs 28:13 teaches us that despite that propensity to hide our sin, we will reap the benefits of being transparent about our sin and working to change our behavior if we overcome that inclination. God calls us to obedience to bless us by His mercy and grace. There is true found freedom when we admit our wrongdoings and make strides toward overcoming them - with God's help! Receiving God's mercy and grace is true prosperity!

Question: Think of a time when you tried to hide a sinful thought, word, or action from God – or someone else – or even yourself – and then confessed that to one or all those parties. How did you feel afterward? Did you experience relief?

Prayer: Lord, we want to experience the blessings of your mercy and grace, so help us to live into not only your call to confession, but also to the true repentance that is characterized by our effort – with your help- to change and live more akin to the way you have taught us, in true obedience to your commands. In Jesus name, Amen.

Trust in God's Care - February 26

Terry McKaveney

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. Jeremiah 24:7 (NIV)

Trust God to be with you, even when it seems like your whole life is in ruins.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the enemy, and it seemed like utter defeat. Many people were taken away to Babylon, and the land was left in ruins.

In the midst of mass deportation to Babylon, God revealed his plan to the prophet Jeremiah. This exile was not the end for God's people. God promised to watch over them and build them up. And when it was the right time, God would bring them back to the land that he had given them.

God explained to Jeremiah that his desire was for the Hebrew people to return to him in their hearts. He was not giving up on them by delivering them to the enemy. God's plan was to give them time, in a different place, to remember their God and know that, "I am the LORD". He was telling those in exile that he was not abandoning them. They were still his people and he would take care of them even in a far-away land.

When everything around you is falling apart, do you believe that God is still with you and will hear your prayers?

Prayer: God, help me to trust you in the difficult times and to remember that you love me and will care for me even when it seems like you have forgotten me.

All of Me - February 27

Steve Kimmel

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man, and God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But, when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so you can stand up under it. I Corinthians 10-13 (NIV)

This devotion will show how repentance involves a spiritual change within our hearts. Also, to illuminate that God is faithful and will open the eyes of our hearts so we can stand firm in his provisions.

Repentance is more than checking off a box. It certainly is about confession but also returning to the truth of God's word and obedience to his will. It also involves transformation— spiritual change from the inside out. This change can be stunted when we get stuck in the familiar. Our spiritual change is not merely a theory. We have to live it. The only people that don't resist change are wet babies. Paul teaches us in Romans 6 1-2 that God's grace doesn't give us a license to continue sinning,

When I reflect on my life, I can see clearly where God provided me a means to strengthen me when tempted. It could be through God's word and promises, prayer, or fellowship with other people. Reaching out to someone who struggles with the same temptation as me is freeing when they share their experience, strength and hope. Many times it is the right person at the right time. I have come not to believe in coincidences. They are God's purposes and design.

We all suffer from the human condition. I would confess my sins to the Throne Of Grace, then hang on to guilt and past burdens. These are Satan's chains to prevent us from moving forward. A good man reminded me that he had taken garbage out his whole life and nobody brought it back.

Spiritual change comes from within our hearts, God is a God of hearts and that is where he meets us, We can't hope for a better past. Isaiah 43:18-19 tells us, "Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past, I am doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it?" The healing and restoration that this provides are glimpses of heaven and sustains us until Jesus returns.

Prayer: Father, I am willing that you have all of me— good and bad. I pray that you now remove any defect of character which stand in the way of you and my fellows. Grant me strength as I leave here to do your bidding. Amen. (This prayer is from Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson from the basic book of recovery.)

Restored...Again! - February 28

John O'Master

**Let us examine our ways and test them and let us return to the LORD.
Lamentations 3:40 (NIV)**

King David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10-12). I have echoed that prayer many times in my life as repentance was so often so necessary.

Immature, naïve, insecure: even into my adult years all these things and more led me down paths that God never intended me to go. But, like the single sheep, I wandered off, and only when God left the 90 and 9 and came and found me, bringing me back, could I feel secure in the love He so graciously poured out on me.

There were events in my life that could have resulted in dire consequences. But God was always there, loving, supporting, leading and healing. Even when I failed to ask!! Even when I was too embarrassed to acknowledge my sin, the Holy Spirit led me back into a right relationship with Him.

I remember now those times as terrifying experiences, not knowing what the future held. But by prayer and yielding to the succor that the Holy Spirit provided, I was restored to peace, comfort and guidance. And the lines of communication, so badly broken by me, were once again open and I was reminded who held the future.

Socrates said, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me. And lead me in the everlasting way. Psalms 139:23-24 (KJV)

Heavenly Father, grant me the courage to examine myself, and to openly and honestly admit what I find there. Guide me into continual examination of my actions, motives and integrity. May you lead me in paths of righteousness, for your name's sake and may I walk those paths with enthusiasm, reveling in your love and forgiveness.

Reflection

Sunday, March 1, 2026

No repentance is true repentance
which does not recognize Jesus as Lord
over every area of life.

John C. Chapman

Reflection questions:

1. Where is it difficult to feel God's presence in your circumstances?
2. Are there circumstances in your life that you think you can "fix" yourself? How can you do better at yielding those circumstances to the Lordship of Christ?
3. Do you ever harbor sinful attitudes or behaviors for a season because you are not yet willing to give them up?
4. Are there areas of your life that seem detached from God's control? Or areas that you feel are too small to "bother" God with?
5. Are there any areas of your life in which you are resistant to God's control? Confess these areas to God and ask Him to help you break down these strongholds.

Putting on Your Sackcloth - March 2

Amy Mathieu

Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
Revelation 2:5 (NIV)

In Revelation 2:5 God is speaking to the Church of Ephesus, reminding his people that they have sinned and must repent. He's asked them to remember the way they first felt when they realized how much God, through sending his son Jesus, loves them. Studying scripture, we remember that the Lord has also redeemed us, his followers, and we are called to glorify Him through various acts, including repentance, here on earth.

Throughout the Bible, we see many characters "putting on their sackcloth" during times of spiritual penitence. Sackcloth was a coarse and uncomfortable fabric made from goat or camel hair and, among other reasons, worn as a symbol of repentance.

Now in 2026, with the same wicked hearts as our ancestors, we can follow the example for repentance. How many times do we, creatures of habit, repeatedly fall right back into the same sins and need to "put on our sackcloth" and repent? We must truly go to God with our hearts, asking for forgiveness. Once we repent of our sins, we move closer to the Lord, casting other idols aside — food, football, media, jealousy — worshiping what we are called to instead worship — The ONE TRUE GOD. Through the words spoken to the Ephesians, God reminds us today that our dependence is on Him and the calling he has for us. We are assured of His faithfulness, where we are secured with the knowledge that we are saved, through grace alone.

What sins, small or large, do you continue to struggle with that need to be taken to God in meaningful prayer and repentance? Write them out and pray over your heart this Lenten season.

Prayer: Lord, it's through you that all good comes. You call me, your child, to repent and turn my gaze back toward you. Let me find time, today, to dig deep into myself, repent and once again ask for your mercy upon me. Forgive me and lead me forward to glorify only you, the one true God. Amen

Unhurried and Patient - March 3

Dee Cuffman

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

The coming of the Lord. The day believers have been looking for since the day Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection. The first century church believed it would be in their lifetime. (And here we are 20 centuries later hoping it will be in our lifetime.)

As Peter was writing his second letter, he knew his time left on earth was short, and he wanted to write what was on his heart to those who "have received a faith as precious as ours." (1:1) These beloved believers were under severe persecution and were longing for the return of Jesus.

And so, one of the things that was on Peter's heart was "the day of the Lord." Scoffers ridiculed the believers about it – where is this "coming" He has promised? Everything is the same as it's always been. (vs.4) As the waiting went on, even the believers wondered about His delay.

So, Peter helps them understand. In vs.8, he first reminds them (and us) that God is not bound by time as we are. God is eternal. With God a day is as a thousand years! (Psalm 90:4) He doesn't measure time as humans do. Since that is so, there's no such thing as delay in accomplishing His plan.

And not only were they not considering the eternal nature of God, but neither did they fully understand the depth of His mercy. His delay in returning is not because He is unable or unwilling to act, but because of His great mercy toward sinners. He wants everyone to have a chance... a chance to repent and turn to Him. He wants to spend eternity with all of us. The "delay" in their eyes is actually God's patience.

And He is patient. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul rejoices that God was patient with Him. And James tells us (5:7) that we should be patient in waiting for the Lord's coming like a farmer is patient for his valuable crops to come in. Every person God created is His "valuable crop." So, not only is God not "slow" in keeping His promises, but He acts in loving patience. God unhurriedly waits, longing for more to say "yes" to His grace.

Peter goes on in his letter to say: then what kind of people ought we to be? Holy and godly... so that we may speed the coming of that day (vs.12). When we see our waiting from God's perspective, we too can be patient for the day of the Lord. We have much to do as He invites us to participate in His work by inviting others to repent and join us in the glorious hope of His return.

Reflection: Let us be grateful for His loving "delay" – don't we all have loved ones who still need to respond to His grace?

Our gracious Father, help us to love like you love and to be patient as You are patient in working in the hearts of others. We long to see Jesus, but until that day, we pray that all may come to repentance.

Fellowship or Darkness? - March 4

Pete Pugliese

If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 1 John 1:6

Reading this verse truly speaks to the heart of our relationship with Jesus. Consider these two Apostles who followed Jesus. Two men who were at the Last Supper. Two men, who committed to being confidants of Jesus. Yet, while celebrating the Passover with him, these same two men saw their lives go in different directions. We find Judas being commanded by Jesus; to go and betray the one he called Rabbi. (John 13:26-28). We find Peter, after Jesus is taken away to be convicted at a mock trial, denying the one he called his Lord. (Luke 22:54-62). Of these two men, one would kill himself (Matthew 27:5), and the other would be restored to a right relationship with his Lord. (John 21:15-25). Let's read 1 John 1:6 again...

It we claim to have fellowship with Him... Think about what this means. This isn't about feeling good about us, as much as this may be a pursuit. It's about where we are in relationship to Christ. It's our relationship with him that frees us to experience life in and through him. Is Jesus Christ the central focus of my life? We should ask this question regularly, as we go through our day. Is my life characterized by love, joy, peace, and service to others?

Yet we walk in darkness... This path is opposed to being in fellowship with the Lord. It's choosing to live a lifestyle not in line with the scriptures. Think about what 'Sola Scriptura' represents... It is the Christian doctrine that states that the Bible is the sole source of authority for Christian faith and practice. If we are walking in darkness, we are not living as God's word would have us live. Do we view God's word, the Bible as authority over our lives? Do we believe the Holy Spirit lives in us to illuminate God's word in order to guide and direct us in the way we should go? Are our lives lived to bring glory to God? Are we truthful with others and ourselves?

We lie and do not live by the truth... Contrast fellowship with the Lord, with living in darkness. Many of us would say that we are good people. Just remember, it's not about whether we are good or bad. It's about our lives being one with Christ. Look back to Judas and Peter. Who was restored to a right relationship with his Lord? Do we approach life as Peter did? We should. The cross of Jesus Christ provides us this opportunity. When we confess our sin, and we repent of our sin, we are restored. Never forget that Christ's death was for the forgiveness of sin, past present, and future. When we repent, stand near to the cross, for this is where our sin was taken on by our Lord. It's here where He redeemed us of our sin, not just the sins we commit, but the sin into which we were born. He, by his obedience to the Father, has provided us life. The life he provides us is more than this world has to offer. May we truly have fellowship with Him as we continue our journey with him today and throughout eternity.

Lord, thank you for the life you have provided us. We are blessed to be in communion with you. As we reflect upon this difficult passage of scripture, Lord our prayer is for you to speak to our hearts, redirecting and guiding us in ways that draw us near to you rather than away from you. When we go to the cross, our prayer is for your grace to be known, not only in our minds, but in our hearts. We are yours. We trust in the forgiveness you provide; we rest in the assurance that you have redeemed us, and we give thanks for the restoration you have provided us that gives us the ability to live transformed lives in Jesus Christ, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit... Amen.

Jesus Loves YOU - March 5

Terry McKaveney

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. Revelation 3:19-20 (NIV)

Jesus loves you and wants to restore you. His love goes beyond your guilt and shame.

The image of Jesus standing at the door patiently waiting for the person on the other side to open it stirs my soul. But I wonder how I would react if I was the person inside the house. Would I think that the house was too messy to have company? Would I see that my clothes were stained and believe they are not good enough to wear in the presence of the Lord? Even worse would I realize that Jesus knows me better than I know myself. Would I have the courage to face him when he knows all that I have done?

Being in the presence of Jesus serves to shine a light on how we live our lives. We know that none of us are blameless – we are all sinners. Jesus knows us completely and yet he still calls us into a relationship with him. He knows our sin and wants us to repent and come closer to him.

What might keep you from opening the door when Jesus comes to be with you? Would you feel guilt, shame or regret about things that you have done, or things that you should have done, but didn't?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for loving me in spite of my sin and shame. Give me the courage and strength to face the things that I need to change. I want to live into the fullness of life that you offer me.

Trust, and Never Doubt - March 6

Carol Anewalt

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."
Isaiah 30:15 (NIV)

Certainly, we need to repent and get in a right relationship with God! Because of my recent experience, I am choosing to focus on "in quietness and trust is your strength". On December 31, I got really sick with what I thought was a stomach bug. I had nausea, diarrhea, and severe pain in my stomach. The next morning, I felt a little better and was able to drink some liquids. I thought it had passed... until the severe pain returned that evening and through the night.

By morning, my husband, Tom, said we needed to get this checked out. At the ER, I was examined and had a CAT scan. The PA told me my liver and pancreas were 'angry' and that I would need to have my gallbladder out. I was agreeable so it would eliminate that pain! They needed to transport me to West Penn, but there was no available bed! I believed God would open a bed in his time. I had a night nurse who I had conversations about our faith as she drew blood and did vitals.

Finally, on Saturday night a bed became available, and I was off to West Penn. The ambulance crew was great. Shannon was my nurse. The Lord created an immediate bond that allowed me to listen as she opened up to share about her life situation and her handicapped child. After delivering me to my room, she placed her hand on my shoulder and thanked me for allowing her to share. I was so touched, I teared up! I praised God for allowing me to be there for her.

Throughout my 5 days in the hospital, I trusted God completely! I could feel the prayers from my family, my church family and friends. My nephew prayed for me in the quiet of the morning and God spoke simply and clearly that he already had this covered! I was amazed how calm and assured I felt! I felt God near and was reassured of his love and care and that He had a path to get me better.

On Monday, I had a procedure to clean all the ducts of my gallbladder. The next day, Dr. Hayes removed my infected gallbladder after reassuring me that everything would go well. I told him that this was my first surgery and that I had an army praying for him and me!

My PCP visit after I was home shocked me to the core. My doctor said, "someone was watching over me!" If I hadn't gone to the ER when I did, we might not be here having this conversation! My gallbladder was gangrenous! I felt a jolt go through me as if God was confirming the miracle he had done to save my life! TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

An anthem we have sung in choir says, "Trust and never doubt, Jesus will surely bring you out— He never failed me, yet!

Reflection: When God reveals his mercy through miracles, how much more can we count on his mercy when we return to him in repentance?

Father God, thank you for your mercy and amazing healing power! Amen!

Don't Look Back - March 7

Kevin Steele

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God. Hebrews 6:1(NASB)

As I was growing up, my family had about a half-acre of land in which we used to grow vegetables. Every spring, we set up the areas to plant tomatoes, beans, potatoes, you name it. One of the most difficult areas to set up was for the corn. They were long rows, 20-30 yards long, and we used an 1800s-era push plow to mark the rows to plant the corn.

Dad taught us to set up a marker at the field's end and push the plow towards that marker, always looking forward. To look at the row as the plow went through the dirt, or worse yet, look back at what you'd already plowed, meant the row would end up looking like it had been plowed, in my dad's words, "by a drunken sailor." And we'd have to do it all over again.



Our spiritual life is very similar. We shouldn't look back, once we've been justified by faith. We can't worry about how bad a sinner we once were, and we need to do our level best not to fall into the same old habits, seeing the same "people, places and things" where we sinned before. Such glances backward cause us to think we're not good enough, to worry about not making enough progress, or to miss the goal entirely of growing more sanctified in Him. As 2 Cor 5:17 assures us, we are "a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Or as Paul exemplifies in Phil 3:14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ." Let us, during this Lent, forget about those things behind us which have already been forgiven, and focus on the direction we are headed, toward Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your forgiveness and the liberty that provides us to act more like you. Guard our hearts from thinking back to who we once were and help us to press forward to a life and a purpose that glorifies You. Amen.

Reflection

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Repentance is an inner change of heart and mind
and an outward change of life.

John Blanchard

Reflection questions:

1. Are there areas of your life for which you feel shame or guilt or a wish for a do-over? Take a few moments to bring them to God – to confess your need of a change of heart and to yield them to His grace for His cleansing. Thank Him for His grace and mercy that frees us from these things.
2. When you are aware of the conviction of the Spirit over areas that need to change, do you view it as a blessing to be pursued or is it a burden you try to avoid?
3. How do you most often respond when you are confronted with your sin— excuse, deny, minimize, or confess? Do you respond differently at different times? What factors contribute to those differences?
4. Are there any “messes” in your life that you have grown so accustomed to that you no longer notice them?
5. In the coming days, how might you engage in personal confession in a way that brings about spiritual renewal and outward transformation?

Healing - March 9

Dee Cuffman

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)

Do we need healing in our land? Do we need forgiveness in our own hearts? I think we can agree that we need both. And we can have both. By returning to God's directive to Solomon. Healing begins when we seek God humbly, taking responsibility for our sins, acknowledging that we have strayed, confessing our ungodly ways, and turning away them.

The word "sin" has been defined in many ways so that some people have taken a "trite" view of it. So, what is sin? Tim Keller said: "Sin is not just doing bad things but also making good things into ultimate things. It is making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship with God."

Another theologian similarly said, "Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship to God. It is seeking an identity apart from God." We were made to center our entire life on God and to find our sense of worth and purpose in Him. Anything less than that is sin.

Failure to do that is how Israel got to where they were. They turned to other things and other gods from the nations surrounding them more than to their One True God. They wavered in their faith. They wanted to follow their own way until it got them into trouble. Then they ran back to God to help them. That is the nature of their sin... and ours.

But the Gospel frees us from fickle faith. God loves us in Christ without condition. We have been accepted and adopted into His family with no strings attached. We don't need anything more than what we've been given in Christ. Nothing can separate us from His love.

And so, when we do still sin, we can take them to Christ and confess them with the full assurance that He will forgive and will not condemn. We don't try to justify the wrong things we have done; we own the reality that we sin because we give in to our own desires. We know our sins grieve Him and we will not be right with Him until we deal with it. But repentance is the precursor to good news. Because He will heal and restore.

Reflection: Do we truly "own" our sin and bring it to God in complete honesty?

Lord, You always welcome sinners who come to you for mercy. When we seek You, forgive us of the wrongs we cannot undo. Grant us grace to renounce our sinful ways and to cling to You. Heal us and restore us so that we may walk in the joy of new life in You. Amen.

One Found Soul - March 10

Barb Kowalski

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:7 (NIV)

The text, by Jesus, just prior to this verse was the parable of the lost sheep. I'll recap in a few sentences. The shepherd has 100 sheep, one becomes lost. The shepherd leaves the 99 to go in search of that one lost sheep. Finding it, he carries it home to safety.

Why do you think God compares us to sheep? Let me share what I have learned. Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. Walk the same paths. Graze the same areas. Pollute the same spots. Sleep in the same location. Make the same mistakes – repeatedly. Oh yeah – and are stubborn. Sound familiar?

As a shepherd, David knew better than anyone their behaviors. God, as a shepherd of people, knows us better than anyone. He knows our behaviors, our good, our bad, our quirks and our talents.

We are as stubborn as sheep! We insist that we know what is best for us even though it may be clear that if we proceed the results will be disastrous. We blindly, habitually, stupidly repeat the same mistakes or follow one another along the same little trails until they become ruts.

We act like we don't want paths of righteousness, because it 'goes against our grain'. We have always been taught to be strong and take care of ourselves – 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps'. Today we call it resilience. Don't get me wrong, there are times when we need to be strong and resilient.

But our stubbornness, self-willed, proud, self-sufficient behaviors (like the sheep) persisting in following the same old rutted paths, turn our lives into broken homes, broken hearts, money problems, relationship problems – you get the picture.

If we confess that we can't do it alone our society considers us weak.

What does God teach us through scripture? All through the Bible there are messages about being led by the Lord. Jesus makes it clear that following him won't be easy.

Obedience and confession create in us an attitude of righteousness. The quality of being right in the eyes of God. So, when we confess our sins to God, and repent of our disobedience, that's exactly what God wants of us. He seeks the one who is lost. He doesn't ask much – just to follow him, repent of our sins, love people and know His Son, Jesus.

Reflection question: What is holding you back from righteousness? Have you found yourself in a rutted path? Does true confession scare you?

Prayer: Holy and merciful God, I am a sinner. Broken, weary, and lost. Please accept my confession and cleanse me of my sins. I want to follow Your ways, but I need Your help. Hear my prayers and help me to walk along Your path, instead of my rutted path, so that I will have eternal life with You. Amen.

Take Words With You - March 11

Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer as sacrifice the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount warhorses. We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion. "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

Hosea 14:1-4 (NIV)

The book of Hosea is a love story describing the love Hosea has for his unfaithful wife. Transcending this story is the love God has for his unfaithful people. God has been faithful to His covenant and steadfast in His love for them, but like Hosea's wife, they have been unfaithful and unloving toward Him.

Then chapter 14 presents a wonderful picture of Israel's return to the Lord and their glorious future. It speaks of the final triumph of the Lord's great love.

But first, they have to deal with their sin. Verse 1 reminds them that they have sinned — their sin has caused them to be separated from God. But then the words of verse 2 invite them to return to the Lord. And it asks them to bring something with them when they return— words. Words of request. Asking Him to forgive them, believing that He will receive them graciously. And they do not approach Him with a sacrifice of bulls but rather offer the sacrifice of the fruit of their lips—praise to Him. And when the Hebrews spoke a word, they also invoked the action described by the word. So, their words of repentance included the action of a changed life. So more than simply religious ritual, they were to express renewed fellowship by their words or repentance and also by the surrender of their lives to Him.

Their repentance also acknowledges that neither other nations nor military might nor the "gods" they have created themselves are able to save them. When they renounce all that they have put ahead of God, His compassion will flow over them. In response to their penitent words, the Lord describes the wondrous blessing He will bestow on them — He will heal them of their waywardness and love them unconditionally.

We too can pray Hosea's prayer of repentance and know our sins are forgiven. Like Israel, we acknowledge the destructiveness of our sin and the futility of life without God and admit that nothing else can save us— not our own ability and not any authority in the world around us. Our only hope is in God's mercy. And He invites us to come to Him. He loves us enough to give us every chance to repent and to be assured that judgement is over and our waywardness is healed.

Reflection: Are we ready to identify and give up any "gods" that have a place in our lives ahead of God?

Lord, remind us daily that our only response to sin is repentance and returning to You. We come to you to ask for forgiveness and then we praise You with the fruit of our lips. Amen.

Repent and Live - March 12

Excerpt from Show Me the Way by Henri Nouwen

I shall judge each of you by what that person does— declares the Lord Yahweh. Repent, renounce all your crimes, avoid all occasions for guilt. Shake off all the sins you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why die, House of Israel? I take no pleasure in the death of anyone— declares the Lord Yahweh— so repent and live! Ezekiel 18:30-32

The Lenten season is a time to be with You, Lord, in a special way, a time to pray, to fast, and thus to follow You on Your way to Jerusalem, to Golgotha, and to the final victory over death.

I am still so divided. I truly want to follow You, but I also want to follow my own desires and lend an ear to the voices that speak about prestige, success, human respect, pleasure, power, and influence. Help me to become deaf to these voices and more attentive to Your voice, which calls me to choose the narrow road to life.

Lent is a very hard time for me. The choice for Your way has to be made every moment of my life. I have to choose thought that are Your thoughts, words that are Your words, and actions that are Your actions. There are no times or places without choices. And I know how deeply I resist choosing You.

Our temptation is to be so overwhelmed by our sins and failing and our lack of generosity that we get stuck in a paralyzing guilt. It is the guilt that says, "I am too sinful to deserve God's mercy." It is the guilt that leads to introspection instead of directing our eyes to God. It is the guilt that has become an idol. Lent is the time to break down this idol and to direct our attention to our loving Lord.

God's mercy is greater than our sins. The question is: are we like Judas, who was so overcome by his sin that he could not believe in God's mercy any longer and hanged himself, or are we like Peter who returned to His Lord with repentance and cried bitterly for his sins? The season of Lent, during which winter and spring struggle with each other for dominance, illustrates in a special way to cry out for God's mercy.

Prayer: Faithful God, trusting in You through these 40 days of reflection, give us strength to renounce evil and be decisive in doing good. Please, Lord, be with me at every moment and in every place. Give me the strength and courage to live this season faithfully, so that, when Easter comes, I will be able to taste with joy the new life that you have prepared for me. We ask this through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thanks Be To God - March 13

It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. Romans 7:17-19 (NIV)

Often in our Christian experience, we walk in the daily tension between knowing what is right and actually doing it. We believe God's Word and agree that it is true and right, and we long to obey it, and yet sin still lurks in our human nature and we are often unable to do the things that align with God's truth. As Paul says, I do the things that I don't want to do!

I think we've all been there. We're all painfully aware of our sinful nature. And as we see from our verses in Romans, this struggle is not new. It was as real for the Apostle Paul as it is for us. Three times in this chapter he states that sin dwells in us. Within ourselves, our deeds are tainted by our old nature.

And from Paul, we learn what to do about it— we remember. Whenever he felt overwhelmed in this spiritual battle, he returned to the "roots" of his faith— delighting in God's Word and remembering that he is free in Jesus. That the Holy Spirit dwells within and fights this battle. He is free to seek and accept forgiveness for failures.

There are times when we cry out with Paul— what a wretched person I am! (vs.24) This is more than the cry of a desperate person; it gives voice to any Christian struggling against sin. And God hears that cry of sorrow for sin.

And so, we can also declare with Paul, who will rescue me from this body of sin and death? Thanks be to God— through Jesus Christ our Lord! (vs.25)

Sinful... yes, but rescued.

Reflection: Do you ever feel as if you are losing the battle against sin? Yield it to the power of the Holy Spirit within you.

Prayer: *Lord, so often we falter in our battle against sin. We cannot fight it on our own. Help us to stop trying to live holy lives in our own power; help us to set aside "self" and remember that we live in your mighty power. Thanks be to God! Amen.*

The Gift of Repentance - March 14

Dee Cuffman

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents from sending calamity. Joel 2:12-13 (ESV)

Many things enter our minds when we hear the word "repentance" ... brokenness, remorse, even judgment. But do we ever look upon it as a gift from God?

The OT book of Joel opens with a definite sense of judgment, and it appeared in the form of locusts. There are cutting locusts and swarming locusts and hopping locusts and destroying locusts. Joel says, "we've never seen anything like it." The land was ruined and the crops were totally devastated. There was no wheat or barley or wine... only destruction and scarcity. The Lord was angry. The dreadful day of the Lord is imminent... who can endure it? (2:11)

But then in the next sentence, Joel describes an entirely different way for God's people to experience this day. God calls His people to repent— to cry out to the Lord and turn back to Him. After all the calamity, suddenly, there is a message of hope. And it starts with repentance. To repent is to reverse direction; to not only turn away from sin, but to turn toward the Lord. It is the active longing of a person to make radical changes within their heart and seek a new direction for their life.

He says, "rend your hearts and not your garments." Tearing (rending) one's garments was an outward sign of mourning. But God wants more than an outward sign – rend your hearts. Rend means to tear something out of place violently. One version says, "rip the wickedness out of your heart!" That is radical change! This kind of repentance is from the depth of your soul. It comes from a place of deep brokenness and contrition. We are to weep and mourn over our sin. We are to hate our sins enough to abandon them.

And then God reverses direction also, so to speak. He relents from sending calamity. Why? Because He is extravagantly gracious and compassionate, and He is always merciful. He does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Repentance is an invitation of grace— a personal invitation for each of us. Repentance is always God's prescription for sin. It may be bitter medicine in the moment, but it brings healing and restoration and abundant blessing to the soul (vs. 14).

Lord, work in me daily so that I grab hold of Your gracious gift of repentance and restoration; that I would have the humility and honesty to "rend my heart" and accept your great gift of mercy. Amen.

Reflection

Sunday, March 15, 2026

Repentance is no fun at all. It is something
harder than merely eating humble pie.
It means unlearning the self-conceit and self-will
that we have been training ourselves into for
thousands of years.

C.S. Lewis

Reflection questions:

1. Do you believe that your greatest problem is sin? What attitudes or actions in your life suggest that perhaps you don't truly believe that?
2. Do you ever try to justify sin in your life? Do you ever look for the "easy way out" spiritually speaking? In what ways? Do you ever attempt shortcuts in your walk with the Lord or try to manage the problem of sin by "fixing" it yourself?
3. What sin are you struggling to overcome? Have you genuinely repented and committed to turning from it?
4. Are you harboring certain sins and living for yourself? Or are you turning from sin and living for God?
5. What would it look like for you to move toward true repentance in these areas? Let the Holy Spirit empower you to change.

With Open Arms - March 16

Lynn Sosovicka

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me like one of your hired servants. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was 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. Luke 15:18-20 (NIV)

When my husband and I got married, we chose to stay in western Pennsylvania to be close to family. My sister and her husband moved to Northern Virginia for the exciting job market.

For years my mother was independent but as she aged, she relied on me more. She wasn't demanding but when she needed me, I was there. My sister would come to visit every couple of months and they would have coffee together and just hang out.

My mom broke her ankle and was non-weight bearing and her independence was stripped away temporarily. She didn't handle it well and did become more demanding and less grateful. My sister would come in to visit and they would have coffee and hang out. My mom was so happy to see her.

Was I resentful...YES!

Fast forward...my mom got better and was independent again. I was still a little prickly and brought it up to Mom. She was surprised by my interpretation. She said she could always count on me; I was an extension of her. My sister was like a visitor. The child that comes home the least is the one you miss the most. Boy, was I humbled.

A parent is waiting with open arms just as our Lord is always waiting with his open, welcoming, loving arms. Jesus places immense value on each of the sheep in His flock. He loves all and places value on each individual.

Heavenly Father, help us to see that you created each of us uniquely and in your likeness. Help us to seek a stronger relationship with you. We don't have to earn your love, it is given freely and unconditionally, and you will always be welcoming us with open arms. Thank you for showing your love for us in the sacrifice of your son, Jesus. Amen

A Right View of Repentance - March 17

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37-38 (NIV)

The word "repentance" has a negative connotation in our culture. It says that someone has done something "evil" and should feel bad about it. While there is an element of truth in that, the call to repentance is more than that. Furthermore, the call to repentance is good news. God has made us for Himself and our highest good is to repent and turn to Him. Repentance is our response to the truth that Jesus atoned for our sins. It is a call to restoration and an invitation to fellowship. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

In our Scripture today, Peter is preaching the truth about Jesus to thousands of listeners. Once they heard it, Peter said they were "cut to the heart" over what they had done. The people Peter was preaching to were "religious" people. Many of them knew the law and the prophets. But there was no real awareness of sin until they heard the gospel proclaimed. And it called for a response. So, they asked the pointed question: What shall we do? That's exactly what Peter wanted them to ask! And his response is direct: Repent —to turn from their alienation from God and be transformed. And many did. We read later in the chapter that about 3000 were added to their number that day (vs.41).

Did you ever wonder why Peter said, "repent" rather than "believe"? Repentance and belief are dependent upon one another. In repentance, we not only turn away from sin, we also, in belief, turn to God. We place our faith in Christ and that faith points us in a new direction (repentance) in our way of life. Note that Peter tells also them to be baptized – it is an outward expression of an inward work.

Peter then says, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. What a gift! This great promise is for as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself! So, as believers, our view of repentance is that of great blessing. It turns us away from that which destroys and redirects us to that which gives life in Christ.

Prayer: Our most gracious God, how we thank you for the blessing of repentance. May we live everyday of our lives as one who is grateful for Your gifts to us of repentance, faith, and the promised Holy Spirit in our lives. Amen.

Produce Proof - March 18

Gayle Forsythe

(Paul speaking): that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. Acts 26:20 (ESV)

(John the Baptist speaking): Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matthew 3:8 & Luke 3:8)

We have all heard the phrase, "talk the talk and walk the walk." This suggests actions should match what is said, doing things consistent with what one claims.

Before we can walk the authentic way, we must repent and turn to God. There must be a radical turning from sin and remorse for having offended God. When we acknowledge our sinful rebellion, He will forgive us our sins (redemption) and restore us to fellowship with Him.

Genuine repentance results in a change of direction and behavior. Repentance itself is not a work, but a changed life is the fruit that repentance will invariably bear. It shows up in our heart, hands, and feet, not just our lips. There is visible proof of an inward repentance by external deeds. God looks beyond our words (talk) to see if our conduct (walk) backs up what we say.

Good works are not a precondition in order to be saved; but rather a postcondition, the result of having already been saved. We are to perform deeds, bear fruit, and do good works in keeping with our repentance. The Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, enables us to walk in step with God, producing spiritual fruit. As we yield to God's nurturing hand, our actions and attitudes become more loving, more joyful, more kind, more gentle, and so forth. A harvest of good works grows our faith and expands His kingdom.

We cannot be passive bystanders in order for the Holy Spirit to bring forth Christlike character. To produce proof of our repentant walk according to the Spirit we need to:

1. Daily and deeply meditate on God's Word.
2. Commit to regular prayer.
3. Gather for worship with fellow believers.

Our good deeds provide a Bonus of Blessing. God is pleased and praised right now, and we will receive a reward in the world to come at the end of time.

In closing, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works... and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:24-25). (For further study, see tabletalkmagazine.com, January 2026, "Good Works")

Reflection: How productive are your actions (deeds) for God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for your forgiveness. I am returning to You. Show me opportunities for good deeds that I must do. Holy Spirit, equip and guide me. In the strong name of Your beloved Son, my Savior, Jesus. Amen.

The Believer's Call to Repentance - March 19

I see that my letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were made sorrowful, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful with godly sorrow, so that you suffered no loss through us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10

Have you ever felt caught in a "guilt cycle"? You confess sin, tell God you're sorry and promise to turn away from the sin, only to find yourself sinning again. You've come before Him time after time but still find yourself repeating the same sins. It can be discouraging.

Paul speaks of godly sorrow. In his first letter, he calls out the Corinthian believers for knowing the truth but not living by it. And he is glad that the letter brought them sorrow... enough that it led them to genuine repentance. Not only a verbal admission but also a sense of true grief over having wronged God. An honest sense of our sinfulness that drives us to seek God's mercy.

1 John 1:9 tells us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive. So, what about our repeat offenses?

The word "confess" literally means "to say the same thing." In other words, to confess is to say the same thing about our sin that God's says; to agree with Him about what is sinful. We allow the light of God's holiness to disclose the depth of our sins. We lay bare our true selves before Him, and we call our sin by name. We take responsibility for our sin.

When we are of one mind with God about our sin, then He is faithful to forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness. And we allow God to continually re-shape our hearts to be more and more in the image of His Son.

We will still be tempted and we will still fail. God knows that we won't live perfectly, but He knows our hearts and will strengthen us against the sins we struggle with. He wants to break the chains of our sin. We keep coming to Him in repentance and surrender until by the power of the Holy Spirit, He gives us the victory.

Prayer: Lord, we so often falter and fail in our walk with You. Help us to see our sin the way you see it and give us godly sorrow that leads to repentance. And in our repentance, let us cling to Your promise to forgive and to cleanse. Thank you for your patience with us. Amen.

Repentance That Leads To Life - March 20

Jessica Molnar

Do you have any barriers that prevent you from praying to the Lord with a heart full of repentance for your sins?

The first part of the book of Acts focuses on Peter's ministry to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. A key verse to understanding the entire book is Acts 1:8: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

This is Jesus commissioning the apostles to spread the gospel right before His ascension to heaven. And the apostles begin to do just that. As you read about Peter's bold ministry, a theme in Acts chapter 11 is the removal of barriers to the good news of the gospel. Luke emphasizes this theme by describing two of Peter's shocking experiences as he tells them to the apostles and early church. First, Peter recounts his vision where previously "unclean" food descended from heaven on a sheet and was now permissible to eat. Second, Peter describes the Holy Spirit telling him it was permissible for him to meet with and share the gospel with Cornelius, a Gentile, in the man's home - which previously would've "defiled" Peter.

Interestingly, Acts chapter 10 also describes these same two events in detail. These narratives are repeated, in adjacent chapters, to emphasize their absolute importance. No more "unclean" food. No more "defiling" people. No more barriers preventing the Gentiles from repenting and coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

How did the believers react to the news that Gentiles could now be included in the faith? Acts 11:18 says: When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

What wonderful news! Do you forget the joy of the good news in the busy-ness of the week? Do you feel unworthy of the good news due to all your past mistakes? Do not put up your own barriers to the truth of your reconciliation to God through Christ.

Here's a reminder that can help. Our kids have been blessed with many outstanding teachers in their young lives. One teacher stands out in that she had the class repeat these truths aloud every morning:

I am not what I do. I am not what I say. I am not what others say about me. I am a child of God. It's who I am. No one can take it from me. My Father sees me and sings over me. The Holy Spirit speaks to me and gives me power. Jesus's goodness protects me. I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please let us remember this wonderful news, repent, and turn to you for the forgiveness that gives life through Jesus. Amen.

How Many Times - March 21

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive them. Luke 17:3-4 (NIV)

So far, we have read much about our ongoing need to repent and ask for forgiveness from God. And we most certainly need to keep doing that. But sin has a horizontal dimension as well as a vertical one. So, let's also consider what God expects of us toward one another.

We are a family of believers. And like all families, at some point we will inevitably offend or sin against one another.

The Jewish law stipulated that those who were wounded forgive 3 times. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive, he magnanimously offered 7 times. But Jesus had a better idea. Jesus told him, 70 times 7. (Mt. 18:22) And in our verse today, He tells us to forgive the same person up to 7 times in one day!

Now, if someone actually sinned against us 7 times in one day, in our humanness, how would we be feeling toward them by the time we listened to their 7th apology? Loving and forgiving? But Jesus says, keep forgiving. Just as God keeps on forgiving us... at least 7 times a day!

Jesus was not suggesting that we keep a tally. Keeping tabs on your grace is not extending grace. The person who is counting has likely not really forgiven the first time. We are all sinners living in a sinful world. We all need to extend grace. We all need to forgive and to be forgiven. Jesus wants our forgiveness to be complete and ongoing... like God's forgiveness of us.

Note that Jesus also tells us to "rebuke" the one who sins against us. Not to embarrass or hurt or judge another but to bring them to a place of repentance. The one who sins should own his wrongdoing. And when he is sincerely sorry, we forgive... over and over... keeping in mind that other believers are instructed to do the same for us.

Notice the response of the disciples to Jesus' command to forgive (vs 5) – increase our faith. The call to forgive others requires incredible grace, and only God can enable us to do it. Because of His grace, we have been forgiven much, and so, we are set free to forgive others.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be as forgiving of others as You have been to us. May we daily live according to Your mandate to forgive as we have been forgiven. Amen

Reflection

Sunday, March 22, 2026

No one repents of his own accord.

Repentance is, as the early church fathers said,
a gift God grants us which leads to life.

John Calvin

Reflection questions:

1. Have you ever been hardened toward your own sin so that you didn't even admit them to yourself?
2. Why are confession and repentance often so difficult for us?
3. What is your practice of confession and repentance like? How much of your prayer time is devoted to confession? Where do you need to grow? What could you do to make your times of confession more specific and meaningful? How might meditating on Christ's sacrifice deepen your confession?
4. Do you have "worldly" grief over sin (i.e., what will people think of me or I'm sorry I got caught) or do you have godly grief over it with sincere sorrow over sinning against God and turning away from it?
5. Have you willingly and intentionally let go of the things you want so that you are able to hear what God wants of you with unbiased ears?

The Kingdom is At Hand - March 23

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:17 (ESV) (See also Mark 1:15)

Jesus began His public ministry with the same word John the Baptist used in his – Repent! Repent – stop rebelling against God by your sins.

Keep in mind that many of the people that John (and Jesus) preached to were “religious” people. They knew the law and they participated in the requirements of their faith. They were “rule followers” but for many of them there was no heart transformation. That was what John was urging. And Jesus could take it a step further because with His entrance into human history, the kingdom of God truly was at hand!

When Jesus uttered these words, many people heard the word “kingdom” and their minds went immediately to a political kingdom. They expected Jesus (with all His power) to overthrow Rome and return Israel to its former glory. But Jesus brought a better kingdom. And He told them that kingdom was at hand.

What is God’s kingdom? Jesus talks about the kingdom of God more than almost any other subject. Almost 120 times He says, “The kingdom of God is like...” and He teaches us about His kingdom – a kingdom that is diametrically opposite of any earthly kingdom. And in fact, Jesus says, “My kingdom is not of this world.” God’s kingdom is more than just a place—it’s His reign over all the world throughout time and all eternity.

Jesus said that the kingdom is within you (Luke 17:21). God’s kingdom is a spiritual one and we enter that kingdom the minute we give our lives to the Lord. When we repent, we willingly enter God’s kingdom, and we pray for Jesus to take His rightful place on the throne of our hearts. We are no longer in the kingdom of sin and darkness. A new King and kingdom reigns in us.

Jesus has inaugurated the kingdom, and through His life, death, and resurrection, He is reclaiming this fallen world for His kingdom. In the present, He is working to redeem and draw each of us to Himself. For the future we have a promise of a perfect kingdom one day when His work in us will be complete; when all evil will be destroyed, and God establishes the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1). We’ll stand renewed and redeemed with Him for eternity.

His kingdom is closer than ever. Whether it’s tomorrow or 10 years from now, in light of eternity, the kingdom is “at hand.” Like Jesus and John, our message to our nation and world needs to be “Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand.”

Prayer: Lord, we believe your kingdom is at hand. Help us to daily repent of our sins and prepare our hearts for the fulfillment of Your kingdom. And give us the sense of urgency to share Your message with those around us. Amen.

No Regret - March 24

Margy Delpoen

"yet, now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." 2 Cor. 7:9-11 (NIV)

What do Zaccheus and Dicken's Scrooge have in common? How do they differ from Judas Iscariot or the Rich Young Ruler? The difference was the type of sorrow they chose to exhibit.

Sorrow that is focused on God leads us to back into right relationship with Him. Metanoia is the Greek word for repentance. It is an incredible word! It means "a metamorphosis of heart and mind." It is a return to right understanding; it is our return to God! Repentance isn't what happens before we return to God, repentance IS our return to God.

Zaccheus and Scrooge mourned their behaviors, but instead of focusing on regret over all that they had done wrong, they rejoiced in all that they could do moving forward to demonstrate their heart change. They had an incredible JOY that filled them with new purpose, a new mindset, a new focus. Their behaviors were not their repentance but rather the outward expression of an inward change. Their sorrow was a godly sorrow, and their actions were proof of the beautiful change that happens when we turn away from sin and back to God. There was absolutely no regret.

Judas and the Rich Young Ruler were also sorrowful, but they never stopped focusing on themselves. They never turned back to God. They kept their original mindset and their original desires. Their sorrow was worldly and deadly. Judas committed suicide and the rich young ruler "went away sad". Both were full of regret because God wasn't what they wanted Him to be. They refused to turn around and reject their self-centered ways of thinking.

We clearly see God's delight in our metanoia in the parable of the Prodigal Son. God's position never changes; it is man's free will that allows us to turn away from God and attempt to do things our own way. God waits, ready to celebrate and embrace those who turn away from sin. He delights in our repentance! We will always find love and forgiveness at the cross.

Edward J. Anton in his book "Repentance: a cosmic shift of mind and heart" sums it up well, "Metanoia does not rue the past so much as it pursues the future. Lamenting fault does not foment change." This is so powerful! Godly sorrow leads us into joy and genuine change of heart that is focused on God and His ways. God doesn't want us looking back and crying over all the wrong choices we made. He wants us to bask in His forgiveness and the freedom we have from the bondage of sin. That freedom shifts our desires and opens our eyes to life everlasting. That freedom is the fertile ground of joy and righteous deeds that are the evidence of true repentance.

Question: How might I have misunderstood true repentance?

Prayer: Lord, help me to see the gift of metanoia! Help me to turn back to You in all areas of life and live without regret over any experience that ultimately draws me into a closer relationship with You. Let me live in the fullness of joy and freedom that comes with true metanoia.

Repentance and Refreshment - March 25

I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. Psalm 38:18 (NIV)

Psalm 38 is a penitential Psalm. David is crushed by the weight of his sin and guilt. He is sorrowful to the point of physical pain and exhaustion over it. He describes his guilt as overwhelming—a burden too heavy to bear. It has separated Him from God.

David did not try to justify his position or excuse his sin or pretend it hadn't happened. In fact, if you read the beginning of this Psalm, you will see an extensive description of his agony over his sin. He acknowledges that he deserves to be punished. But he asks for mercy and help instead.

The subtitle of this Psalm is "bring to remembrance." For God to "remember" someone means that He begins to act on their behalf to meet a specific need. When David gets down to the business of dealing with his sin, he confesses in true repentance and in faith, waiting for God to "remember" him, knowing that God is listening and will answer (vs. 15).

In this Psalm, David cries out to God like a child might cry out to their father when they have done wrong—please don't punish me while you are angry. And in verse 18, we read, "I am troubled by my sin." One version says, "my sin is like pain burning in my gut."

Are we troubled over our sin? Do we have godly sorrow over it?

We should be troubled when we sin. But then, we can take heart. We are not condemned. We do not have to live with a heavy burden. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul writes, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets..." And in Acts 3:19, Peter writes these words, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Refreshing—what an uplifting word! The blessing of God that follows our repentance is forgiveness and pardon... and we are rejuvenated! Restored! Refreshed!

Prayer: Lord, help us to have godly sorrow over our sins so that it brings us to you in penitence and repentance. But then let us release it to be covered by Your grace. Thank you for forgiving us and for giving us times of refreshment. Amen.

How are We to Respond? - March 26

Carole Klocko

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?
Romans 2:4 (NIV)

God's grace is an amazing gift.

God is kind towards us. He is tolerant of our sin. He is extremely patient with us.

How are we to respond to God's kindness?

Romans 2 begins with Paul's letter to the believers of Jesus in Rome and it helps to clarify this. In fact, after reading and meditating on this, I know I don't do the best job of contemplating my sins and repenting them.

Paul asks in his letter that when we pass judgment on others, are we ignoring the fact that we too will be judged by God? Do we blatantly ignore his kindness and patience? Do we take God's kindness for granted?

Paul encourages us to be fully aware of God's gift of kindness, tolerance and patience. He also wants us to recognize that God wishes for us to respond to this gift through our repentance.

This is how we should react...by turning away from our sins and repenting.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise You for your kindness, tolerance and patience with us. Help us to repent as a real way to show our thanks to You for being so patient and kind. May we continue to praise You for Your never-ending kindness and choose to more frequently recognize and repent of our sins. We thank You for Your forgiveness! Amen.

Return - March 27

Michele Holmes

'Return to me,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the Lord Almighty. Zechariah 1:3b (NIV)

The idea of returning to the Lord assumes that at some point, or in some aspect of our lives, we have left Him.

And we have.

We have chosen selfish ambition or deceit or gossip or arrogance—we have all chosen some path at some point that takes us away from Him. And Lent is the time that we are reminded of that stark reality. If we let Lent be a healing season—if we enter this season with intentionality and ask the Lord to share with us His insight on the ways that we have left Him—we will experience the fullness of His return.

Choosing to follow hard after God instead of feeding the areas of our lives that pull us from Him allows us to hear Him more clearly, recognize His presence more readily, and experience His love and delight in us more deeply. His love for us does not change—even when we are completely ignoring Him. But when we return to Him, He's that father of the prodigal son, running fast toward us with His arms wide open.

Returning to the Lord takes commitment and discipline, two things I am regularly lacking. But I know that if I ask Him to help me, He shows up every time. Let's ask the Lord to help us return to Him this Lenten season. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to rid us of any ugliness that we are choosing over our Creator. Let's ask God to return to us. And then ready yourself for the most gigantic spiritual bear hug you've ever received!

Pray with me: Lord, You are our truest love. Forgive us for choosing to love other things instead. You created us to need you, and yet we ignore that need for our own foolish desires. Help us to let go of empty things and choose You instead. We love You, Lord. We're ready to return, by the power of Jesus. Amen.

Available to All - March 28

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you ... I have declared to both Jews and Gentiles that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:21 (NIV)

When we read the book of Acts and the writings of Paul, one thing we know for sure— he always preached the gospel. In hardship, in imprisonment, in hunger, in bad reports, Paul never stopped preaching the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit and with sincere love. (2 Cor. 6) The message of salvation was of such ultimate importance, he sought to share it fearlessly with anyone who crossed his path.

Jesus Himself after His resurrection, declared that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all the nations. (Luke 24:47) The early church received this command and ran with it. Paul certainly did.

The Lord had shown Paul how much he would suffer for the gospel, (Acts 9:16) but Paul was undeterred. He declared the total word of God, even when it was unpopular or caused him hardship. And he preached to diverse hearers – both Jews and Gentiles. He used a different approach in speaking to different audiences, but the message was always the same— turn away from sin (repent) and turn to Christ (faith). Christ's love and forgiveness was and is available to everyone.

And Paul tells them that they are all saved the same way. Whatever your culture or background, all must turn to God in repentance and have faith in Jesus. All of us! His message has worldwide scope. No one is outside of the opportunity to repent and find life in Christ.

God shows no partiality. We are all in need of a Savior. We are all called to repent and believe. And then in the example of Paul as well as by the declaration of Jesus, we are called to share the message simply and directly— repent and believe.

Prayer: Lord, give us an experience of Your grace that allows us to repent and believe, and then gives us boldness in proclaiming that message to others.
Amen.

Reflection

Sunday, March 29, 2026

Palm Sunday

Hymn writer Charles Wesley was known for his great passion to spread the message of the gospel to the poor, the downtrodden, and the imprisoned in the 18th century.

As you read this hymn of repentance and renewal, reflect on the ways we have “withstood His grace” and have resisted repentance. But then rejoice that He forgives and “loves me still.”

Depth of Mercy! Can There Be?

Charles Wesley

Depth of mercy! Can there be mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear? me, the chief of sinners, spare?

I have long withheld His grace, long provoked Him to His face;
would not hearken to His calls, grieved Him by a thousand falls.

I, my Master have denied; I afresh have crucified,
oft profaned His hallowed name, put Him to an open shame.

There for me the Savior stands, shows His wounds and spreads His hands.
God is love! I know, I feel; Jesus weeps but loves me still!

Now incline me to repent, let me now my fall lament;
now my foul revolt deplore; weep, believe, and sin no more.

Reflection questions:

1. In considering “Palm Sunday,” the fickleness of the crowds is striking. Are there ever times in our lives that we cry “Hosanna” (save us) in one moment and then by our words and actions we “crucify Him afresh” in the next?

2. Where is God “inclining me to repent?”

3. Has focusing on repentance this season changed your understanding of it? Or perhaps made you more conscious of it? Has it given you a greater awareness and a deeper gratitude for Christ’s work on the cross?

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “repentance is ultimate honesty.” Are there any stumbling blocks in your life that cause you to be less than honest about your sin? Are you asking God to help you remove them so that you can be fully and honestly repentant?

Remember Who You Are - March 30

Margy Delposen

For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Romans. 7:19 (NIV)

In 1994 The Lion King introduced us to the beautiful story of Simba. We journeyed with this young cub through the heartache of losing his father and the rebellious choices that left him denying his true identity and giving into selfish desires. In a vision, his father, Mufasa, appears and states "You have forgotten me." Simba cries back "NO! How could I?" Mufasa responds, "You have forgotten who you are and so forgotten me." Mufasa calls Simba to 'Remember who you are. You are my son.' By remembering who he really was he would be able to make choices consistent with his true identity.

When we give into temptation and make choices that we know we will regret later we are acting in ways that are inconsistent with our true identity. Ezekiel 36:26 tells us that we receive a new heart and a new spirit as children of God. This gives us the power to be overcomers of ALL temptations. But the struggle is real and we fail regularly. In Romans Paul shares how he clearly knows his mind belongs to God, but his body constantly fights the battle against his sinful nature. So where is our hope in this constant battle? Romans 7:25 — "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Halleluiah! We are not alone fighting this battle. And it gets even better. Romans 8:1 tells us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We don't fight temptation to earn God's love and acceptance; we fight temptation because we are filled with God's love and acceptance. God only wants what is best for us.

Here is the encouragement. God knows we are in a daily battle against our sinful nature. Our sins have already been covered by the blood of Jesus. We can confess our sins and turn back to God (repent) no matter where temptation has led us. It is never too late to turn back to God. By remembering who we really are we remember who we belong to and the power that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection: What area of temptation do I recognize in which I consistently do the thing I don't want to do, or don't do the thing I do want to do?

Prayer: Father God, I know that I give into temptation in the area of _____ far too often. Please forgive me. Help me to see the power I have in You to make a different choice, one consistent with what I truly want as your child. Thank You for Your perfect redeeming love for me. Thank You that I can come to you without any shame because Jesus has already paid my debt in full. I love You Lord!

Amen.

The Path Towards Freedom - March 31

Ryan Pietryga

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? Romans 6:16 (ESV)

The apostle Paul's words in Romans 6 point us to a truth that is hard for many of us to swallow: you are a slave. We all have a master. Paul writes that our master used to be sin and sin is a terrible slave owner: it has no regard for you, and it only brings about death and destruction in your life.

Yet recall our Savior's words from the gospel of John: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (Jn 10:10) Jesus embodied that kind of abundant life through obedience to the Father's will. He died a death we should have died so that we might experience that same kind of life.

Yet we often forsake that life, and that brings us back to Paul's argument in Romans 6. While Christ rescued us from the penalty and the power of sin, we live as if we still submit to it as our lord. Since we are no longer slaves to sin, we ought not to live as if we are. Rather than yield to sin, which brings death and destruction, we ought to live in service to Christ, who brings life and renewal.

Pastor and theologian Tim Keller once wrote "Freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, those that fit with the realities of our own nature and those of the world." During this season of Lent, as we turn from those things that once mastered us, we remember that holiness and righteousness are always the right constraints through which true, Gospel-powered freedom is found.

Reflection: How does turning from sin and turning towards Christ provide true freedom in your life?

Prayer: Jesus, I acknowledge today that you are not only Savior, but you are Lord of my life. Grant me grace as I continue to throw off the "sin that so easily entangles" and live in service to you, for that is where true freedom lies. Let me not forget that through your death and resurrection, I have been united to you and therefore I am yours. Would my lifestyle align with the fact that you have redeemed me from the penalty and power of sin as I seek to serve and honor you. Amen.

Create in Me a Clean Heart - April 1

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Psalm 51:1-3 (NIV)

The word “repent” is not found in the passage we just read. And yet it is one of the clearest expressions of repentance in all of Scripture. We hear it in the Psalmist’s heartfelt cry. David wrote Psalm 51 after his affair with Bathsheba. He knew he had willfully sinned and now he longs to be cleansed.

David’s problem (and ours) is not only that we commit sins but also that we are sinful. In Psalm 19, David asks the Lord to “forgive my hidden faults.” He knew he needed forgiveness for sins he didn’t even know about! And that knowledge brought him directly to God in repentance. For sins known and unknown, his cry was, Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your great compassion.

Countless broken sinners have found in these words an exact expression of our own deep need for God’s mercy and forgiveness when our sin or guilt has created distance with God. David’s genuine contrition and confession include no excuses, no defensiveness, no superficial skimming over what he has done, but true sorrow over sin. As enormous as David’s sin was, it was immensely exceeded by God’s grace. Our heart’s posture of repentance leads to full pardon.

We cannot and should not minimize sin, but neither do we hold on to it. We allow God to work on our sin. Later in this Psalm David courageously asks God to “create in him a clean heart” ...to use the scalpel of tough love to scrape out the impurity of our sin.

We are prone to wander and to pursue life on our own terms, not because we don’t genuinely repent but because we are in a continuous battle with the enemy. Yes, we take responsibility for our sins. But we have a standing invitation from God to repent and to give up those lesser (idolatrous) pursuits and turn back to the one True God whose mercy alone can create in us a clean heart.

Prayer: God of grace and of mercy, restore to us the joy of our salvation. So often we sin and fail. Even our best efforts fall short of Your glory. Create in me a clean heart and keep creating a clean heart until we are perfected in eternity. Amen

Where Are You? - April 2

Esmé Teel

"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" Genesis 3:8-9 (ESV)

After sin has entered the world and everything has shifted, God comes walking in the garden in the cool of the day and asks a simple, searching question: "Where are you?" It is not a question of location. God is not confused or uninformed. It is a question of relationship. Adam knows exactly where he is—but he no longer knows how to be with God. Lent is a season that gently presses that same question into our lives. Where are you?

Adam's response is so very human. He is hiding. He is afraid. He is aware of his nakedness. Sin has introduced distance where there was once intimacy. Instead of running toward God, Adam pulls back. He covers himself. He explains himself. He places blame. Shame has already taken root and shapes this response to the presence of God.

And yet, God comes toward him. Before consequences are named, before exile is pronounced, before judgment is spoken, God pursues. He enters the space of brokenness and calls out—not in anger, but in invitation. Where are you? is the first act of grace after the fall.

Lent calls us to begin repentance in this same question of "where are you?" Not with excuses or self-defense, but with truth. Repentance is the willingness to step out from behind the trees and name where we really are. Afraid. Exposed. Disappointed. Distracted. Ashamed. It is the refusal to keep hiding from the God who already knows and still comes near.

Too often we imagine repentance as harsh or punitive, as something that requires us to beat ourselves down before God will receive us. But Genesis tells a different story. Repentance is not about earning forgiveness; it is about restoring relationship. It is not self-condemnation, but honest return. Lent invites us into that honesty.

This season slows us down so we can see clearly—to notice where sin has distorted our lives, where fear has shaped our choices, where we have allowed distance to grow between us and God or one another. Where have we pulled away? Where have we covered ourselves instead of trusting God's mercy?

The good news of Lent is that God does not stop asking the question—and He does not stop coming toward us. The God who walked in the garden is the same God who, in Jesus Christ, enters fully into our brokenness. Christ does not wait for us to emerge from hiding on our own. He moves toward us, bearing our shame, carrying our sin, and making a way back through the cross.

Repentance during Lent is not about proving our seriousness or worthiness. It is about returning. It is about letting the light reach the places we have kept hidden and trusting that God's mercy is deeper than our fear.

As we walk through this season, listen again for God's question—not as accusation, but as grace. Where are you? And trust that when you answer honestly, even haltingly, you will find that the God who calls you out of hiding is already waiting with mercy, ready to restore what has been broken.

Reflection: Where am I hiding from God right now—and what might it look like to step into the light with honesty instead of fear?

Prayer: *Gracious God, meet me where I am, draw me out of hiding, and lead me gently back into restored communion with you. Amen.*

Who is a God Like You? - April 3

Who is a God like you? You forgive those who are guilty of sin; you pardon the sins of your people ... You will not stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing mercy. Micah 7:18 (NCV)

We have arrived at the most solemn day of the Lenten season—Good Friday. Some wonder why it is called “Good” when it is a day of mourning and contemplation over the crucifixion of our Lord. But it is good because His sacrifice provided for our eternal salvation.

During these 40 days, we have contemplated the act and attitude of repentance. And today we remember the price He paid for our sins. And as we mourn our sins that took Him to the cross, we also remember the other side of our repentance— restoration and new life.

In his book, the prophet Micah paints a picture of the True God – the Almighty who hates sin but loves the sinner. In the early chapters, he describes God’s judgment over the grievous sins of His people.

God has given His people countless opportunities for repentance from the sin that will lead to certain judgment. But following a dire proclamation of turbulence and judgment, he then declares hope and consolation, because God is also loving and merciful.

And He offers deliverance to those who choose to return to Him. After declaring “there is not one upright person remaining in the land,” (vs. 2) Micah then presents a bridge from judgment and condemnation to hope and restoration. But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. (vs.7)

Micah was confident of the unchanging character of God. God will not go back on His covenant promises with His people even when they have been unfaithful. And he asks, Who is a God like You? There is none other. He is a God who forgives and pardons sin and who delights in showing mercy. He does not forgive grudgingly, but with great abundance and rejoicing!

At the time Micah wrote this message of hope, the future for his people seemed dark and hopeless. But Micah had hope because he knew God and fully trusted Him. He knew God would forgive as the people turned back to Him. We can declare with Micah – there is no God like You — our God who forgives and pardons... and delights in showing mercy.

Prayer: Lord, as today we meditate on Your sacrifice for our sins, may our hearts be in a posture of repentance, and at the same time a posture of rejoicing because we trust in the One True God. We praise you for the abundant mercy you delight in giving us, and we celebrate the grace that is ours because of Good Friday. Amen.



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