



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



MARCH 5 – APRIL 17, 2025



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 contemplate each day of the Lenten season. Many of the devotionals were written by a member of the congregation, reflecting ways that they see Jesus at work in the world. Others are from other published sources. These devotionals are intended to help prepare our hearts and minds for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

MARCH 5, 2025 ASH WEDNESDAY

PREPARING FOR EASTER

Written by Allan Anderson of the Village Church

In today's world, how do today's Christians prepare for Easter? The answer to this question goes way beyond knowing Crucifixion and Resurrection dominates our thoughts, when remembering this season of the church year. How many individuals fully understand the sacrifice and future promise offered for all, nearly 2000 years ago? Parental education, media, dedication and understanding continue to be a challenge in this modern world! Efforts to change this trend has become even a greater challenge in today's societal pressures. Holy week, Good Friday and the entire weekend are featured in their entirety in movies like "The Greatest Story ever told" ---the power and intensity of the possible outcomes resulting from daily faith, spiritual understanding and commitment to following Jesus's lead in our lives has lost some of its intensity and this has impacted daily life throughout the U.S. and the world. The issue has not gone unrecognized, but the dilution of our personal commitment coupled with outside distortion continues to offer an exciting chance for rebirth and redirection to both confirm our faith and to continue sharing this amazing piece of history, not only at Easter but throughout the year.

Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 3:13-14]

What if we view this desert time of Lent as not just a time to reflect or to lament or to confess or to fast, but a time where we learn to be free. [Megan Westra]

MARCH 6, 2025

LENT AS A PROJECT

Written by Alicia Britt Chole, a contemporary author, speaker, and mentor. Today's devotion is from her book "40 Days of Decrease."

Lent is often, and understandably, described with project language. The season has a starting date, an ending date, and clear, quantifiable goals "to accomplish" in between. After Easter, consequently, we evaluate Lent with project language. We "did okay" or "only made it two weeks" or "kept our commitment" or "totally failed." Whether engaging this experience prior to Easter, or at another time during the year, from day one, I invite you to consider Lent as less of a project and more of a sojourn. A sojourn is a "temporary stay at a place."⁴ And a "stay" is about presence, not productivity. For the next forty days, fast measuring your "success" statistically — that is, resist calculating how often you keep your commitment to do without meat or sugar or your favorite shows. Instead, invest your energy in seeking to remain present to the sacred history of Jesus' walk to the cross. With each reading, dust off your childhood imagination and "stay" in each story. Observe Jesus' response to John's death. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples trying in vain to hush blind Bartimaeus. Throw your only cloak under the colt's hooves as Jesus enters Jerusalem. Taste the mounting tension as Jesus offends leaders with parables. Hear Jesus predict Peter's denial. Fast Lent as a project and enter Lent as experience, as a sojourn with your Savior.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. [Psalm 51:16–17]

MARCH 7, 2025

CREATIVE BRIDGE MAKING

Written by Stan Kruis, a contemporary retired missionary in the Philippines.

One highlight of our ministry in the Philippines was to work with young adults in discipleship. A group on Negros Island developed an evangelistic team that they called Halieus ("Fishermen"). They practiced pantomime presentations (sometimes in our home) portraying the gospel story. Then they worked with churches to hold rallies in local neighborhoods where they presented the pantomimes. A shiver would go up and down my spine when I watched them. God used them to open the hearts of people for whom words alone were inadequate. One reason why some people groups have not been reached, or have not responded to the gospel, is that typical strategies are not effective with them. To bridge those barriers, we need to understand the people and their culture more deeply, and to find creative strategies that can reach their hearts. That can also be true close to home, with people who live with us and around us.

[Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. [Matthew 9:37-38].

MARCH 8, 2025

PRAYER IN ACTION

Written by Vickie Stone of the Village Church..

In 2020 I received a phone call that my name was suggested to fill in as a deacon for someone that had to step back from their role. I felt so busy yet I prayed on it, and felt compelled to serve. COVID times had me feeling as if the Holy Spirit was inviting me to accept an opportunity for this new path of service. After my 15 months I agreed to serve another 3 years. Learning my role of having a flock, (church members assigned to me that I checked in with for needs and their prayer concerns) I attended monthly meetings and joined the prayer ministry team. It was overwhelming, the amount of prayers that were needed by so many. Early on, I confided in Pastor Jan Farley of my feelings of being overwhelmed since praying didn't feel like it was enough. I would get emotionally exhausted thinking of how many people were hurting, especially the health prayers, as it took me back to my personal anguish of when my sister had cancer. Pastor Farley helped me by reassuring me that praying was enough, and with our prayers, our goal was to release it into the care and the hands of God for "His will be done." Jesus modeled that we should pray earnestly, often, and with hopeful faith. His time on earth was limited, but He prioritized getting away by Himself to pray. Life can be so difficult. We may not always receive what we ask for, but we can be sure that God is working in and through every prayer. My hope was and is, that people felt/feel the prayers lifted on their behalf. And I pray still for the current Deacons as they serve their flocks, demonstrating Jesus's work in action.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. [Ephesians 6:18]

MARCH 9, 2025

WHEN NATURE STRIKES

Written by Sergei Sosedkin, a contemporary Russian language ministry leader.

On March 11, 2011, a powerful earthquake struck the Pacific coast of Japan. It triggered a massive tsunami with waves that engulfed entire towns. Over 20,000 people lost their lives, and tens of thousands were displaced. In just a few weeks the members of my denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, raised over a million dollars to help those in need. Our relief agency, World Renew, used funds effectively, thanks to a partnership with Japanese Christians. Our media outreach, Back to God Ministries International, began producing a special radio program in the Japanese language to bring spiritual comfort to those living in the affected area. Natural

calamities in faraway communities challenge us and trigger all kinds of responses. Some people prefer to do nothing. Others limit their involvement to a pious prayer and theological reflection. Still others start blaming God. We, as Christians, are called to do good and share with those in need. We serve and worship a God who always reaches out in love and compassion. That's why we have to go beyond condolences and kind wishes. If we truly know his saving grace, it is only natural for us to reach out to hurting people with a helping hand and caring heart.

Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. [Hebrews 13:15-16]

MARCH 10, 2025

GOD USED IT

Written by Kevin DeRaaf, a contemporary director of Resonate Global Mission.

Johnny is a missionary I work with who served for several years in Haiti. Because of the political struggles and increased violence there, he came back to the United States with his family. It was a difficult transition. How do you leave behind the colleagues and friends you love dearly? How do you process the trauma of living in such an unsettled environment? But as Johnny and his wife began to settle and heal, they discovered a remarkable thing. Thousands of Haitians had also moved to where he and his family were now living, and God was creating opportunities for them to minister among the Haitian community right where they were. So now Johnny is working with a Haitian pastor to raise up Haitian leaders and plant Haitian churches. They have a dream to launch 10 new Haitian church plants in the next few years! God took a painful situation and used it to open up new opportunities in North America! God did something like that with the early Christians too—like Philip, who was forced to flee to Samaria. In all kinds of situations, the Holy Spirit continues to spread the good news of Jesus in surprising ways around the world.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. [Acts 8:4]

MARCH 11, 2025

FINDING YOUR MISSION RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE

Written by Tim Tebow, a contemporary former NFL quarterback.

Twenty-three-year-old Jaden Barr has had Type 1 diabetes since he was 15 years old, as well as recurring cholesteatoma, which has resulted in hearing loss in both ears. While he admits he has fallen short time and time again, Jaden aspires to live what I call a “mission-possible life”: a life that glorifies God through living out his unique purpose. I had the opportunity to spend a few days with Jaden in 2015. Part of my mission was to encourage him, but by the end of our time together, he was the one encouraging me! It's funny how God works that way so often...Jaden told me, “God created me with a

purpose: to know Him and to make Him known. It's easy to fall into the temptation of thinking life is about me and my plans, but I'm always reminded that the mission I've been given by God is much bigger and better than any worldly pursuit. By giving God control over my plans and following His instead, it makes the work I do have meaning and significance."... Even at his young age, my friend Jaden has the wisdom to point out the dangers of me-centric living. This is tempting for all of us, no matter how young or old, no matter if you're a parent or a preacher, a student or a teacher, a web creator or a music maker. I love what Jaden once shared with me: "You'll end up empty if you make life or your mission about yourself. I feel most fulfilled and in line with my purpose when I'm looking outside of myself and my own desires and putting that energy into pouring into others. When you look outside yourself, that's where true mission is found." This reminds me of the power and passion that comes when you are focusing your energy outside of yourself. I want to live each day more alive and more passionate because of what Jesus has done for me. The past — His death and resurrection — keeps me motivated in the present to change the future.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. [Ephesians 2:10]

Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves...What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out. [Catherine Doherty]

MARCH 12, 2025

NEIGHBORLY LOVE

Written by Judy Walters from the Village Church

How and when do I encounter Jesus in my everyday life? Especially since I live on a relatively quiet street with 2 cats for company. Let me count the ways! My neighbors are "Jesus" personified. First of all, having a plumber next door is an extraordinary gift—he has saved me from disaster more than once. Pat's wife loves to garden and presents me with the best pickles ever! Did Jesus ever make pickles? Then, there's Jane, a trained chef, a few doors down who drops by with delicious cookies for no reason! Another, really awesome guy has helped me and others in countless ways. Got the rattlesnake out of my backyard! Held my sweet 18-year-old dog as he crossed Rainbow Bridge. And spent the whole day in the ER with me as I cried in pain. Other kindly neighbors did my grocery shopping and walked my dog daily while I suffered from agonizing back pain. Obviously, I have been blessed in so many ways by these dear people. None of these neighbors expected anything in return. Their actions were not especially spiritual in nature. However, they show real LOVE, Agape Love.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. [1 Corinthians 10:24]

MARCH 13, 2025

A LIFE OF INVOLVEMENT

Written by Donald Macleod (1940-2023) a Scottish theologian. This is an excerpt from his book "A Faith to Live By: Understanding Christian Doctrine."

[Jesus] did not, as incarnate, live a life of detachment. He lived a life of involvement. He lived where he could see human sin, hear human swearing and blasphemy, see human diseases and observe human mortality, poverty and squalor. His mission was fully incarnational because he taught men by coming alongside them, becoming one of them and sharing their environment and their problems. For us, as individuals and churches in an affluent society, this is a great embarrassment. How can we effectively minister to a lost world if we are not in it? How can we reach the ignorant and the poor if we are not with them? How can our churches understand deprived areas if the church is not incarnate in the deprived areas? How can we be salt and light in the darkened ghettos of our cities if we ourselves don't have any effective contacts and relationships with the Nazareths of [our day]? We are profoundly unfaithful to this great principle of incarnational mission. The great Prophet came right alongside the people and shared their experience at every level. He became flesh and dwelt among us.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. [Philippians 2:5-7]

MARCH 14, 2025

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Written by Carole Holiday, a contemporary writer.

My doctor paused as she left the exam room, her hand on the door. She opened it a bit, then turned to offer a final prognosis. "There's a new chapter coming for you." I love how God provides encouragement in the unlikeliest of places. In my thin paper gown, I shivered — my body's involuntary response to her verbal gift that provided salve to my sore soul. My internist, a woman of my age, had listened well. Our conversation about aging, difficult diagnoses and caregiving had touched both of us, and she knew I was hurting both physically and emotionally. Some would say that in moments like this, we enter "thin places" — where the distance between heaven and earth diminishes and the two seemingly overlap. I found this in the sacred serendipity of another human hearing and seeing my heart and responding with empathy and understanding, as Jesus would. He reminds us in Luke's Gospel that the Kingdom of heaven is *already* superimposed over our earthly realm...Through image bearers of God, the Kingdom of heaven flourishes on earth. Every time we live like Jesus and point to His beauty, it's like we wander through heaven's gates and offer a bit of its mystery and wonder to our fallen world. I sense this most in encouragement from His saints: the kind word, the

unexpected message, the text from a friend on a gray day when my faith is shaky. On those days, I find myself whispering, *God, I need to **see** You today.* And then a P.S.: *God, I need the strength to **show** You today.* As if I'm pausing at the door, prying it open just enough to usher the Kingdom of heaven into the broken places.

The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst. [Luke 17:20-21]

MARCH 15, 2025

GOD'S PRESENCE

From the Heartlight devotional website.

God can be seen in my home when I love those in my family. The Father of the universe lives in my church, and his presence can be recognized when I love those in my church family. Almighty God's love is recognizable in my life when I love those around me and when we choose to be loving instead of petty, unforgiving, critical, and harsh to our brothers and sisters in Christ. God reveals his presence, power, and perfection in us! God is love; we reveal his presence when we do love each other.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. [1 John 4:12]

MARCH 16, 2025

GRAVEYARDS

Written by Lyn Lloyd-Smith from the Village Church

I love graveyards. There is so much to be learned about a community in reading the headstones and seeing families buried together through the generations. I love researching birth, marriage and death certificates, and following family lines through history. And yet, my heart breaks a little every time I see the deaths of so many small children, taken by epidemic and infection, diseases not seen today. This was brought home to me in January when I was helping a friend with her family tree and discovered that between 1920 and 1930 her great-grandfather had lost 7 of his grandchildren, as babies and toddlers, to diphtheria, whooping cough and pneumonia. While doing this research two of my own grandchildren, in the space of three weeks were in hospital on IV antibiotics, thanks to medical care they both recovered quickly and are back in good health. I thought of Matthew 10:8 where Jesus says "Heal the sick.... Freely you have received; freely give." Christians, in monasteries and homes, through the ages have sought to follow this calling but for many centuries their tools were of comfort and care, bringing the love of God to the sick and the dying; often there was little they could do practically. However, the rapid expansion of medical science and community health since the late 19th century, and particularly since the 1940s with the introduction of

widespread vaccination and antibiotics, has changed our world. Today I give thanks for the hand of God, the love of Jesus in the medical research, the scientists and doctors who have made this a healthier world for all our children.

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. [Matthew 10:8]

MARCH 17, 2025

A PRAYER OF SAINT PATRICK

Written by Saint Patrick, a 5th century Romano-British Christian missionary and bishop in Ireland.

*As I arise today,
may the strength of God pilot me,
the power of God uphold me,
the wisdom of God guide me.
May the eye of God look before me,
the ear of God hear me,
the word of God speak for me.
May the hand of God protect me,
the way of God lie before me,
the shield of God defend me,
the host of God save me.
May Christ shield me today.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,
Christ when I stand,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Amen..*

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. [Psalm 84:11]

The command to love and serve—not merely tolerate—each other requires more commitment and sacrifice than we care to give, and so we do the polite minimum from afar. The seasons of Lent and Easter bring thoughts of surrender and sacrifice.

[Nana Dolce]

MARCH 18, 2025

COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR THE NEEDY

Written by Phil Ware, a contemporary writer.

Jesus made clear that his ministry was to seek the lost, serve the broken, and save those imprisoned by their past as prophesied in the prophets. This meant he got involved in messy situations, helped "undeserving" people, associated with sinners, and sought out often forgotten people. Jesus' example here is crucial for us as we seek to be Jesus' bodily presence in the world as his disciples. As we follow his example, he promises us that we will meet him in those we serve!

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' [Matthew 25:40]

You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working and just so, you learn to love by loving. All those who think to learn in any other way deceive themselves. [Francis de Sales]

MARCH 19, 2025

OUR CALLING

Written by Chris Eggemeyer of the Village Church

I have found the last few years challenging. Our world feels darker, not just in the proliferation of war, hunger, and disease, but in more intimate, common ways. It feels as though hatred, anger, fear, and aggression run amok in our daily lives. I find my own life offering a great many small temptations to give into these feelings, some as simple as speaking ill of someone, or muttering angrily at a passing driver who fails to dim their brights at night. I increasingly find God's comfort and direction in Luke Chapter 6. It is a beautiful summary of our calling as believers. Jesus tells us that faith must extend beyond ourselves, reminding us that even those who do not believe can do good to those who do good to them. We, however, are called to love our enemies and do good to them without expecting anything back. To do this we must change from the inside. Jesus tells us that 'the mouth speaks what the heart is full of', and so I find God calling me, challenging me, to fill my heart with his goodness, his mercy, his charity, and his compassion.

People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the goods stored up in his heart, and an evil man bring evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. for the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. [Luke 6:44-46]

MARCH 20, 2025

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

Written by Jennifer Ayotte, a contemporary Communications Director.

I have been pondering my wilderness journey and my encounter with Christ. For some reason, I am saddened by the thought that I don't know the day of my very first encounter with Jesus. I didn't grow up in a family that attended church, but when I was a child, some men from a church in town knocked on our door and asked my dad if he'd want to let his kids go to church on the bus. He was thrilled to get rid of us for a few hours each weekend, so he happily agreed. I don't remember the day or age, but I do remember asking Jesus into my heart in a Sunday School class in that church as a child. My parents never did attend church and through some difficult family circumstances and moves, I did not get to go to church through most of my teen years. When I was a senior in high school—dealing with more difficult family issues—I asked a friend of mine who I knew went to church if I could go with her sometime. From that point on, her family picked me up and took me to church with them every Wednesday and Sunday. That church is where I fully committed my life to Christ. I know I was a senior in high school, but again, I don't know the actual date. In thinking about all of this, I've realized that I have had more than one encounter with Jesus throughout my life, and each one has been eye-opening and life-altering in different ways.

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. [Psalm 16:11]

What we see in Christ is sacrificial love. Merciful love. Love that values the well-being of others above itself. Love that will generously and fully pour itself out, whatever the cost, in order that the beloved might benefit, flourish and thrive.

[Krish Kandiah]

MARCH 21, 2025

AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST

Written by Ryan Maher, a contemporary writer and app developer.

Lord Jesus, please help me see the areas in my life where I do not represent you well. Help me to shine brightly today and put others first. My heart is to serve you every day of my life. Help me to honor you today. When people see me, I pray they see you. In your holy name Lord Jesus, amen.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [2 Corinthians 5:20]

MARCH 22, 2025

KALEIDOSCOPE

Written by Nina Pope of the Village Church.

There are 5 of them, full of charm that delights the heart, individual and unique in their gifts and talents, yet as a group cohesive. There is a clear sense of each personality with a visible affection and concern one for the other. They range in age from teen to elementary grades to a nearly three-year-old. They are our five grandsons. On a recent holiday weekend, they gathered in San Diego, the memory of which still warms the cockles of my grandmotherly heart. Miles separate their households so the opportunity to gather is limited, but when it arises, it is roughly equivalent to an occasion of state. The three-year-old is enchanted with the older cousins who lavish attention on him chatting, laughing, playing indoors or out. Activities almost always involve some version of building or other creative play. Noise and motion combine as different cousin combinations group, re-group then go on to the next exchange or activity. It is rather like a happy kaleidoscope where each distinctly colored piece brings its beauty to join in the fun of the moment, pauses, then whirls anew into a different, happy collaboration with a luster all its own. On and on, the kaleidoscope of personalities emerge, share their gift, then continue into a new array and experience. Palpable fun and affection bond these cousins. The true joy for the surrounding adults is watching the enduring relationships develop despite the miles that separate their daily lives. My heart swells as I see a reflection of God's love acted out on the family stage. God is all around us in ways minute and great. The blessings are plentiful and are ours for the savoring. NOTE: There is also a treasured granddaughter in the mix who was unable to join recently but who also brings her unique contribution to the kaleidoscope.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. [Psalm 127:3]

MARCH 23, 2025

GOD LOVED US FIRST

Written by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish philosopher and theologian.

You have loved us first, O God, alas!
We speak of it in terms of history
as if You loved us first but a single time,
rather than that without ceasing.

You have loved us first many times
and everyday and our whole life through.
When we wake up in the morning
and turn our soul toward You –
You were there first – You have loved us first;

if I rise at dawn and at that same second
turn my soul toward You in prayer,
You are there ahead of me, You have loved me first.

When I withdraw from the distractions
of the day and turn my soul toward You,
You are there first and thus forever.
And we speak ungratefully as if
You have loved us first only once.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins ... We love because he first loved us. [1 John 4:10, 19]

MARCH 24, 2026

SHINING LIGHT

Written by Rich Villodas, a contemporary author. This is an excerpt from his book "The Narrow Path."

Jesus looks into the eyes of his ragtag community and says, "You are the light." Of course, Jesus is *the* light. In John 8:12 he says, "I am the light of the world." But remarkably, he gives his students the same title. In the same way the moon reflects the light of the sun, Jesus is *the* light, inviting his followers to reflect his brilliance in a dark world. Our light might not shine as bright, but he knows that a little bit of light goes a long way. Like salt, light has many purposes. One of its primary purposes is to scatter darkness. Light helps us see. It makes things visible and reveals what would otherwise remain hidden. Light helps people find their way, especially to God. What a sacred calling!

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." [John 8:12]

MARCH 25, 2025

LOOK TOWARD HEAVEN

Written by Julie Riddle, a contemporary writer and editor.

Some of us may not be able to see the stars between all the buildings and streetlights. Others of us may see stars so often that we don't think to look up and gaze at them with wonder anymore. When was the last time you looked up at a sky full of stars and marveled at the Creator who made them? Abraham looked up at those stars thousands of years ago, and God Himself spoke. God promised Abraham a family of descendants that would outnumber the stars. Even more than that, One in Abraham's line would make the children of Abraham the children of God. In Jesus, born in the line of Abraham, all who believe in God are numbered with Abraham's descendants—and there are more

of us than there are stars in the sky. So the next time you look at the stars, think of God, who had the power and creativity to make them. And also think of all your brothers and sisters in Christ, who are so many they would outshine the heavenly bodies with the light of God's Word to a darkened world.

Look toward heaven, and number the stars. [Genesis 15:5]

MARCH 26, 2025

STAYIN' ALIVE = STAY IN THE LIGHT

Written by Susan Besser of the Village Church.

In the late 1970's my two 'tweenagers' were very fond of the Bee Gees, The catchy tune "Stayin' Alive" caught on in our home and soon I was singing the refrain along with my kids. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive". Only I sang the words as "Stay in the light, stay in the light". Have you ever been in a truly dark place? I was eleven when my father and I drove into the desert outside of Las Vegas to watch the above ground detonation of an atomic bomb. We left home at three in the morning and headed for Frenchman's Flat where we parked, stepped out of the car and peered into the inky black of a moonless night. Without a sound, a flash lit up the desert sky. The mountains, sage brush, our car all perfectly visible as if someone had switched on a light in a dark room. It looked like high noon in the desert. I was awestruck. Then it was dark again and a slow rumbling sound shook the ground, and the distinctive mushroom cloud rose in the distant skyline. When we live for Christ, we will glow like light, showing others what Christ is like. The world needs our light. Stay in the light.

*You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people **light** a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead **they** put it on its stand, and it gives **light** to everyone in **the** house. In **the** same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. [Matthew 5:14-16]*

MARCH 27, 2025

TASTE AND SEE

Written by Sarah Young, a contemporary author. This is an excerpt from her book "40 Days with Jesus: Celebrating His Presence"

Taste and see that I am good. The more intimately you experience Me, the more convinced you become of My goodness. I am the Living One who sees you and longs to participate in your life. I am training you to find Me in each moment and to be a channel of My loving Presence. Sometimes My blessings come to you in mysterious ways: through pain and trouble. At such times you can know My goodness only through your trust in Me. Understanding will fail you, but trust will keep you close to Me. Thank Me for the gift of My peace, a gift of such immense proportions that you cannot fathom its depth or breadth. When I appeared to My disciples after the resurrection, it was Peace

that I communicated first of all. I knew this was their deepest need: to calm their fears and clear their minds. I also speak Peace to you, for I know your anxious thoughts. Listen to Me! Tune out other voices, so that you can hear Me more clearly. I designed you to dwell in Peace all day, every day. Draw near to Me; receive My Peace.

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. [Psalm 34:8]

MARCH 28, 2025

AN EVIL GENERATION

Written by Robert Barron, a contemporary Catholic bishop. This is an excerpt from his book "Lenten Gospel Reflections.".

[In the] Gospel, some Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign. And Jesus replies, "No sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah," who was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, foreshadowing Jesus' death and Resurrection. Jonah was called by God to preach conversion to Nineveh, which is described as an enormously large city. It took, they said, three days to walk through it. I can't help but think of Nineveh as one of our large, modern cities, a center of all sorts of worldly activity and preoccupation. What would its conversion look like? A turning back to God as the only enduring good. After hearing the word of Jonah, the Ninevites "proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth" (Jon. 3:5). What is the purpose of these ascetic practices? To wean people away from an attachment to worldly pleasures. Go beyond the mind that you have. Repent. Live as though nothing in this world finally matters. And you will be living in the kingdom of God!

This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. [Luke 29-30]

MARCH 29, 2025

GOD AND OUR CHURCH

Written by Ruth Grendell of the Village Church.

Upon arriving on the church campus, I see and feel the Spirit of Jesus in the beauty of the plants and flowers lovingly cared for. I see His work on the church patio as we greet each other and learning about the outreach projects. I see Jesus at work in my world when I visit the children's study room as they share their projects, tell me what they have learned about Jesus, and when they are chosen to light the candles in the sanctuary that morning. I see Jesus in the custodians as they work hard behind the scenes, always with smiles & joyful hearts (and big hugs!). As I enter the sanctuary I'm reminded and amazed by the technical expertise the Media Ministry provides which enhances the services and programs throughout the campus. As the ushers greet me His Spirit is felt there too, and as I walk through the aisles to my favorite pew. He works

through Susie and others who play the organ or the piano, through the beauty of the music the choir sings, and through the joyful performances of The Bell Ringers. His Spirit is present as the speaker reads the scriptures, and as we observe & participate in baptisms, and in taking communion. His Spirit speaks to the congregation through the Pastor's sermon. His Spirit is felt throughout the week in the fellowship of Bible Study and Academy Class, and as I look forward to returning to church the next Sunday.

The Lord is my Rock, my Fortress, and my Deliverer. [2 Samuel 22:4]

MARCH 30, 2025

LENTEN TRADITION

Written by Julian Linnell, a contemporary pastor.

Throughout history, the traditions of Lent have been based in community. For the first Christians, Lent was an occasion to ready themselves for Holy Week and Easter through repentance and fasting. New believers were prepared and instructed for baptism. Believers who had been separated from their community due to notorious sins were offered the opportunity to be reconciled. The entire fellowship of the church was impacted as the gospel was preached and lived out through repentance, forgiveness, faith and pardon. It would have been unthinkable to do this alone. Likewise, there are contemporary reasons for why our journey through Lent is most impactful when undertaken as a community. It can be easy for many Christians today to focus exclusively on celebration and success. While Jesus' victory over sin, death and Satan should always be central to believers, lament, suffering and injustice also mark our spiritual journey. Through the Holy Spirit, believers in one place can learn, identify and empathize with believers in many other parts of the world, sharing in their suffering. Observed in local and global community, Lent can provide a corrective to a thin Christianity that isolates believers from complexities that are inherent to life on earth, as well as from the meaning of the cross.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. [1 Corinthians 12:12, 26]

MARCH 31, 2025

GOD'S LOVE IN ACTION

Written by Terrance Gattis, a contemporary pastor and the chaplain for Habitat for Humanity.

While speaking about love, Mother Teresa offered these words: "Love cannot remain by itself — it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service." Mother Teresa's words remind us that love is not a noun, but rather a verb. Love is not measured by what we say. It's measured by the actions we take and the service we render... The practice of putting God's love into action is what Habitat [for Humanity]'s

mission is all about. When we bring people together to build homes, communities and hope, not only are we helping God's people by providing decent places to live, but we are also responding to the love that God has shown us by putting His love into action. I was recently in Hendersonville, North Carolina, to speak at a prayer breakfast that was hosted by our Henderson County affiliate. I was blessed to see the new community that the affiliate has constructed, a community of 114 families and 400 children that includes parks, playgrounds and walking trails. When reflecting upon all the great work that this affiliate has accomplished, one can easily hear the words as recorded in the book of Hebrews: "God will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them."

God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them. [Hebrews 6:10]

APRIL 1, 2025

GUIDE ME TO SERVE YOU

Written by Joshua Steward, a contemporary student. This is an excerpt from Baylor University's 2020 Lenten Devotional Guide.

Lord Jesus. Guide me to be your disciple and serve you. Remind me daily of the love you showed for me on the cross. Remind me that you called me to share this wonderful love with others. Use me. All of me. My trials. My circumstances. My abilities. Every part of me. To bring others closer to you. So that they can share in this amazing love. In your most precious name, Amen!

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. [Matthew 4:21-22]

APRIL 2, 2025

CONNECTION TO GOD

Written by Linda Bailey, a contemporary pastor.

In the lead up to Easter we are reminded of this incredible sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us. And if we truly let that message sink into our souls, we cannot help but see that there is nothing on this earth that could ever offer us the love, acceptance, grace and mercy that God extends to each of us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That, while all the messages of our culture sound appealing on the surface, Jesus sacrificed everything so that our lives could have true meaning – being in an intimate relationship with God. When our relationship with God is restored through His mercy and grace, we can't help but respond by replicating Jesus' actions. We too can "take the very nature of a servant" and work alongside God to help all of creation

restore their relationship with their Creator. Any time we show God’s love, mercy and grace we are opening a window for people to see His face.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. [Hebrews 4:15-16]

We need to take time to connect with the poor, resist our unceasing cravings, and pray. But we also need to gather with friends and family, share in God’s good provision, eat delicious food, tell stories that encourage us all, and celebrate the risen Lord. [Chris Seay]

APRIL 3, 2025

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Written by Kathy Loftman of the Village Church

A long time ago and in a place far away, I had the opportunity to be a volunteer youth counselor at my church for the 8th and 9th graders. When I was in 8th and 9th grade, we had a very small, struggling youth group. Our 8th and 9th grade group 8 years later had about 100 persons that attended each week. We had an exciting and meaningful journey learning about and growing in God’s love. Although we all went our different ways after high school, this group has stayed together over the years. This is a very special group that shares a sense of common purpose of following Jesus, accepting differences of opinions and expressions, providing a safe space for conversation, providing honesty and loving support where deep conversations can be shared no matter how long we have been apart. Once a month on Sunday evenings many of us who can get together on Zoom and chat. In November, we learned that one of our “flock” has been diagnosed with stage four cancer and underwent surgery. Unfortunately, Stacy is now in hospice facing the last days of her life on this earth and is saying goodbye to her friends for now. We have been showering her with love through visits, emails, chats, cards, and many, many prayers. We look forward to that day when we will all be reunited. I will always treasure the special relationships that we share. I am so blessed to be a part of “us.”

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. [Romans 12:5]

APRIL 4, 2025

RESTORED HOPE

Written by Ben Chong, a contemporary Christian leadership coach.

I came to faith as a justice warrior. And I probably loved justice far more than I loved Jesus. I wanted all of those great parts of the kingdom, but I wasn't really sure if I was okay with the king. I poured so much of my life out in the name of peace and justice, unity and compassion. But I was also seeming to grow in anger and despair and frustration and cynicism and bitterness; I was still dividing people into kind or cruel, or good or bad, or right or wrong. I was still drawing lines and labelling people based on my perception of their political, theological beliefs, economic status, whatever. There was this real self-righteousness; I was deciding I could play God's role, the Judge. A mentor of mine once reflected on their own journey through this stuff. He said, 'I realized that I could never truly be part of God's restoration of all things if the primary way I'm operating is to tear things and people down.' I think that's a real challenge as we pursue restoration. Because without the hope of Jesus, we can get so fixated on what's wrong, on all of creation groaning. And then it's also really easy to attribute those wrongs to specific people, to blame and label, and we can forget that our own restoration too needs to be part of the restoration of all things. We're called to love incarnationally, to embody love...If Christians have planted themselves so deeply in Christ, that the fruit that they bear is joy amidst lament – they can do both! – and hope amidst despair. They can forgive amidst hurt and they can have peace amidst fear and embody love amidst hate. How beautiful!

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. [John 1:14 The Message]

APRIL 5, 2025

GRACE UPON GRACE

Written by Paul David Tripp, a contemporary pastor, speaker, and author. This is an excerpt from his book "Journey to the Cross: A 40-Day Lenten Devotional,"

The cross teaches us that God offers us the one thing that no other person or thing can. He offers us the grace of forgiveness. He offers us the grace of welcome into relationship with him. He offers us the grace of personal transformation. He offers us the grace of a new identity and new potential. He offers us the grace of a glorious and fully secured destiny. Yes, it is true, he offers us grace upon grace!

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. [Galatians 2:20]

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

APRIL 6, 2025

TWO STEP

Written by Foster Smith

I spent a year in El Paso, Texas, as a missionary in 1975 and 1976. A great place to witness was the Red Dog Saloon. To my surprise the entire place formed a large circle and began to dance. The Texas two-step was the call, and off we went. If you only did one step the circle swallowed you, but if you did two steps together the night was a success. Our Christian journey is outlined by Paul as “two step: “ Step one: seek those things which are above and set your mind on the things above. Step two: put to death your old ways: sexual immorality, uncleanness, out-of-control passions, evil desires and covetousness, which is idolatry. Our journey is not putting a Christian veneer over our old fleshly ways. Put those ways to death by the internal power of his Holy Spirit, and you will become a new creation. Join the dance and be sure to make it “a two step.”

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. [Colossians 3:1-5]

APRIL 7, 2025

MY CHURCH HOME

Written by Joann Melton from the Village Church.

When I was searching for a place to worship, I went to many churches. One Sunday morning, I walked into the open doors of the Village Church. I may have been about five steps inside before I was warmly and genuinely welcomed with a handshake and a “Welcome!” That was a great start. When I stepped into the sanctuary I couldn’t move. My eyes were drawn to the Trinity Window. I have no words to describe the feeling I had at that moment, but I can tell you that it was a very special experience for me. I found my place in a pew. Someone turned and said “Good Morning!”, and we chatted a bit. At that moment I knew I was “Home”. It didn’t take long before I was invited to join Women’s Bible Study, but this one is special, because it is led by the pastors. Over the years this activity has enriched my life in so many ways and I am forever grateful for the guidance and knowledge they share. There is such joy in this church! Each year the women gather at Christmas and Spring for fellowship and comradery. It is so beautifully done, and each one is better than the last one. Every year our children and grandchildren of the church and the community gather with their families and friends for breakfast. Pastor Jack reads the Christmas Story, and teenagers in the church dress as Mary and Joseph, shepherds and Wise Men to bring the story of the birth of the Christ Child to life. At Easter, the story of the Crucifixion of Christ is read, and the children learn and see Jesus on the cross and are told how this came to be. In the summer, the children are invited to learn more about Jesus at Vacation Bible School. The church campus becomes a joy-filled place for all. Our Middle and High Schoolers

are taught about the life of Jesus. They share in helping our community by serving meals and gathering canned goods and other items for those who need these things. They gather during the summers to travel to other countries, or places in our area, to serve communities that need their help desperately. Many of our members also make journeys to other countries, not only to bring much needed help, such as building homes, constructing ways to bring clean water to their towns, providing medical care and supplies, but much more. In doing these things, our members show their selfless willingness to provide help to others, shine a light on their lives, and bring the word of Jesus to them. When you walk up to the open doors of the Village Church on Sunday Morning, you will be greeted with a smile and a sincere “Good Morning! Welcome!” You will find your place in a pew. Your neighbors will also share a good morning greeting. The organ will begin to play, and it begins! Our Pastor Jack welcomes us, and we greet him back. There are smiles all around. And, soon, we hear the organ once again, but this time there are voices, like angels, filling every space in this sanctuary! It is exhilarating. We then greet each other with the words “Peace be with you” and as a response, “And also with you”, one of my favorite things. We hear the words that Pastor Jack brings to us. We sing together and we pray together. I look up at the beautiful Trinity Window and I know that Jesus is with me and with all of us. Not only in this sanctuary, but he walks with me as I go about my life. Our church, the Village Church, isn’t just the beautiful building where we worship together. It’s the beginning of our journey with Jesus. We are a congregation that shares our talents, our resources, our friendship, and our compassion. The doors to the Village Church are open. All you have to do is come in. You will be welcomed. And, you will be in good hands, because Jesus is here waiting for you.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. [Matthew 18:20]

APRIL 8, 2025

THE FIRST MISSIONARY

Written by Billy Graham (1918-2018), an American evangelist, minister, and civil rights advocate.

Jesus Himself was the first missionary! He did not sit by passively and let those who happened to be interested in His teaching come to Him. He went out where the sick, the sorrowing, and the sad were, and expounded His message of joy, healing, and salvation. Even at a tender age, He went to the Temple and “taught” the doctors and lawyers who were entrenched in the old traditions. He found His way to the seaside and intruded upon the life of the commonest of laborers, saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Wherever He went He challenged, uprooted, and changed men. And at length they nailed Him to a cross because He had upset their selfish, secure, smug way of life. Not only was Jesus a missionary, but He pledged His followers to be missionaries, too!

Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. [Matthew 4:19]

APRIL 9., 2025

ENCOUNTERING GOD

Written by the First15 ministry group, which helps people spend the first fifteen minutes of their day focusing on their growing relationship with God.

One of the most important pieces of spending time with God is encountering his presence. His presence is meant to be at the core of all that we do. God so hated separation from us that Jesus was sent to pay the ultimate price. And at Jesus's death the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from mankind was torn in two—signifying that God's presence was no longer contained but made available to everyone. God's presence is everywhere. There is nowhere you could go that he won't be with you. There is no situation, conversation, job or place in which you can't meet with God... Encountering God is similar to encountering another person. I don't seek an experience with a friend; I simply seek to know him by spending time with him and gain an experience as a result. I don't seek to hear the voice of a friend; I simply engage in conversation with him as an act of wanting to know him and hear his voice as a result... Scripture is clear that God is everywhere and that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. His presence is already with you. Encountering him is as simple as taking some time to become aware of his nearness. God longs for you to know him. So great is his desire to meet with you Spirit to spirit, heart to heart, that Jesus gave his life. Take time to simply seek God. Meditate on his word. Allow Scripture to fill your heart with faith. And make space to rest in God's presence that your heart might come alive at the revelation of his nearness.

"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" And Psalm 84:3-4 says, "Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!" [Psalm 139:7-8]

APRIL 10, 2025

JOY IN HIS PRESENCE

Written by Ana Wright, a student and writer.

The joy that God brings us is different. It does not come from whatever circumstances we may be in but through our faith and hope in Christ. We can have comfort in knowing that we are in his presence through every obstacle and triumph we experience. His presence and peace give us strength and security as he anchors our souls through life's tribulations. The joy that he gives us is far greater than the joy we could ever receive from the world. God's presence is experienced through your heart. No matter where we may turn or which road we follow, he is there. Living in God's presence isn't reserved for special moments or specific places. The joy within God's presence is true and lasting. In times when you may forget or be distracted, remember, reflect, and give thanks to God for always being there with us.

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. [Psalm 16:11]

APRIL 11, 2025

GOD AMID THE RANUNCULAS

Written by Margot Wallace of the Village Church

A few weeks during Lent bodacious flowers spread vibrant hues on a 50-acre hillside in Carlsbad Ranch. The dazzling Giant Tecolote Ranunculus blooms to create a rainbow of color facing West. Each Spring I visit these flowers to reflect upon the beauty of this display. I humbly try to capture their brilliance through photography and paint. At this time of year, the Earth gives up its nutrients to prepare seeds for growth. Dirt is the most important factor - enabling these incredible plants to surface.

After a cold winter, the blooms appear in blazing color for all to enjoy! Think of all the life giving ingredients we reap from this fine soil, enabling all life forms on our planet to thrive! Lent is a time of reflection, service, and prayer. In our journey here we are privileged to reflect upon this magnificent garden. In praise and prayer we develop a closer relationship to God, and, serve others through acts of charity.



Painted by Margot Wallace

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. [Matthew 6:28-29]

APRIL 12, 2025

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ME?

Written by Meredith Houston Carr, a contemporary writer.

I'd read accounts of Yosemite National Park's beauty, but seeing it for myself felt electrifying. With eyes wide, I tried to absorb the grandeur set before me. The massive rock formation El Capitan rose high into a cerulean sky, its monstrous granite face basking in the sun. The waters of Bridalveil Fall roared with authority, and the peak known as Half Dome stretched upward, shrouding itself in clouds. All this splendor made it clear: God's presence lives among this land, His fingerprint evident on every breathtaking peak. And yet my heart struggled to reconcile how a God who created such majesty could let crushing heartache into my family. Just before this trip, my son received a diagnosis identifying special needs that would change his life and my family's

life forever. We found ourselves thrust onto a hard road we neither anticipated nor desired. It felt like God was asking me to scale one of these peaks with no equipment, and I couldn't help but wonder, *God, are You here with me? Have You forgotten about us?* Maybe you're asking the same questions. In your marriage, family, work or health, you struggle to see evidence of God's activity. As you wipe away endless tears, you may wonder if He's with you — and if He *truly* has your best interests in mind... If we're honest, we know we often conclude that we must be on our own when we see only desert rocks and unscalable mountains in our path. When human solutions are absent, we often assume God's presence must be absent, too. But the next time we face a crisis, we can make a different choice! In Matthew 28:20, Jesus promises to be with us — *always*. So when trouble comes, we can pause, take a deep breath and choose to acknowledge the unshakeable reality of God's presence. We can also cultivate the habit of shifting our eyes *from* the obstacle *to* the God who will sustain us through it. Fixing our gaze on Jesus frees us to experience God's provision in surprising ways. We can refuse to let our human expectations form a barrier to God's divine workings. It's been years since my son's difficult diagnosis — and while special-needs parenting hasn't been an easy road, I can confidently say God has never left our side. Time and again, He's shown up for us in ways my mind couldn't comprehend. *And He wants to do the same for you, dear one.* Today, will you choose to look for God's presence along your desert road? The rock you keep tripping over may just be the tool God uses to demonstrate His sustaining presence in your life.

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. [Matthew 28:20]

***You do not need to wallow in guilt. Wallow in the mercy of God.
[John Vianney]***

APRIL 13, 2025

WITH US ALWAYS

Written by Claire Gibson, a contemporary writer.

God's presence is a mysterious concept. At times, I've felt His closeness like a breath on my cheek. Other times, I've had to trust that His nearness is truth—regardless of my emotions or circumstances. If I trust Jesus, then I must take Him at His Word, and He tells me over and over again through Scripture that He will not leave me behind, He will always be present, and even when He is not physically present, the Holy Spirit will stand in the gap. ... Often, I can be tricked into believing that in order for me to experience God's presence, I need a plush upholstered chair, a window that emits plentiful natural light, a cup of just-brewed coffee, a journal, and a good pen. *Silence.* But God is present with me, even when I am not aware of Him. And if God is always with me, then He is with me in the chaos of the day, just as much as He is in the precious moments of morning quiet. Jesus is with you too—today, yesterday, and forever. No matter what

you're facing. No matter the sorrow, past or present, He is here—grieving with us, celebrating with us, growing and filling us with His Spirit, and helping us take steps forward with hope. There is no checklist of calm or solitude required for God's presence to attend to your weary soul. He is here now. He is with you, always. His presence flows into your heart, whether you feel it or not, whether you see it or not.

The one who keeps his commands remains in him, and he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us. [1 John 3:24]

APRIL 14, 2025

JESUS IS WORKING IN ALTADENA

Written by Julie MacNeil of the Village Church

The little town of Altadena, California sits on a hill at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains. The majestic peaks rise high above and are Altadena's crowning glory. Once there was nothing but poppy fields, but now neighborhoods populate the hill town. Some parts are like forests, where the stately deodar firs line many streets. It is a town where families have lived for generations, and neighbors know neighbors. Altadena was my hometown. Our family owned the house on Athens for 67 years, selling it, after my mother passed away, to a family much like the one who bought it in 1947, a young couple with a little girl, and a boy on the way. My brother and I handed them the keys with tears in our eyes. Then last January 7th, vicious winds swept up from Eaton Canyon with diabolical force, bending trees nearly parallel to the ground. Sparks turned into flames, merciless until they had destroyed everything in their path and there was nothing left to burn, leaving much of Altadena as desolate as a battlefield, the epitome of scorched earth. It was then that Jesus made his way through the rubble and poured out his love. He poured it out in tears of the residents, in hugs and in kindness. There were no strangers in Altadena that week. Neighbors shared what they had. Families took in families. Restaurants gave away food. Folks who had never heard of the little town at the top of the hill became friends of the people in Altadena who had lost everything they owned. And the people learned that they hadn't really lost everything at all. They still had the love of Jesus. My brother's family and mine still love that house on Athens, and feel that it remains part of us. All the memories are still there, the Christmas parties, the fun with cousins of three generations, wedding and baby showers. My brother over the years remodeled the kitchen, 2 bathrooms, built cabinets in the family room and kept up repairs for our mother, when she lived there alone. So we feel a great connection to the young couple who must start over and create new memories out of the rubble. Curiously, the little grey wooden mailbox that my brother made, with white trim and shingles, just like the house, was left unscathed by the flames. It even had mail in it! To me it is a sign that their home will be restored. Next week we will go to Altadena to reconnect with this family and share the love of Jesus with them.

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. [Psalm 34:18]

APRIL 15, 2025

THE GENTLE KNOCK

Written by Paul Bane and Matt Litton, contemporary authors. This is an excerpt from their book "In the Presence of Jesus."

There is something invasive about even a loved one coming into the intimacy of your home. It can be extremely stressful to try to get your house perfect before someone visits. But consider the profound revelation that the God of the universe did not wait for you to come to Him, but He patiently waits outside your door. The truth is that Jesus longs to be invited into every moment of your life, whether you are experiencing stress, worry, grief, or joy. He wants to bring His presence and unconditional love to every aspect of your existence. As you go through the busyness of this day, quiet yourself to listen for Jesus' gentle knock. Consider what anxiety, need, relationship, and moment He is patiently waiting for you to release to Him. What areas of your life are you trying to keep hidden from Christ?

Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends. [Revelation 3:20]

*The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist.
[Gregory the Great]*

APRIL 16, 2025

GOD PURSUES US

Written by Joni Eareckson Tada, a contemporary author. This is an excerpt from her book "The Practice of the Presence of Jesus."

Our great King is eager to pour favor on his children. He does not wait for us to come to him; he seeks us out. He is actively pursuing us...God pursues us with goodness by giving us things we haven't earned, such as warm friendships, food on the table, peace and safety in our streets, jobs to do and encouraging words over cups of coffee. God pursues us with mercy by not giving us what we have earned, such as judgment. He is quick to forgive and overflowing with love, all because of Jesus. God never grows weary of pouring out mercy and goodness

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. [Psalm 23:6]

APRIL 17, 2025 MAUNDY THURSDAY

HUMBLE ACTS OF LOVE

Written by Ee Chien Chua, a contemporary IT leader.

Heavenly Father, on this Maundy Thursday, we remember the humble acts of love that Jesus displayed by washing the feet of His Apostles and sharing the Last Supper with them. Help us to follow in His footsteps, serving one another with humility, love, and forgiveness. We praise You, the Ancient of Days, and trust in Your eternal power and presence. Guide us in our daily lives as we strive to be more like Jesus, serving others without self-interest. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. [Luke 22:19-20]

Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty, not because God is mean or fault-finding or finger-pointing but because he wants us to know the joy of being cleaned out, ready for all the good things he now has in store.

[N.T. Wright]

APRIL 18, 2025 GOOD FRIDAY

COMFORT IN TIMES OF SORROW

Written by Vickie Stone from the Village Church

1995 was Lorrie's diagnosis. She did not know it at the time, but my 35-year-old sister, would have a 5-year battle with breast cancer. Her medical team would tell her, great news: your lymph nodes are clear. They would label her cancer in remission, only to later tell her the cancer had returned and spread to her lungs. And then to her liver. This was so wrong. She was young. Her kiddos were so little, just 3 years and 8 years old at her diagnosis. I was barely back to California from a wonderful trip to Australia, when my brother-in-law Tom told me I should come; the doctors said the disease was progressing. Lorrie, true to her form, had not wanted to "interrupt my special trip" with her latest disease challenge. I left for Ohio immediately. Visiting was hard, we all just wanted to wave a magical wand and return her health to her. Our family was numb and simply lost without our Lorrie, our social director. Lorrie, always the organizer, making plans for our family's outings and celebrations. How could she be taken from us? She was so needed here. I had so many questions for God as anyone does when they see someone taken so young. A few weeks later, after the funeral, I was back in California, trying to figure out a future without my big sis, my childhood partner in crime, my

matchmaker, and my confidant. The phone rang. My best friend in Ohio insisted she had to share what had transpired with her 5-year-old daughter. Her daughter says to her, as they are walking up the stairs in their home, "Lorrie is talking to me." My friend was naturally quite surprised, yet curious so she simply said: "Oh? What is she saying to you?" The little one, matter of factly replies, "She is telling me that we should be crying only tears of joy!" This little girl's message provided my entire family such comfort. It was a mystery we gratefully took at face value. Lorrie was letting us know...she was in His glory, she was fine, and she wanted us to be too. Indeed!

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. [Psalm 16:11]

APRIL 19, 2025 HOLY SATURDAY

SITTING INSIDE PAIN AND GRIEF

Written by Erin Jean Warde, a contemporary author.

I believe one of the greatest challenges of the human life is the experience of sitting inside pain and grief. I find that when I am entombed in my suffering, my prayers take the form of questions as I ask God to offer me the compassion, tenderness, and deliverance I thought I could count on when I first believed. There is something about that middle place, the place where my faith and my reality feel deeply at odds, where I am forced to wrestle with doubt knowing that the tussle won't tear me from my belief, but instead that it will somehow join me to a God who can survive the fight. The remembrance that my love for God and God's love for me can survive the conflict is, in and of itself, a form of belief, as it means that instead of disappearing from God entirely I stay connected, because even when my prayers are questions they are passionate, as they are born out of my desire to be connected to God, to feel the love of God, not to leave God and my faith...Holy Saturday invites us to be honest about the reality of our suffering, the prayers we pray out of conflict, the ways we tussle with the tension between our faith and the reality of life before us. The gift of Holy Saturday is that we are able to behold the dead body of Jesus and know that, against all odds, there is a way out of the tomb. When we are in our own sufferings, feeling so covered in the reality of death and suffering that we can almost smell the spices that promise we are given into decay, we can remember that this day is not the last day. There is a tomorrow that will greet us at dawn with the compassion, tenderness, and deliverance of God.

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want. [Matthew 29:39b]

COME CELEBRATE WITH US

MARCH 5 ASH WEDNESDAY

7:00 PM Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary (LIVE Stream)
Service of Repentance and Renewal
villagechurch.org/ash-wednesday

MARCH 10 MONDAY EVENING - LENTEN STUDY

6:30 PM Join us for a six-week study of N.T. Wright's Book
"The Day the Revolution Began."
villagechurch.org/bible-studies

MARCH 13 LENTEN PRAYER SERVICE

6:30 PM Thursday evenings during Lent in the Chapel
Time of prayer, scripture, and song
villagechurch.org/quenten-prayer-service

APRIL 12 EGGSTRAVAGANZA

9:00 AM Interactive Easter story with Pastor Jack
Egg Hunt • Breakfast • Petting Zoo • Crafts
villagechurch.org/eggstravaganza

APRIL 13 SONGS OF HOPE

4:00 PM A spring choral concert featuring guest organist
Nathaniel Gumbs and The Village Community Chorale
villagechurch.org/songs-of-hope

APRIL 17 MAUNDY THURSDAY

7:00 PM Service of Darkness inside the Sanctuary (LIVE Stream)
The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the Tenebrae
villagechurch.org/maundy-thursday

APRIL 20 EASTER WORSHIP

7:00 AM Sunrise Contemporary Worship

9:00 AM Traditional Worship

11:00 AM Traditional Worship (LIVE Stream)

villagechurch.org/easter



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