



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



FEBRUARY 14 – MARCH 28, 2024



Village Church
FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide families, individuals, or study groups with a devotion to study each day of the Lenten season. Many of the days include a devotional entry written by a member of the congregation that provides a description of a tradition their family celebrates or remembers that demonstrates the meaning of Christmas – even if it is a secular tradition. Other days include a prayer for contemplation or a meaningful reflection about God’s love in the world. These devotionals are intended to help prepare your heart and mind for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

FEBRUARY 14, 2024 ASH WEDNESDAY

THE LOVE OF GOD

Written by In Touch Ministries, an organization founded by Dr. Charles Stanley to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Christians often hear that God loves them. This truth is repeated in church, and believers often recite Bible verses on the topic. Yet do we really grasp what it means to be cared for in this way by the Creator of the universe? Let’s explore two aspects of His love. First, God’s love isn’t influenced by anything within or around us, because it is one of God’s unchanging attributes. We know that even while we were still living in sin, Christ died for us. We didn’t do anything to earn His love, and we can’t do anything to hinder it. Second, divine love is eternal. Believers will never be separated from it. God chose us before the foundation of the world. We know, therefore, that His care for us has always been a fact—and always will be. We can trust the One who loves us completely. Jesus proved His love by dying in our place to rescue us from sin and its consequences. He promises to stay with us always and redirects us when we stray. Whether or not we feel His presence, His love surrounds and protects us forever.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins [1 John 4:10]

***The shape of true love isn’t a diamond. It’s a cross.
[Alicia Bruxvoort]***

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

FOLLOWING JESUS FOR LIFE

Written by Peggy Stackle from The Village Church.

A few of us are gathering together to learn how to follow Jesus for life. If you've been Christian for a while you probably have some knowledge and experience in this area and may not feel that this is a necessary, course to dive into right now. I think you would be surprised. I have been. Many of you have heard the part of my story that my Dad was the Superintendent of the Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church in Washington DC in the 1930's. My Mother was the new Sunday School teacher and my Dad thought she was kind of cute so he invited her to lunch. That makes me Presbyterian since before I was the sparkle in my Dad's eye. I'm also a seminarian and hold a Master of Divinity degree. But I've learned a couple of things already from participating in the "How To" experience. We have our Youth group participating and their parents, and a few others, some long-time members, some more recent, and some inquirers. Hold on to your hats. While we hold firmly to our traditional theology and doctrines, there are some new ideas. New, fresh ways of looking at those traditions that make you sit up, take notice and ask Jack. It's positively refreshing. Then there is my favorite part, the fellowship. We're meeting new friends, sharing a meal and engaging in good, old-fashioned conversation. Of course Jack teaches a little as well. There's still time. Join us.

*As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth.
"Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. [Mark 2:14]*

FEBRUARY 16, 2024

GOD IS WILD ABOUT YOU

Written by Lisa Bevere, a contemporary minister, author, and speaker.

God, who is Truth, cannot lie. He is wild about you! As daughters and sons of our Lord, we are under His rule, and His rule is love. One way we can honor His lordship is by choosing to accept how He feels about us. His love for us is not subject to how we feel about ourselves, no matter what we've done or how tempted we are to dwell on the past. His love is selfless. He is love. His love is independent of how we look, feel or act. We might as well surrender to this love that is beyond our comprehension. This revelation — that God, who is love, loves us — is exciting. If we are bored with the idea that God loves us, it could be because we've heard it but never experienced it. This realization that He constantly thinks of us is thrilling and should awaken a fresh enthusiasm in every aspect of our walk with the Father. He means what He has said about us. His heart is set on us, and nothing we do or say can remove His seal of love from us. In Christ, His love is forever settled. It is now time for us to settle it for ourselves.

He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. [Micah 7:19]

FEBRUARY 17, 2024

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Written by Arlene Stamper, from The Village Church.

As a teenager living in Garden Grove California, I had a close friend Terry. We were on our high school Rancheros Drill Team together, wearing "cowgirl" outfits that had leather fringed vests, cowboy boots and hats. We would practice our routines at her house after school and many times her mother would invite me to stay for dinner with their family. Terry had two siblings, so it was a large family dinner, well, at least it was large for me as I had no siblings my age. Also, I was missing family meals and family at my own home as my mother had died in my freshman year of high school.

Terry's grandma owned a cabin in Big Bear mountains, and they invited me to spend weekends up there. I had never been there. It was springtime and as we spent time outdoors, I loved the tall pine trees and the woodland smell, the sun filtering through the trees and the blue jays chattering. I was so comforted by Gods beauty and majesty. And also loved by the surrogate family that God had provided to comfort me. Years later, those trips to the mountains were so impactful that I chose Big Bear Community Church as the place to be married at. Jerry and I will celebrate our 57th anniversary this March!

*For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.
[Psalm 26:3]*

*The shape of true love isn't a diamond. It's a cross.
[Alicia Bruxvoort]*

FEBRUARY 18, 2024

LOVE OTHERS

Written by Tracy Kulwicki, a contemporary author, blogger, and podcaster.

Father God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our example of love. Thank you that He chose to surrender His rights and give up His life that I might be saved. Thank you for loving me that much. Lord, I pray that you would place within me a heart that loves others as much as you love me. Give me the strength to lay down my wants, my plans, and my very life to love the people around me. Grant me the wisdom to see your beloved people the way you do and to treat them with a sincere and compassionate heart. Teach me what real love is and what it looks like in my daily life. Help me to show your love in everything I do.

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. [1 John 3:16]

FEBRUARY 19, 2024

13 TEARS/13 LIVES

Written by Vickie Stone, from The Village Church

Columbine High School, Colorado. Reading that can conjure up a horrific day, 25 years ago this April when tragically 13 lives were lost violently by two high schools shooters. Rachel Scott was the first person to be shot that day. 3 weeks prior, she had witnessed personally of her faith, to the two shooters. They had been bullied and their hate kept them blinded. Rachel's backpack from that day was returned to her parents and her diary inside revealed a sketch she had made of 13 tears coming from her eyes, down onto a single rose and turning to blood. On the Columbine campus, a rose plant is now there, with a Bible verse underneath it that says, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man would lay his life down for his friends." Many of her classmates would come forward to her parents and tell them of Rachel's kindness toward them... Although her diary also contained how she had been bullied for her faith. Rachel's life is a powerful testimony to the ways that God uses those who love Him. Her life was brief, but Rachel's legacy touched millions. "I want you to use me to reach the unreached," Rachel wrote to God in her diary. I sometimes wonder if I would have the faith, courage and conviction Rachel had? When asked "do you still believe in your God?" and she replied "you know that I do", she lost her life for it. John 11:25-26 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die..." This Lenten season, may we all be grateful for The Promise of life eternal with our Savior.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. [1 Peter 3:15]."

FEBRUARY 20, 2024

BE KIND

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

Kindness is one way we can show genuine love. Kindness can be defined as an intentional action to be friendly or caring. Whether through a random act of kindness to a stranger, writing a thoughtful letter to a friend, making a meal for a new mother, or saying "thank you" we can choose kindness in an instant. Those who are unkind, hateful, or lack compassion for others may have a difficult time spreading the gospel. If we claim to be Christians but are inconsiderate, disgruntled, and selfish, we can expect that few nonbelievers will be interested in the God we serve! Kindness opens the door to us being able to share the Gospel with others.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. [Colossians 3:12]

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

WHAT GOD WANTS US TO KNOW

Written by Doreen May, from The Village Church.

Just before dawn, in the dark of the night
The soul awakens in search of the light
Enduring heart break, struggles and strains
Tears overflow for the question remains
Why so much anguish and strife
As we travel the road on our way in this life?
Is God trying to tell us it's time to let go?
Be content whatever the circumstances, go with the flow

What exactly is it God wants us to know?

Could it be that the journey right here on this earth
The one we have traveled from the day of our birth
Is His way to prepare us for our final destination?
As He shapes and refines us to His perfect creation
Will we stop long enough to give Him the chance?
Will we listen at last when He asks us to dance?
Is it true as it's stated that we reap what we sew?
Why do we test every limit and venture so low?

What exactly is it God wants us to know?

We have faith ...or faith we have not...
We demand answers to all questions sought
Why is it so hard to accept and believe?
Believe in the promises God wants us to receive
For He sent us His Son, that we might have salvation
One and for all to each and every nation
Acknowledge Him now, He'll slay every foe
Yield to that yearning, let your faith build and grow

What exactly is it God wants us to know?

Rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is Savior and King
Sing Praise to His Glory and hear Heaven's bells ring!
Claim victory over evil, claim Grace as your gift
Let anguish be banished, may all dark clouds lift
Acknowledge Him now, let faith be your goal
Peace, Love and Blessings, will comfort your soul

What is it God wants us to know...

He wants us to...

"Be Still and Know that... "I ...AM GOD"

Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. [Psalm 46:10]

FEBRUARY 22, 2024

KNOWING THE LOVE OF GOD

Written by Mark Brown, a contemporary monk and retreat leader.

So how can we come to know the love of God in our lives and in the lives of those around us? I start with the understanding that God is Himself love. God is love. And in a sense all love is God's love and all love has its source, its ultimate source, in the heart of God. Like that very old hymn reminds us, "Wherever love is, God himself is there." So we see God's love all around us in the lives of those that we know, in their compassion, in their generosity, in their giving, in their acts of love and kindness, the way that they care for other people. It is all God's love even though it is coming through those individuals. Even more immediately, we can come to know God's love within ourselves because we too, like the people we admire and appreciate, we, too, are instruments of God's love. We are Christ's hands in the world, as it were. So God's love is something that's alive and present and active in and through us and so recognizing that in our giving, in our generosity, in our compassion, in our loving kindness and care for others, that that's God living and active and working through us and through our lives.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [1 John 4:7]

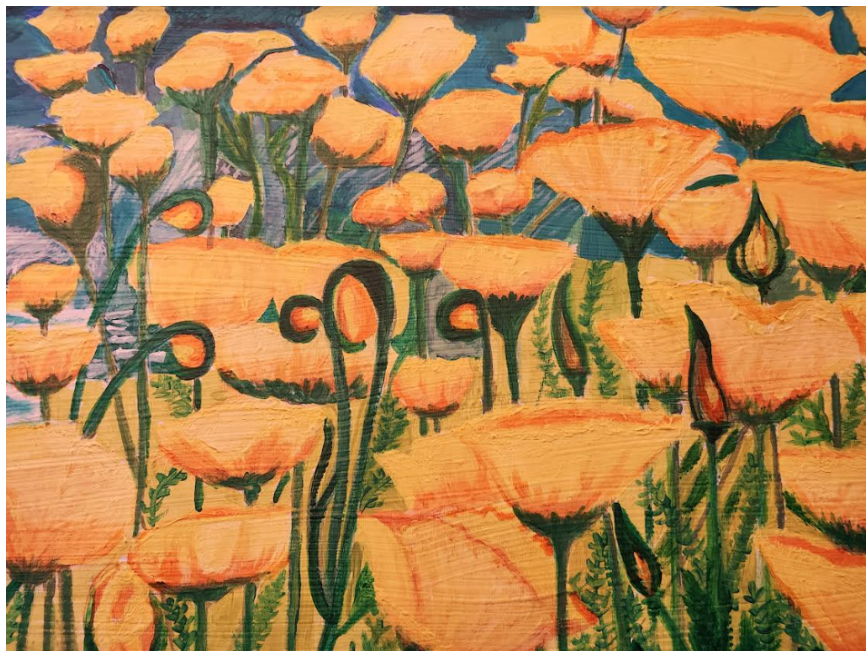
FEBRUARY 23, 2024

INCURVATUS

Written by Margot Wallace, from The Village Church

During Lent I try harder to make myself more godlike in my habits, thoughts, and aspirations. Yet I often wonder at the disparity between knowing what it takes to be a Christian and actualizing that in fact. I know the perfection which Jesus represents in thought, word, and deed. How is it then, even as a Christian, that I fall short so often? It seems that agape love, the only love free of motives, does not come naturally at all. There is a very old Latin phrase recently discussed in Jack's Kingdom Academy on Sunday: "homo incurvatus in se" translated from Latin: "Man/woman curved in on her/himself." Essentially this means that we are born curved in on ourselves. While I was made from love, by love, for love, I was not spiritually aware of these origins at birth. Time, experience, education, and discipline are required to become open to God's love which un-curves my spirit. Most importantly, I am God's person, representative, messenger on Earth. In reflecting upon this concept, I turned to nature and the image of the budding California Poppy came to mind. Here we can witness what we know, with the right conditions, will become a magnificent blossom. While curved in on itself the bud rises from the ground with great potential to create a plethora of cascading color to decorate the hillside. This analogy from nature is all around us in different forms on our beautiful Earth!

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. [Romans 7:15]



California Poppy painted by Margot Wallace

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

GOD'S SUBLIME BEAUTY

Written by St. Francis of Assisi (c1181-1226). an Italian friar, deacon and preacher. He founded the men's Order of Friars Minor, the women's Order of Saint Claire, the Third Order of Saint Francis, and the Custody of the Holy Land.

Dear God, please reveal to us
your sublime beauty
that is everywhere, everywhere, everywhere
so that we will never again
feel frightened.
My divine love, my love,
Please let us touch
your face.
Amen.

For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty! [Zechariah 9:17]

FEBRUARY 25, 2024

OUR MODEL FOR LOVING OTHERS

Written by John Warden, a contemporary pastor and writer.

How should my life (words, actions, and decisions) reflect my relationship and pursuit of Christ? If a person is walking with God on the inside, then their life (words, decisions, and actions done out of obedience to God) should reflect a distinct character on the outside. The perfect expression of God's love for others is found in the person of Jesus. Jesus is our benchmark! Jesus does not require anything from us that He did not already live out in His own person and life. The command to love one another and to love our neighbor as ourselves were given and modeled by Jesus and commanded of His followers... We learn from the biographies of Jesus (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that all people were accepted and loved, especially those at the bottom of the social pyramid—poor people, women, outcasts, lepers, children, prostitutes, and tax collectors. Jesus is the perfect model of loving your neighbor as yourself. Why should Christians have an active heart for serving the poor? Because of Jesus, the perfect standard by which we live. The overflow of Jesus's love for the Father was a life in constant service to others. Our overflow and love for the Father (our seeking to conform to the character of Christ) should also result in a life of service and love to others... A life living in Christ is a life that loves and serves others. A service to the poor that listens, loves, encourages, respects, and helps those in your midst—especially those from the bottom of the social class. This is the heart of Jesus and should be our heart as well as we seek to live in fellowship with Him.

Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. [1 John 2:6]

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

LEARNING TO RECEIVE GOD'S LOVE

Written by Dawn Kaiser, a contemporary writer, trainer, and coach.

A few years back I was sitting in a coffee shop with a friend and we were talking about our ability to receive love. I confessed to her that for many years it was hard for me to receive love from others and especially from God. I mean how could God love me when I kept making mistakes or breaking my promises to really change for the better this time? But that's the great thing, God's love is not conditional, rather it's unconditional. It's not based on our successes or our failures or if I have earned it, rather His love is always there for us, we just have to receive it. Do you ever find it hard to let God love you? ... The nature of God's love is generative and relational. God's love towards us creates new love for us to give back. We have the opportunity to multiply love when we receive it, but when we refuse to receive love, we diminish its possibilities... So how do we receive God's love? There is an exercise I practice and recommend to others. The truth of God's love for you is woven throughout His Word and so I encourage you to go on a love scavenger hunt and find the verses of God's love that speak directly to you. Once you find 5-10 of these verses, read through

each statement as you picture God speaking these words over you. In each statement, place your name in the verse. Repeat this exercise daily for several weeks and soon you will find that these seeds of love begin to take root in your heart.

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.” [Isaiah 54:10]

FEBRUARY 27, 2024

HELP US TO LIVE FOR YOU

Written by Cortney Whiting, a contemporary lay leader and writer.

Father God, in the middle of the chaos we call life, may we be still enough to recognize the love you have for your creation. May we trust in Your unfailing and unconditional love. As You have loved us, may we love one another. Forgive us for the times when we have forgotten the cost of Your love, the life of Your Son, Jesus. I pray that we will live confidently today, knowing that we are Your children who You have chosen with a plan and purpose in mind. Help us live for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. [Ephesians 1:4-5]

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Written by Bill Bright (1921-2003), co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. This is an excerpt from his book “Transferable Concept: How You Can Love By Faith.”

The parable of the prodigal son, as recorded in Luke 15, illustrates God's unconditional love for His children. A man's younger son asked his father for his share of the estate, packed his belongings, and took a trip to a distant land where he wasted all of his money on parties and prostitutes. About the time that his money was gone, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He finally came to his senses and realized that his father's hired men at least had food to eat. He decided, "I will go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man.'" While he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming and was filled with loving pity. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. I think that the reason he saw his son coming while he was still a long distance away was that he was praying for his son's return and spent much time each day watching that lonely road on which his son would return. Even as the son was making his confession, the father interrupted to instruct the servants to kill the fatted calf and prepare for a celebration -- his lost son had repented;

he had changed his mind and had returned to become part of the family again. God demonstrated His love for us before we were Christians, but this story makes it obvious that God continues to love his child who has strayed far from Him. He eagerly awaits his return to the Christian family and fellowship. Even when you are disobedient, he continues to love you, waiting for you to respond to His love and forgiveness.

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. [Luke 15:24]

The sin underneath all our sins is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot trust the love and grace of Christ and must take matters into our own hands. [Martin Luther]

FEBRUARY 29, 2024

WHILE WE WERE SINNERS

Written by Shelly Esser, a contemporary writer and editor.

Recently, I've been struggling with loving people – people who have become enemies, or at least feel like enemies. I've been constantly asking God to show me how to love them, especially as they are hurting someone I love. There has been unlimited injustice, unfairness, and an absolute disregard for how hurtful actions are wounding. It's so easy to love those who love us back, who are kind or nice to us, but what about those who harm us, who make our lives difficult, who show no love or compassion to us. As I've wrestled with that question, I realize that at my worst, in my sin, that is me too! And yet, when I was lost in my sin, Christ demonstrated the greatest love possible and died for me. The impact of that reality as we move into this holy time of year focusing on Christ's death and resurrection is sobering. I was an enemy of God *and yet* He does something so amazing that it's hard to fully grasp. Think about what God's love did while we didn't give Him a second thought, while our hearts were as far away from Him as they could be, while we were living for ourselves in sin, while we were still sinners...While we were in our separated state, He *demonstrates* His love for us on a cross. In other words, He *shows* us just how great His love is...God *shows*. Not in a quiet, out-of-sight kind of way, but in an unmistakable way that no one has or ever will show like this again. And He shows it to sinners—*while we were still sinners*. Do you realize how great God's love is for you?

God shows [demonstrates] his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [Romans 5:8]

MARCH 1, 2024

SPECIAL PEOPLE

*Written by Bruce Prewer (1931-2018), an Australian minister and author.
This is from the book "Australian Prayers."*

We thank you, O God,
For those people who are channels of your love in our lives:
For those who gave us birth,
And, in the weakness of our infancy,
Sheltered, nurtured, and treasured us.

For those who taught us to walk,
To talk and to explore tastes, smells, sounds,
And affirmed our strengths,
And the friends young and old
Who share our tears and laughter.

We thank you, Lord,
For the people of strong faith
Who stretch out minds and enlarge our capacity
To explore and understand your ways.

For those at every stage of our journey
Who teach us trust by trusting us,
Who enable us to love others
Through the experience of being loved.

We thank you for those very sincere people
Who have demonstrated the joys and disciplines
Of the kingdom of God,
And especially people who taught us to love you,
Rather than to be afraid of you.

God of love, God of Jesus,
For these healing experiences of growth and loving,
And for the knowledge that the best is yet to come,
We praise your holy name:
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. [1 Chronicles 29:13]

MARCH 2, 2024

YOU ARE LOVED ALWAYS

Written by Connie Fink, a contemporary author and lay ministry leader.

Did you feel unloved today, even if just for a minute? Remember, the One who said He IS love lives within you. He's there all the time. That means you are loved always. Can you imagine continual unconditional perfect love? You have it! Then, in that moment when you're standing in front of the person who is very hard to love, you can say, "Ok, Lord, please take it from here and love her because I can't right now." Just think...Jesus came to live within you the moment you accepted His death on the Cross. He moved in, bringing all that He is with Him. He is Love. Peace. Joy. Patience. Humility. Kindness. Gentleness. Faithfulness. Wisdom. Truth. Mercy. Power. (To name a few.) All this is always with you. Always close. Always perfect. Always sufficient. Always accessible. What a gift! What a treasure!

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" [Galatians 2:20]

MARCH 3, 2024

HOSPITALITY

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

Hospitality is one way to show God's love that may often go unnoticed. Yet, hospitality is purposeful. Inviting a person into your home and treating them with genuine care is one of the most selfless things we can do. Whether we're hosting a ladies Bible study, a playdate or allowing a missionary or church member to stay in our home, hospitality gives us the opportunity to make others feel welcome and cared for. Hospitality helps the other person to feel loved and gives you a chance to spread the Gospel during your intentional time with the other person.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. [Hebrews 13:12]

Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely. ... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken. [Dieter F. Uchtdorf]

MARCH 4, 2024

LOVE AS GOD LOVES

Written by: Jill Briscoe, a contemporary editor and publisher.

Believers need to learn how to love as God loves. They need to move from just being loved to giving love or from “need love” to “gift love.” The key lies in the measure of spiritual maturity. The measure of our spiritual maturity lies in our ability to feed on the Word of God and grow up! If you are a new believer, the Gospels are a good place to start training in spiritual maturity. There you can get to know Jesus. Read eyewitness accounts of His life. You can watch Him heal a leper, listen to His sermons and parables, follow Him to Jerusalem, stand at His cross, visit His tomb, and meet Him in the garden like Mary Magdalene did. You can learn how to love Him. Of course, as you learn the behavior God expects of His followers from the Bible, you need to obey. Whenever you come to a command, underline it. Then go out into your day and try to do what it says. ... I encourage you to read the Bible, see the many ways God demonstrates His love for you, and then share that love with others.

I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. [John 13:34]

MARCH 5, 2024

PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

Written by Nina Pope, from The Village Church

One of the best features of growing older is having the possibility of perspective regarding life experiences which just simply does not always occur to the young at heart. It brings joy to know there is something good about maturity. I can now see that God’s presence has been with me for a long time, probably more times than I actually recognized. As I look back, I know God’s presence was guiding me towards him as I got myself up and dressed Sunday mornings for church during my grade school years while the rest of my family did other things. I went to choir practice, took part in various pageants, and participated in many other church activities. Eventually, Hughes and I were married by a young Jewish Unitarian minister (how’s that for Ecumenical!). The most important part of those past years came when a friend sensed a spiritual hunger within me and kick-started me toward a more serious faith journey as she witnessed to me in a Ralphs parking lot in VanNuys, California. That was in the past. God must really have a sense of humor. It was a tapestry of events following that brought me to a lasting faith journey. I began to experience what I now call ‘God moments’ which alerted me to awakening instruction God gives me to pay attention to something special I might act on or notice for future reference. Sometimes it has drawn me into unique intervention of some sort or indicates something I am to know or hear. Every now and again, I realize I have missed a cue for which I feel great remorse. In this present stage of life, I have clearly been directed to just the right church, to many wonderful people who mentor and teach me, and it makes me cognizant of the rich layers of blessing that have characterized my marriage, my family, and beyond. I am drenched in blessing, and I see God’s gracious hand in both the ordinary and the extraordinary, and I am grateful God bothers with me at all. This is my present. In spite of many current, unsettling

uncertainties in the details of my life, I look forward to discovering blessings yet unknowable and unimaginable in the future. Because I have received so many past blessings, I am confident that whatever God has planned for me will be abundant and exceedingly gracious.

Older people are wise, and long life brings understanding. [Job 12:12]

MARCH 6, 2024

BE OPEN TO GOD'S LOVE

Written by Denise Yarrison, a contemporary counselor and writer.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your immense love for me. I ask You for the grace to open my heart and receive Your love more and more each day. Please reveal to me any unhealed hurts or wounds within me that are impacting my full receptivity to the Love You offer me freely at every moment. Please guide me to see more clearly the obstacles I create and the ways that I deflect Your love. Be with me Lord. I give You permission to restore my heart in You. Even though that may mean facing past hurts, I know I face them with You, strongly enfolded in Your healing embrace. I invite You Lord Jesus, to work in me each day through Your Holy Spirit. Guide me to rid myself of judgments, resentments, unforgiveness, bitterness, prejudices, cynicism and fear. I desire to bring Your healing love to others, and I know that to do so effectively, I need to first experience Your healing love myself. Conform my heart to Your Heart, Lord! Purge and purify my heart! Steady me by Your grace and guide me further along the pathway of Heavenly perfection in You. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen!

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. [John 1:12]

MARCH 7, 2024

BE INTENTIONAL

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

Above all else, intentionality should be what drives how we treat others. Being intentional reminds us that love is a choice and not just an emotion. Thus, you can love someone without particularly liking them. Showing intentional love is making a choice to be polite when we want to be rude, to call a friend going through a tough time, and to value the need of other people above others. According to Dr. Chapman, love is "the attitude that says I want to enrich your life." He states that people universally experience and give love in one of the five ways: acts of service, words of affirmation, touch, gifts, and quality time. When in doubt, we can choose to find one person we can be purposeful about each week to show love. This is our greatest way to show people that you care about them and that God still uses people to demonstrate His love for humanity.

*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
[1 Corinthians 13:7]*

MARCH 8, 2024

SERVING OTHERS

Written by Christy Kinney, a contemporary writer and blogger.

Serving others and meeting their needs go hand in hand. They are both great ways to show God's love to your friends, family, and community! Service can look different for all of us. You can volunteer to serve in the music or children's ministry at your local church. Or, you can volunteer to help keep the building and grounds clean. Maybe you want to volunteer at a local food bank. Any way you serve others, you're showing God's love to them!

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. [1 Peter 4:10]

When you know how much God is in love with you, then you can only live your life radiating that love. [Mother Teresa]

MARCH 9, 2024

THE SELF-EXPRESSION OF GOD

Written by Dustin Crow, a contemporary pastor.

As the Word, Jesus is the self-expression of God. The incarnation points to the Father's love because it proves he wants to be known in a way that is clear, intimate, and according to truth...Jesus takes our vague or slightly distorted notions of God and gives us the real picture of the Father in his fullness of grace and truth. We should look to the incarnation of Jesus to see just how near the Father has come. The Son shows us the Father, and through Jesus the invisible God is visible. It should astound us that the infinite, transcendent, and perfect God would make knowing us and being known by us one of his highest priorities. What a joy that God is a Father who doesn't just show mercy—and that would be wonderful enough—but he wants a real relationship where we know and love him. Our perceptions of God become fuzzy when we look at earthly figures of fathers or authorities. However, when we look at Jesus, the character and compassion of the Father is clearly and accurately displayed.

And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. (John 12:45)

MARCH 10, 2024

LENT—A LIFE EXPERIENCE

Written by Allan Anderson, from The Village Church.

Reflecting on 8 decades of life and Lenten worship experiences, we can ask ourselves how we have introduced Lent into our daily experience and approaches to life. My earliest recall of this part of the church season is the affirmation of “giving something up!” In church school each year, a reminder of the importance of this gesture was the receipt of a small paper bank box that could be used to forego something for yourself and instead make a contribution each day – a reminder of Jesus giving himself for the benefit of all God’s people. There was also the promise of fish for lunch in the school cafeteria, the importance and meaning of the Ash Wednesday service that eventually culminated in one of the Bible’s outstanding experiences; the unfolding of Holy Week, Good Friday and the excitement of Easter Sunday and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ! Do we continue to remind ourselves of this total Biblical teaching? Do Easter egg hunts, a new pair of shoes or a new dress help incite the desire to assure our understanding of God’s word, along with spreading this Gospel news to others? Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday; stair steps to God’s offerings for our comprehension that leads to a daily road map for all our futures.

*But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds.
[Isaiah 53:5]*

MARCH 11, 2024

GOD’S LOVE IN NATURE

Written by Divinah Nyabera, a contemporary writer.

Nature testifies of God’s love. Look at the wonderful and beautiful things of nature. Think of their adaptation to the needs and happiness of man, and all other creatures. The sunshine that gladdens the earth and the rain that refreshes. The mountains and the plains, the seas and the land all speak of God’s love. God’s love is written upon every opening bud. Beautiful birds chirp as they sing sweetly of the love God in the trees. Delicately tinted flowers fill the air with the perfect fragrance. The lofty forest trees, with their green foliage, testify of the God’s tender care and His desire to make His children happy. The Lord covers the heavens with clouds, causes rain to on earth and grass to grow on the hills. He makes snow like wool and scatters frost, commands winds to blow and waters to flow. How marvelous! You witness God’s love when you see animals feeding. It gives an assurance that He will take care of you, too. God is the Lord of all seasons (summer, winter, spring and autumn). He carefully takes His children through the extreme cold and hot seasons. The beauty and complexity of God’s creation

reminds us of God's limitless love for us. Take a moment and spend some time admiring God's creation. You can go for a mountain hike, sit at the beach and watch the waves and tides of the ocean, watch a thunderstorm or just play in the rain. The presence and peace of God will fill your whole being.

You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. [Nehemiah 9:6]

MARCH 12, 2024

GOD'S LOVE MADE MANIFEST IN US

Written by Danny Russell, a contemporary church planter.

Just as God's love is more than an emotion towards his people, our love towards others must be more than an emotion. Our love must be made manifest in life and in death. Our love must be made manifest in sharing life with others. We are called to a life filled with the fellowship of the believers. We are called to bear one another's burdens. And, we are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Just as Jesus was physically present with his followers, let us also be physically present with our brothers and sisters in Christ through every season. Our love must also be made manifest in dying to ourselves. We are called to take up our cross daily. We are called to consider others more significant than ourselves. And, we are called to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Just as Jesus laid down his life for his sheep, let us also lose our lives for the sake of the gospel. And in our love being made manifest, let it always point to the love of Jesus, made manifest in both His life and death.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [1 Peter 2:9]

MARCH 13, 2024

FAST AND FEAST

The author of this prayer is unknown.

Fast from judging others; Feast on Christ dwelling in them.
Fast from fear of illness; Feast on the healing power of God.
Fast from words that pollute; Feast on speech that purifies
Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger; Feast on patience.
Fast from pessimism; Feast on hope.
Fast from negatives; Feast on encouragement.
Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion.

Fast from suspicion; Feast on truth.
Fast from gossip; Feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from problems that overwhelm; feast on prayer that sustains.
Fast from anxiety; feast on faith.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. [Luke 14:13]

Unless there is Good Friday in your life, there can be no Easter Sunday. [Fulton J. Sheen]

MARCH 14, 2024

GOD'S LOVE FROM THE EYES OF CHILDREN

Written by Gordon Pennertz, a contemporary pastor.

I will borrow from radio pastor David Jeremiah and his examples of love as seen by young children. And as I share them, I'll try to show how they represent the love of God which leads to our hope and our security that God will never leave nor forsake us. Billy, age 4 says, "When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know your name is safe in their mouth." Jesus knows each of our names; he knows you by name and loves you. Your name is safe in his mouth, you are safe because Jesus loves you ... this we know because the bible tells us so...Tommy, 6, "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other very well." God knew you before you were born, he knows your coming in and your going out. "You have searched me, LORD, and you know me." (Psalm 139:1) And God loves you even knowing you so well! And my favorite, Rebekah aged 8: "When my grandmother got arthritis she couldn't bend over and paint her toes anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time even with his hands having arthritis. That's love." When we were lost in sin and couldn't save ourselves, Jesus came down to earth to do what we couldn't do for ourselves. Out of his great love for us, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's love. And that's why we can face whatever tomorrow might bring. Because Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again, he is in heaven interceding on our behalf today. And he has prepared a place for us for eternity. That's love. It is important to live out our faith in practical, personal, real ways in this world. But it is also important to just be still and know God's love for us. Paul made it clear that God's love doesn't depend on our good works. It doesn't depend on circumstances or luck. It depends on God, and God's love is eternal.

Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:39].

MARCH 15, 2024

BE A LISTENER

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

Listening is more powerful than speaking. When we make a choice to not just hear the hearts of those around us we act out of love. It can be difficult to listen when you don't agree with the stance of the person or when you feel like you haven't been heard. However, when we make a choice to allow others to express themselves, we recognize their need above our own. We notice that even Jesus didn't do all the talking. From asking the disciples who people thought He was to asking Peter if He loved Him, Jesus asked questions and awaited the response (Luke 9:18-20, John 21:15-17). This is astonishing because we know that Jesus knew their thoughts (Luke 5:22) but still took time to have conversations. What a beautiful picture of Jesus caring about what those around Him felt and being willing to listen!

In the same way, we have an opportunity to be active listeners. Those who are active listeners do the following: Wait their turn to speak, ask open-ended questions, and await the answer, repeat back what they have heard, and give undivided attention.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. [James 1:19]

MARCH 16, 2024

NEIGHBORLY LOVE

Written by Lyn Lloyd-Smith, from The Village Church

We humans, we are so hasty to see the great wrongs of the world and so slow to acknowledge the wars that didn't happen, the disasters that were averted. In the minutiae of everyday we find cause to complain and forget to praise the evidence of God's goodness and love around us. Today, I choose to reflect on some of those who have touched my life in beautiful ways. I think of the choir of the French Reformed Church who took me under their wing when I was the only person living in a school building in a provincial town in Southern France. They taught me how to appreciate life in a different land and culture. I remember the neighbor in Germany who washed the steps of my apartment when I was heavily pregnant. And yes, another neighbor, in Switzerland this time, who came to the children's gym class and looked after my baby, week after week, while I helped my toddler wear off her boundless energy on the balance beams. Then also, the neighbor in England, who knocked at my door for an entirely different reason but stayed with me for three hours while I waited to hear that my father had come through heart bypass surgery. May we today and always, in God's grace and love, be the neighbor we want to have.

He has shown you, O Mortal, what is good. [Micah 6:8]

MARCH 17, 2024

REAL BEAUTY

Written by Maxine Harrison, a contemporary writer.

In the world of today, 'real beauty' is often defined by an individual's appearance; but God looks at our true beauty and identity which is found in Christ who lives inside of us (1 Samuel.16:7; Galatians. 2:20). God says we are fearfully and wonderfully made in His image (Psalm 139:14, Genesis 2:7) and that He has chosen to use you to be 'His own special treasure' (Deuteronomy 7:6). You have astonishing potential and 'through God working in you, you are able to accomplish infinitely more than you might ask or imagine' (Ephesians 3:20). What more could you want or need? ... we serve a God who genuinely loves and cares for us. The whole process of God putting in so much effort to save us, so that we may have a relationship with Him, is an amazing concept in itself and all contributes to the unbreakable love that He portrays.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. [Psalm 139:14]

MARCH 18, 2024

MERCY SHIPS

Written by Ruth Grendell, from The Village Church

A graduate nursing student of mine introduced me to a global medical care group—MERCY SHIPS--the goals are to follow Jesus to the world's forgotten poor, and able to provide hope to those who have been praying for help. I learned that volunteer doctors, nurses and other medical personnel believed their own lives are transformed as they put their faith in action as they care for patients and families before surgeries, during recovery times and providing additional support, love, and health education. The ships are equipped with "state of the art" medical equipment on board including intensive care and recovery rooms. Families often stay with the patients and learn how to care for themselves as well. The countries' own health care providers receive education, infrastructure, and tools to continue to care for their people when the ship and personnel move to another setting. I was very impressed with this information and learning the MERCY SHIPS have been in existence since 1978, I was ready to volunteer! I volunteered three months on the ship based in the Caribbean Islands. It was a great decision. Our goal was to care for children and young adults who need surgery to remove very large benign facial tumors that can eventually become life-threatening. Every year I receive a bulletin regarding the year's activity. "Within a few short days two ships will be serving countries along the coast of Africa."

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds [Hebrews 10:24]

MARCH 19, 2024

Today's prayer is from the website RENEW, International, an organization with a mission to connect faith and life. The prayer is excerpted from the book "Lenten Longings: Seeing With God's Eyes."

O radiant light, eternal God,
we pray that you shine on your Church.
Scatter the darkness of our ignorance,
the blindness of our pettiness,
the limits of our self-protecting positions.

May Christ be our light shining within us and around us,
inviting us to the heights of Tabor and sustaining us
in the depths of Golgotha.

Teach us, Holy Spirit of wisdom,
to embrace the rhythm of light and darkness
that flows from your sustaining grace.
Inflame us with courage and trust
to journey together as beacons of hope
whom you enlighten for the sake of this world
that you love.

Lead us, kindly light,
until we reach our journey's end
and the home of God's embrace
where we will dwell in triune love
forever and ever. Amen.

*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always **leads us** in triumphal procession, and
through **us** spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
[2 Corinthians 2:14]*

MARCH 20, 2024

EVEN WHEN WE RUN

Today's devotional is from Newspring Church.

God does not love us because of what we do or don't do. He loves us because of who He is. Such a powerful truth can be hard for us to wrap our minds around. God gives an example of His unconditional love for us through Hosea's marriage. It would seem that Hosea had already done the godly thing by looking past Gomer's history as a prostitute and marrying her. Despite her infidelity, Hosea was faithful. And when Gomer runs away yet again, God tells Hosea to go after his wife, loving her in spite of the mess. "Go find her. Go love her again," God says. Hosea had nothing to gain from loving Gomer. She didn't even seem to love him back! But Hosea's love did not depend on what Gomer did

or did not do. In this way, Hosea is a picture of God, while Gomer represents you and me. God loves us even if we run and even if we choose not to love Him back. God chases after us because He hurts when we hurt. God knows that even the best the world can offer us will not satisfy the longing in our souls. We try to fill our hearts, minds, and bodies with new things and new relationships, but the emptiness always catches up. God continues to love us regardless of where we run. He comes to the darkest, messiest places to find us and rescue us, again and again, because He loves us.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them. [Hosea 14:9]

MARCH 21, 2024

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE

Written by Kim Arnold, a contemporary music teacher and writer.

God's steadfast love for us is firm and unwavering. It is not merited upon our performance. He does not look at us and think, "Oh, she messed up again. I will only love her a little bit today." No! Scripture continually proclaims that God's love is devoted, faithful, and enduring. The love that He promises us in heaven is the same constant love that He gives us today... He pursues us with His love no matter what season of life we are in. He pursues us in the boring mundane, chaotic mundane, lonely mundane, and hurting mundane. Whatever season you are in, keep your eyes open to where He is revealing His love for you in Scripture... I see God holding me in the comfort of His arms to quiet my soul. There is no place I would rather be during the mundane days than held by my Savior.

The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save you; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. [Zephaniah 3:17]

MARCH 22, 2024

CULTURE SHOCKED

Written by Catherine Montgrain, from The Village Church

When I moved from Canada to the USA (moving to a small town in Indiana and not California quite yet), I was what I could call doubly culture shocked. Shock from learning a new bilingual culture in Quebec from my native UK, to shock from moving from that multicultural experience to a small mid-western town where many people had never traveled out of their country or even their state. I asked God to guide me on this journey and he showed me how life plays out when we let ourselves be guided. How does this happen? By engaging with the people, we meet in each new place. After joining churches, school activities with our four children who were also in culture shock from Canada, we were humbled and grateful for how caring the people were in the USA. I joined charities to provide shoes to schoolchildren whose parents struggled to buy

them, worked in a free Catholic-run clinic to give medical help to people without insurance, and joined many school fundraisers of all kinds with our children. I was so impressed with how selfless and hard-working all these kind Americans were. They would work so hard and literally tire themselves out helping people. I will never forget the example these lovely people from all walks of life gave me. Commitment, dedication, love, and mainly faith. I soon forgot my homesickness and started trying to emulate them. I still haven't managed to, but God is helping me.

*But give as alms those things that are within and behold, everything is clean for you
[Luke 11:41]*

MARCH 23, 2024

BE HONEST

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

Honesty is a quality that goes a long way. Making a choice to tell the truth when it's difficult is an act of love. Yet, one must balance truth with grace. Telling the truth without grace is rude and causes us to make harsh statements. However, giving grace and never sharing the truth is enabling. We have a duty as Christians to share the truth even when it's not comfortable or acceptable by the world's standards. In doing so, we must realize that it's not just what we share but how we share it. In general, airing our feelings on public forums, in a way that may embarrass, or in a demeaning way, will always be met with contempt. One-on-one conversations and not avoiding answering questions of faith or ethics (when asked) can help us to communicate truth in a way that will be respected and heard. Let us remain prayerful and students of the Word so that we can be ready when the time comes to share His truth.

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. [2 Timothy 2:15]

MARCH 24, 2024

GOD THE SHEPHERD

Written by Gregory of Narek (950-1003), an Armenian poet, monk, and theologian.

You found me, a sinner, lost in darkness crying like the psalmist in prayer,
and because of Your willing care You were called Shepherd,
for not only did You care but You sought,
not only did You find, O worker of miracles
but with the goodness of Your love,
A love that defies description,
You rescued me, lifting me upon Your shoulder,
To set me down alongside Your heavenly army,
the heirs to Your fatherly legacy.

He [The LORD] brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me. [2 Samuel 22:20]

MARCH 25, 2024

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Written by Vickie Stone, from The Village Church

One of my most cherished books is called "*Intimate Moments with the Savior; Learning to Love*", by Ken Gire. The copyright is 1989 and I had it for years before, like many of my books, I finally read it. Once I did however, it is a book I go to time and again. During Lenten season one of the stories in this book especially sticks with me: "An Intimate Moment with a Thief on the Cross". Jesus is suffering on the cross; on both sides of him hang a thief, teetering between life and death. At last one reaches out in faith, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Not much is known about the criminal on the cross next to Christ. We know from Matthew's scripture that this thief joined with the crowds in mocking Jesus. Yet his plea to Jesus before he dies is the last kind word Jesus hears. Jesus responds to the thief "Today you will be with me in Paradise". He receives the blessed assurance of the Savior. This thief had mocked Jesus to come down from the cross and save himself and taunted Jesus for His claims to be the Son of God. What did the thief see Jesus do, that made him reconsider who Jesus was? Even as Jesus is taking spears in his side, this thief hears Jesus appeal for mercy for His persecutors, His tormentors. As he feels himself fading, the thief meets the eyes of the Savior, and for a moment, all time stands still. And in those eyes, he sees no hatred, no scorn, no judgment. He sees only one thing - forgiveness.

Then he knows. He is face to face with a dying God.

As the author writes: "Incredible, when you think of it. Amidst the humiliating abuse of the crowd and excruciating pain of the cross, Jesus was still about his Father's business. Even with his eyes sinking on the feverish horizon of death, he was telling a common thief about the uncommon riches of heaven."

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" [Luke 23:39]

MARCH 26, 2024

GRANT ME GRACE

Written by Ken Gire, a contemporary author.

Help me Jesus to look at you through the eyes of that thief on the cross. Grant me the grace, I pray, to see in your eyes the forgiveness that he saw. Grant me the grace to live such a life that when you do remember me in your kingdom, O Lord, you may remember me with a smile, and look forward to the day when I too, will be with you in paradise. Amen.

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. [Luke 23:42-43]

MARCH 27, 2024

GOD'S OVERWHELMING MERCY AND LOVE

Written by Davis Wetherell, a contemporary writer and editor.

The Ninevites were some of the *worst* people. Jonah was either so afraid of them or thought they were so hopelessly lost that when God called him to go there, he went the *other way*. But Jonah did go and proclaim God's Word to them, he proclaimed God's offer of repentance to them. They responded in faith, and God withheld their due judgment. Remember the Ninevites' story next time someone describes God as one who lacks mercy in the Old Testament. The Ninevites so deserved their punishment that Jonah himself—a prophet of God, having seen many conversions—still believed God would condemn them after they repented. Jonah's lack of mercy in his story contrasts the overwhelming mercy and love God has for humanity.

"Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. [Jonah 3:8-10]

*The Easter egg symbolizes our ability to break out of the hardened, protective shell we've surrounded ourselves with...
[Siobhan Shaw]*

MARCH 28, 2024

PRAY

Written by Victoria Riollano, a contemporary ministry leader and author.

One way to show Godly love is to pray for one another. Often, in the world of social media Christians may use the words "praying for you" out of habit. After doing so, many walk away from the screen to never to pray or really think of the need brought forth. Yet, Christ prayed for His disciples (John 17:6-26). He also taught His disciples how to pray for one another and how to see God's miracles take place. Prayer was not just a good idea, but we see Jesus praying for people throughout His ministry on earth. When we pray for others (intercession), we come into agreement for their healing, peace and comfort. Is there any greater love than to seek the Father on someone else's behalf? Again, this act of love is another opportunity to care about another person's need, even above our own.

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. [James 5:16]

MARCH 29, 2024

BURDEN OF THE CROSS

Written by Celeste Bailey, from The Village Church

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit Israel with SAT-7. It was a lifetime experience that brought a renewed spiritual awakening in me. To visit actual places where many Biblical events took place brought a new meaning of Scripture - it became alive! One of the highlights of the trip was walking through Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, which represents the path that Jesus took to His crucifixion. Via Dolorosa means 'sorrowful way' in Latin or 'way of suffering'. What struck me the most was the stone handprint at Station Five of the Via Dolorosa (photo above). Jesus may have stumbled and reached out His hand on the wall for support as He was carrying the heavy cross to a point that Simon of Cyrene had to help him. As it is written in Luke 23:26 "As they led Him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus." As I placed my hand on the stone handprint, I was overwhelmed by grief for what Jesus had to endure because of His unconditional love for me and the world. My grief was followed by a quick prayer thanking Him for His sacrifice. As I recall that experience, I am reminded of Matthew 16:24 "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Jesus denied Himself for my sake. Am I ready to deny myself and share the burden of the cross for Him?

Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the skull [John 19:17]

MARCH 30, 2024

JESUS DIED THAT MAN MIGHT LIVE

Written by Divinah Nyabera, a contemporary writer.

After his fall from the Garden of Eden, man was condemned to death. God, in His fullness of love and mercy, set out a plan to save, redeem, and exalt the fallen humankind...Jesus left the glory of heaven to die so that man could be saved. Jesus preached the gospel to the poor, healed the brokenhearted, set the captives free, and caused the blind to see and the lame walk. Love, mercy and compassion were His way of life. He became a man that He might reach man's needs. Jesus on His earthly journey always spoke the truth, but in love. He was never rude, nor did He utter a severe word to a sensitive soul... It was in His mission to save humankind that Jesus lived, suffered, and died. God permitted His beloved son to come down from the Heavenly glory to a sinful world darkened with the shadow of death. The son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He felt a separation from His father in heaven. The burden of sin broke the heart of the son of God. God made this great sacrifice because of the great love for man. His begotten son was the medium through which He could pour His infinite love for fallen humankind ... The agony of Gethsemane, the death on Calvary, the heart of infinite love, paid the price of salvation...What matchless love!

For God loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life [John 3:16]

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday, February 25 | At the close of 10:30 AM Worship
villagechurch.org/congregational-meeting

NEW MEMBERS EXPLORATION LUNCHEON

Sunday, March 3 | 11:45 AM
villagechurch.org/special-events/new-members-class

EGGSTRAVAGANZA

Saturday, March 23 | 9:00 AM
villagechurch.org/eggstravaganza

BRANCH BBQ

Saturday, March 23 | 12:00 PM
villagechurch.org/help-serve-homeless

PALM SUNDAY BREAKFAST

Sunday, March 24 | Following Both Services
villagechurch.org/palm-sunday-breakfast

PALM SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, March 24 | 9:00 & 10:30 AM
villagechurch.org/visit/special-events/palm-sunday-240324

AUGUSTANA CHOIR CONCERT

Monday, March 25 | 7:00 PM
villagechurch.org/2024-concert-series/augustana-choir

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, March 28 | 7:00 PM
villagechurch.org/maundy-thursday

EASTER

Sunday, March 31 | 7:00, 9:00, & 11:00 AM
villagechurch.org/easter

AMOR MEXICO MISSIONS TRIP

Saturday, April 6 | 7:00 AM - 7:00 PM

SPRING CHORAL CONCERT

Sunday, April 14 | 7:00 PM
villagechurch.org/spring-choral-concert