

Creating Space for Grace

Lenten Meditation Guide
for Students 2008

By Quincy D. Brown
and Students from LaGrange College

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This devotion is a guide to help “create space for grace” through the season of Lent. Grace is a shorthand way of speaking of the incredible love of God. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, understood grace as God’s mercy that comes to us, even though we do not deserve it. It is a free gift.

Like receiving an unexpected present from our grandparents on Christmas morning, we are often surprised by grace. When we are given such a gift, our natural response is to feel guilty since we do not have a gift to give in return. But like the Christmas gift, grace is given out of love and we are invited to receive it with no strings attached.

God’s grace comes to us in many ways. From the natural world around us, we see God’s grace through the lens of nature. Grace comes to us when we enjoy breathtaking sunsets, the vistas of majestic mountain ranges, the tranquil sounds of the ocean tides rhythmically rushing against the rocky shoreline, the multicolored and panoramic view of gold, purple, orange and red leaves on a cool autumn day, and the Eden-like paradises of the tropics.

God’s grace also comes to us through relationships with others as they show us glimpses of divine love. Grace is also present when people hurt us so much that we are driven to seek comfort in God. God’s grace is felt in the experiences of our lives—in the times where we are confident in God’s presence and promises and in the dark moments when it may be only later that we realize that we were never alone. The simple truth is that God’s loving-kindness is far greater than we can comprehend.

We often overlook grace operating in our lives. We need to take time to see how grace helps us in our everyday experiences. Throughout the season of Lent, the gifts of grace assure us that when we commit ourselves to walking with Christ, God will lead, support and walk beside us.

What is Lent?

Lent offers us an opportunity to create space for grace. It is a season of the Church that spans forty days beginning on Ash Wednesday and goes through Easter Sunday. For early Christians, Lent was a time to prepare for baptism which only happened on Easter Sunday morning. It was marked by a time of prayer, self-reflection, and preparation for Easter. The number forty is connected with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for his ministry.

Today, Lent is a time for repentance. It is “housekeeping for the soul” where we clear out the clutter in our lives to receive God’s gift. The traditional practices of Lent, which include fasting and giving up something that hinders us from connecting with God, are not meant to give us “spiritual brownie points” to earn God’s grace. Rather these activities are meant to help us to clear out the clutter in our lives to see, hear and receive God’s grace.

Turning toward God

While the word Lent is never mentioned in the Bible, its practices are a vital part of what the Old Testament calls *teshuva* or “turning” to God. When translated as “repentance,” as it usually is, this word suggests that we turn away from our own faults, inadequacies, sins, and failings (see 2 Chronicles 7:14). Quite simply, Lent is an invitation to turn away from self-preoccupation toward available grace.

The same can be said for the New Testament word *metanoia*, the Greek word that is translated as “repentance.” It literally means “going beyond your present state of mind.” It implies a turning of our whole selves, including our faults, strengths, and everything else in-between, toward God’s grace.

Contrary to popular belief, this “turning” is neither a once-in-a-lifetime event nor a life-long preoccupation with sin. But it is “creating space for grace” by turning toward God. This involves a continual, habitual recurring shift from an ego-driven agenda to a receptive openness to grace.

The devotions in *Creating Space for Grace* are written by students at LaGrange College to help you in your turning toward God’s grace. Each student has taken a scripture and given their personal reflection on what it means for them in their faith walk. We have also included song lyrics written by one of our students that are useful in helping us create space for grace during prayer time and meditation. *Road to Grace* reminds us that during the difficult times, we can always find a place of grace in God’s presence.

During your daily readings reflect upon how the perspectives that our students present are similar to or different from your experience. As you make your way through this guide over the next forty seven days (we have included Ash Wednesday and Sundays) we trust that you will be led to reflect on ways that you can create space for grace in your lives.

Blessings upon you as you read.
Quincy D. Brown

Since 1831 LaGrange College, located in LaGrange, GA, has been challenging students’ minds, inspiring their souls—and changing lives. Today, LaGrange is a four-year liberal arts and sciences college affiliated with the United Methodist Church. The College is home to more than 1,100 students.

For nearly eleven years, The Reverend Dr. Quincy D. Brown, an ordained United Methodist minister, has served as the chaplain of LaGrange College. Quincy, or “Q” as many around campus call him, was the recipient of the 2003 National Chaplain of the Year Award presented by the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation. He is interested in helping people work through life’s transitions. By using universal images and stories found in the Bible, television shows, movies and fairy tales, Quincy uses the art of storytelling to help others to connect their life stories to God’s story of care, love, forgiveness and grace.

Road to Grace

Verse

There's a road that leads to grace
My secret place
And I know that I will always find you there
You never once turned me away
Your love forgave

Pre-Chorus

And when I was down
You believed in me
You taught me how
To believe in you
And when I was so lonely
And had no peace within
You reached into this heart of mine
And healed me once again

Chorus 1

Here I am again
Lord I come before your throne
I don't want to ask for anything
Just wanna thank you for the things you've done
Cause I love you
And I thank you
For this road to grace
It's kept me safe in you

Chorus 2

Here I am again
Lord I bow before your throne
I give you the thanks and the praise
for all the love that you have shown
Cause I love you
And I thank you
For this road to grace
It's kept me safe in you

Chris Owenby
Music
Cartersville, GA

Wednesday, February 6

Ash Wednesday

Just some ashes are all that are needed to begin the season of Lent. Ashes are the product of burning something away. They are what is left over after fire passes over or through something. They are the waste after the heat and light are gone. Perhaps our first association with ashes comes from childhood where we watched our fathers carry out the ashes from the fireplace on a cold winter's morning. After the fire has warmed the house, the ashes were useless so they would be disposed as trash.

So why do we put left over "trash" on our foreheads to start the season of Lent? One reason is because the ashes are symbols to remind us of who we are. The Bible tells us that we came from the dust and to the dust we shall return. Adam was formed out of the dust of the earth by God and then God breathed life into that dust (Genesis 2:7).

Ashes are also a sign of repentance. Receiving ashes during Ash Wednesday prepares us for Lent, the time when we are called to repent and change our ways. In biblical times, it was common for people who were mourning to dress in sackcloth and put ashes on their heads. There are several stories in the Bible where the people come to God and sit before him "in sackcloth and ashes" to show their repentance and to seek his forgiveness.

So the ashes are meant to be symbols of our mortality and signs of repentance showing that we are truly seeking to follow in God's path. They may be just a few ashes but they sure do mean a lot. They signify our need for God. They are also a way of showing on the outside what is happening on the inside. So as you have the sign of the cross placed on your foreheads, repent of your self-reliance and self-seeking. Receive God's grace and forgiveness that marks you as a redeemed child of God.

Prayer: *Merciful God, please help me to remember to repent and believe the gospel. Amen.*

Thursday, February 7

Giving Thanks

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1

“This is my renaissance. This is my one response. This is the way I say I love you. This is my second chance. This is my one romance. This is the cutting line on which I stand to show you...”

— “Renaissance,” Mat Kearney

Every day I thank God that he knows the true intentions of my heart.

I often find it difficult to stand before God, giving him the praise he so rightly deserves. Instead, I am consumed by homework that I never seem to have enough time for, by extracurricular activities, parties, friendships and life. I thank God that he knows that I am eternally grateful, even when I am too consumed or too apathetic to vocalize it.

I’m amazed at the ways I find myself caught up in a moment of worship. I’m often caught up with something as simple as walking across campus in a shower of autumn leaves or finding a dollar in my jacket pocket. Feeling the warmth of the afternoon sun on my face, seeing an old friend or connecting with a new one often causes me to cry, “Awesome! Amazing! Beautiful!” But what I’m really trying to say instead is “Praise God!” I truly believe that when I say these things, God knows my heart. He knows that as I appreciate the splendor of my surroundings, and the infinite blessings of each day, that I am glorifying him with my wonder.

It is particularly important during the Lenten season that we take time to embrace and give thanks for the blessings we receive every day.

Perhaps this year, instead of giving up chocolate, we can make a little time in our busy schedules to truly glorify God.

Amanda Arnold
Religion/Church Leadership
Jasper, GA

Prayer: Father God, I praise you for the wondrous things you do in my life. I thank you for allowing me to awake to a new day, and for the guidance to navigate life when it becomes overwhelming. I ask for your patience when I forget or overlook the glories you have provided me. I thank you for the promise of never leaving me even when I don't know you are there. Thank you so much for the season of Lent—for the anticipation of the death and glorious resurrection of your Son, and for the salvation you have so freely given. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Friday, February 8

Keep Running

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)

The image of “running the race” is one in which we are all familiar. It provides us with a mental picture that can be quite useful in reminding us of our life’s mission. God calls us to persevere throughout our lives. Whether things are going great or we’re having the worst couple of months of our lives, God wants us to “keep running.”

The season of Lent can be a great time for us to challenge ourselves to continue to “run the race.” Whether we are giving something up, or rededicating our lives to God in some way, Lent can be a time for us to move forward in our commitment and relationship with God. In moving forward, we can get bogged down and become distracted with the worries of life. So we need to “throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles.” What better time to receive help in getting rid of the things that slow us down than Lent?

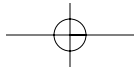
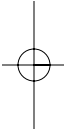
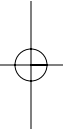
God gives us help along the way. We have a body, the body of Christ, to help us through our trials. We need others to run the race with us. Without this body, it is a lonely and difficult path.

While this is only the second day of Lent, we must not forget that the road ahead will be curvy, steep, and long. We must prepare ourselves for this race, for this is a time for perseverance. Remember to seek help from others—whether it is for encouragement, accountability, or someone to pray with. God has blessed us with teammates to run alongside of us. ‘Tis the season: the season for change; the season to run with God!

Rachel Burch
Religion/Church Leadership
Augusta, GA



Prayer: *Dear God, help me to run the race of life without losing sight that you're running alongside me.*



Saturday, February 9

Supplying our Needs

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Life often guides us through many different directions and paths. When put in difficult situations we think that we can correct the problem, rather than relying on God to fix it. In our efforts to come up with a solution, we must allow our faith to come forth and let God take over.

God wants to supply our every need. In meeting our needs, God shows his amazing grace and awesome power. So we should not worry about anything but pray and ask God about everything. Do not try to take on the giant that life can become, instead yield to God, the one who can defeat every giant that comes our way. So as you go through today, remember to pray and ask God specifically to answer your needs.

Dialleo Burks
Religion/Philosophy & Assistant Football Coach
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: Father God, I thank you for being my Lord and Savior. As I go through today, I pray that you will supply my every need. I ask in your name Father, that you will carry any burdens that I may have. I ask in your name Lord, that you remove any worry or doubt from my mind and spirit. I thank you for the right to praise your name. I love you and adore you, for this prayer I pray in your name, Amen.

Sunday, February 10

Forgiveness Works!

You are kind, God! Please have pity on me. You are always merciful! Please wipe away my sins. Wash me clean from all of my sin and guilt. Psalm 51:1-2

I cannot begin to think how many times I have prayed this prayer. We have all sinned against God. The word of God tells us that if we sin against God that we must pray and ask for forgiveness and it will be done. Sounds too easy, right?

When I was a kid I would get in trouble a lot! And once I realized that I did something wrong—something that really hurt someone’s feelings—I had to ask for forgiveness from that person. Even after I apologized, some people just wouldn’t let go of what I had done. They would hold it over my head to make me feel even worse about it (I have to admit that I am guilty of doing exactly the same thing to others).

We say that we forgive a person, but we don’t really forgive them. Instead, what we are doing is just forgiving them for that one moment. The grievance is still in our minds and hearts and we hold on to it with both hands.

When we do something wrong to God and we ask for forgiveness, it’s forgiven. Bam! That’s all. God will not hold the grievance over our heads. God loves us so much that when we do something bad and then ask for forgiveness from the bottom of our hearts, he forgives us.

Lent is a season of not keeping score of the wrongs of others. It is easier to ask others not to keep a scorecard on our wrongdoing, but it is very difficult not to keep score on others. It is a challenge to give up holding grudges for Lent and to practice forgiveness. So the next time someone

hurts you and then asks for forgiveness, forgive them and try not to hold it against them. Once they see that you're doing that, perhaps they will try and do the same.

Kelsey Chandler
Religion
Acworth, GA

Prayer: *Father God, please help me to be a more forgiving person. Grant me patience and love. Thank you Lord for your everlasting love that you have shown to me. Help me now to show that forgiving love to others. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Monday, February 11

Life is an Inheritance

When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and have taken possession of it, and live in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place which the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. Deuteronomy 2:1-2

Have you ever considered your personal journey of faith to be an inheritance from God? What if you looked at your faith as something to be cherished and honored? It is not until we have taken possession of the unique call God has placed upon our lives and allowed our spiritual senses to be opened that we can understand that the new life God gives is an eternal inheritance.

We have been blessed by God with certain gifts that equip us for the journey of faith set before us. These finest of fruits, harvested from within our new life in Christ, are to be noticed by the world, through our character, relationships, and our values.

When we see our journey of faith as an eternal inheritance, then we will truly be the reflection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Wherever we find ourselves in life's adventure, our mission is to "make his name to dwell there," bringing the kingdom of God near into the world. Today as part of your Lenten practice, live as though you are an inheritance given by God.

Andrew Cunningham
Religion and Philosophy
Marietta, GA

Prayer: Most gracious and loving God, help me today to understand you have given me an eternal inheritance into the family of God. I pray that you will nurture and empower the gifts you have given to me so that your presence will penetrate every facet of my life. Anoint me today to bring the Kingdom of God near to those in my sphere of influence, that others may know the Savior I serve. Amen.

Tuesday, February 12

The Secret Place

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. Psalm 91:1-3 (NIV)

Have you ever been afraid of your shadow? God's shadow is a place where we don't have to be afraid. If we get in God's shadow for protection, leaning on him, relaxing in his arms, and allowing him to carry us through difficult times, we are promised that God will make a "way out of no way." Getting into God's shadow is like going to a secret place where there are no distractions but intimacy between God and us.

Whether we're in private or in a public place like a church, the secret place is where we fall in love with God again. Isaiah 59:19 says "that when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against it." So nothing shall harm us if we take refuge in God's shadow and let him lead, guide, and protect us, trying us like silver is tried, and loving us so unconditionally that it brings us to tears. And when it is all said and done, we will have peace that surpasses all understanding and fire in our bellies that burns through any dark place we encounter. Jesus will protect us from the hands of the enemy. He will make us the "head" and not the "tail," so that we are above and not beneath things. So continue to praise and give reverence to the One who consistently saves us.

Minister Brian Darden
Religion/Church Leadership
Stone Mountain, GA

Prayer: Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus, I ask you to keep me totally under your protection. Put me under your wing and carry me through any problem that I may face. Love me, care for me, and mold me in any way that you want to. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, February 13

Owning our Faith

Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

Romans 10:9-10

Life is filled with many choices and decisions. Many times we are raised in a tradition of the Christian faith where we talk about Jesus without really knowing in our hearts what we believe. When we begin to truly search out our own faith and develop a deep relationship with Christ, then we understand and profess our beliefs from the heart. It is our belief in Christ and the desire to profess him as Savior that grants us forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.

When we choose to follow God and confess him as our Savior, God's grace and forgiveness, which are beyond all our human capabilities, make us whole again. Then we begin a faith journey of our own making, because it is from our own heart and experience. We become disciples of the Lord, spreading this joyous confession of love and grace to all we meet.

Melissa Dempsey
Psychology
Lilburn, GA

Prayer: Dear God, help me to find a true relationship with you. May I be bold and faithful as I profess my faith in you and your loving sacrifice. Amen.

Thursday, February 14

In Spirit and Truth

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24 (KJV)

Jesus’ entire ministry pointed towards the worship of God. For him, worshipping God was seen not only in the temple but in the everyday places of people’s lives. Perhaps this is why Jesus’ parables, healings and teachings were set in common, everyday life situations. His stories ran the gamut of illness, death, decision-making, sweeping, seasoning food, buying more than is needed, trimming the lamps, boating, fishing, eating, marrying, sowing seeds, investing talents, standing with the oppressed, misplacing loyalties, and relating to family members. Jesus used the articles and events of everyday life to illustrate his message of God’s in-breaking Presence.

A more complete way of understanding worship is that it is both a private and public action highlighting our need for connection with God and others. So the purpose of worship is to create a “sanctuary” to connect with God and experience grace. This sanctuary allows us to enter into “sacred space” where we are ushered into the Presence of God through the characters and stories of the Bible, prayers, hymns and choruses.

So how is it with your worship? What aids your worship? What hinders your worship? How might you use the articles of everyday life to illustrate God’s Presence to others? How can you worship God throughout the day?

Prayer: ***Spirit of Truth, breathe on me and help me make time to worship you.***

Friday, February 15

Promised Blessings

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people, your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Genesis 12:1-2

What if you were asked to move from a familiar place? Consider what it would mean to pack up all your belongings and leave the home that you grew up in to go to a land that you know nothing about. Can you imagine the concern, excitement, fear, and worry that would go on in your head? God asked Abram to leave the land he knew and promised him a blessing. Abram decided to say yes and look what happened: God blessed Abram, who later was called Abraham the ancestor of the Hebrew people.

But what would have happened to God’s people if Abram had decided to say no and stayed in his comfort zone? History would not have been the same. How many times have you been nervous and scared about hearing God’s call in your life? Doubts run deep and the ‘what if’s’ fill our minds when we are faced with a new opportunity. Remember that God blessed Abraham and blessings will happen to you also when you are called to move away from familiar surroundings.

Ashley Fitzpatrick
Religion/Church Leadership Program
Duluth, GA

Prayer: God, thank you for examples like Abraham that we can look to for strength. Give us courage in everything we do and lead and guide us to the places you want us to go. Amen.

Saturday, February 16

Faith in Action

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:5-6 (NIV)

In times when we are overcome with fear or doubt, we must look to God for comfort and reassurance. Looking around us we can see what God has created and be reminded of his glory and power. We can pray and be assured that God will answer us with a desire to fill our hearts with assurance, comfort, hope and peace.

Abram was shown the grace and love of God by his strong faith in God, not by his works. We too can receive the grace of God and become righteous through our faith. God has promised us his everlasting love if we believe and trust in him. With faith and trust in God, we can accomplish infinite goals, just as God has created infinite stars in the heavens.

Andrew Gaines
Accountancy with minor in Religion
Fairburn, GA

Prayer: God, when I am afraid or in doubt, help me see your splendor and grace. Guide me to have faith as Abram did. Help me realize that all my problems and needs will be solved if I have faith in you Lord. Amen.

Sunday, February 17

Child's Play

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Luke 18:15-17 (GNT)

What is it like to receive God's kingdom like a child? It sounds too simple. It suggests that we are not to work for it unless we work like a child does. The work of a child is to play. A child's obsessive play with stuffed animals, action figures and dolls can take on richly imagined personalities and stories. Whether it is imagining the story of an heroic quest with an action figure or imagining life as a princess with a doll, a child's imagination helps them to order the world.

There is no life of the spirit without the imagination. Without imagination, our souls are undernourished. Yet people constantly belittle or trivialize imagination by saying, "You're just imagining that!" "Your imagination is playing tricks again!" Perhaps you doubt that you can receive like a child and use your imagination. Poets, artists and painters, you may think, have imagination, not ordinary people like me.

With practice and allowing yourself to be a little foolish and goofy at times, you can learn to receive God's blessings like a child. When we learn to trust God as a child uses her imagination to play with a doll, totally engaged in the moment, we come close to entering the Kingdom.

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for the gift of imagination. Open my eyes so that I may use my imagination to see glimpses of your truth, mercy and grace. Amen.

Monday, February 18

Grace is Constant

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8.28

Life is unpredictable. Like the ever-changing seasons, a life of discipleship means change for all members of the Christian faith. Whether we are young or old, new followers of The Way or experienced servants, we encounter the many seasons of the faith: seasons of grief and hope, discouragement and enthusiasm, uncertainty and clarity, naïveté and wisdom.

Yet unlike the changing nature of our experiences, the providence of God is constant. God's grace works to give us good gifts. God's goodness does not waver as a result of the circumstances we find ourselves in; rather, it is a fixed source of encouragement. It constantly reminds us that God is in control, that God loves us immeasurably, and that God works unceasingly for our good and for the good of the Christian community. May we mimic God in this constant activity toward abounding goodness, providence, and love.

Nicole Henderson
Religion/Church Leadership Program
Peachtree City, GA

Prayer: God, thank you for your providence and love. Assure me that in all things, in all circumstances, you are working for my good. Grant me hands and feet that work for the good of others. Amen.

Tuesday, February 19

Peculiar People

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)

I once heard a pastor describe Christians as peculiar people. In a recent Gallup poll, eighty-three percent of Americans said that they were Christian. In a later poll, only twelve percent of Americans said that they attend church on a weekly basis. When comparing those who confessed Christianity to those who attend church, we may conclude that there is a wide gap to bridge. Indeed, the road we walk is narrow.

The Christian lifestyle is one that calls us to move away from what is common in our society. This narrow road that Christ tells us about is one that says love your neighbor when society tells us to always “look out for number one.” It is a road that welcomes compassion, mercy, charity, and forgiveness, instead of winning at all cost, keeping score, and petty one-upmanship.

We *are* peculiar people and the road *is* narrow, but we do not walk it alone. We have this idea that the narrow road is a lonely one. This mentality can hold us back from our true calling as the Church. The community of believers—our brothers and sisters in Christ—walks alongside us down the narrow road. Like “easing on down” the Yellow Brick Road, we are walking a narrow road where God is always with us. But we need to recognize others who also travel this road. Many people are walking in circles on the road and some have stopped walking altogether. Where are you on the narrow road? How well do you know others on the narrow road? How about the person you sit next to in

church, in class or in the college cafeteria? What about the people sitting behind you? May we walk hand-in-hand with our brothers and sisters on the narrow road of faith.

Trey Hockman
Religion/Church Leadership
Atlanta, GA

Prayer: *Father, as we continue to face the uncertainty on the narrow road you call us to be on, give us the compassion and strength we need to encourage one another in faith. May we walk as a community of believers to be an example to the world. Amen.*

Wednesday, February 20

Strength and Comfort

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. Exodus 15:2

There are many times in life when we become so caught up in what we want, or what we can do, that we lose sight of who gives us strength. God gives us the strength to endure hardships and losses. God gives us the strength to support friends and family through their trials. God even gives us the strength to get out of bed in the morning to go to class and to succeed in our daily life. God alone can save us from our selfish desires and lead us to become something better. As a result of the strength that God provides, I will continue to praise him every day of my life.

God's strength is constant. God is the same today for me as he was for my parents and their parents. God's loving-kindness will continue for all time. I will always find great strength and comfort in his never ending love. As long as there is breath in our lungs and life in our bodies, we should exalt and lift high the name of the Lord for the strength to live.

Krystle Jacks
Early Childhood Education
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: Dear Lord please help me to always lean on your strength and not my own. Help me to never forget that you deserve my praises. Give me the strength to always praise your name with my life and actions. It is in your holy name that I pray. Amen.

Thursday, February 21

Reaching Out

Ho! Everyone who thirsts come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat. Yes, come; buy wine and milk without money and without price. Isaiah 55:1

Society places high importance on wealth and social status. For instance, we lend money to those who are our friends and we know they can pay us back. And there is an unwritten code that says that when we are in need, our friends will allow us to borrow money from them to return the favor. It's kind of an "I'll scratch your back and you'll scratch mine" system that has been established.

While it is convenient for us to continue this borrowing cycle, it shouldn't be this way. To change this cycle, we need to reach out to others who are outside the system. In doing so, we must also seek to really help others with no reward in return.

Lent is a time to give up something that hinders our relationship with God. God calls us to love him and to love our neighbors. Perhaps in our Lenten practices, we can practice loving our neighbor more intentionally.

One way to do this is to help those with no money. Are you willing to give to help those who hold up signs on the highway saying that they will work for food? How about the disheveled panhandler who's always asking for a handout, or the mentally challenged man who carries on a conversation with himself, or the lady pushing the grocery cart full of thrift store items? Are you willing to step outside of your social circle of friends and really help others in need? Today, try helping the less fortunate.

Molly Korb
*Undeclared
Cumming, GA*

***Prayer: God please help us to reach out to the less fortunate,
even in times when we know there may not be a reward.
Thank you for your blessings and give us strength to
continue spreading your message of love. Amen.***

Friday, February 22

Order Out of Chaos

In the beginning, when God began creating the heavens and earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1:1-2 (NRSV)

What happens when life becomes chaotic? To avoid discomfort and disorder, there's a good chance that most of us will shift into crisis mode to avoid the darkness of chaos at all cost. While we do not like to dwell on the subject, if we are honest, we will admit that we are afraid of the darkness of chaos. Perhaps this is because of what our culture associates with chaos and darkness. Evil, shadows, negativity, monsters, crime, and the boogeyman are just a few connotations that immediately come to mind. A wider reading of religion, society, and culture, however, reveals deeper meanings for chaos and darkness that hold it sacred and vital to the journey of faith.

According to the Bible, the meeting place with God is often found in chaos. For St. Paul, the apostle, who helped to spread the message of the New Testament beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem, it was the chaotic darkness of his blindness. For Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, it was the dark night of his wrestling with a divine being. Both the crucifixion and resurrection are reported to have occurred in the chaos of darkness. The good news that we need to remind ourselves of is that even the darkness is as light to God!

While learning from the darkness of chaos is not a lesson that we would choose if given the choice, we all will eventually experience the fertile mystery of chaos. Sometimes such learning happens in spite of our best intentions. Remember that in order for something to be constructed,

first something else must be deconstructed. In this way, Divine Order can come out of our chaotic lives. In the midst of chaos and darkness, if we are receptive, we can hear God's voice proclaiming, "Let there be light." God's light will shine in the chaos and darkness of our lives and the darkness cannot overcome it!

Prayer: *God, be my light as I face chaotic times. Amen.*

Saturday, February 23

Facing Temptation

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

During the Lenten season temptation is an inevitable factor that is going to take place. Although this is true, one of the greatest aspects of Christianity is its richness in history and tradition. As believers, the richness of our tradition can play a crucial role in our spiritual formation during this season. In the Scripture there are many instances of individuals conquering temptation, into which we can enter into celebration. Also, there are many instances in which great individuals fall into temptation and rise from it, providing us hope and an example with which we can identify with.

These examples, not only show God's faithfulness throughout the years, but also show us that some of the greatest believers have been tempted in the same ways that we are today. When temptation comes your way during this season, remember God's faithfulness. Our faithful God has always provided an outlet in the past and will do the same today!

Ryan Snider
Religion / Philosophy
Richmond Hill, GA

Prayer: O Lord, our protector, let us remember during this Lenten season your faithfulness throughout the years. When we are tempted let us remember that we can always seek comfort through history and the present. Let us remember that you O Lord have provided a way out of temptation throughout history and will do the same today. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Sunday, February 24

Seeing God's Glory

Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. Habakkuk 3:2

The Lord has blessed the Earth with a beautiful abundance of glory. From a beautiful clear day, to a brilliant starry night, his wonders are indescribable. God has put himself in every aspect of nature, from the luscious green grass, to the red and orange sunset. God has made it obvious to us that he is always present and his love is plentiful.

With such a wondrous love, God cares for us in our times of dilemma. God longs for us to give our troubles to him, for he has been with us in the past and will be with us for the times to come.

Joseph Wiegand
Chemistry
Grayson, GA

Prayer: ***Lord your love is deep and wide. Please allow me to see your glory in my time of need. Amen.***

Monday, February 25

Defining Moments

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

When I first read this scripture, I created my own definitions of the words that seemed to be most important. The passage made sense, but when reading several translations I found that one could possibly read the scripture differently. Just as Bible translations vary, definitions can also. Here are definitions from Dictionary.com:

Clean: morally pure; innocent; upright; honorable

New: other than the former or the old

Steadfast: firmly fixed in place or position

Now read the scripture with these definitions and see if it says anything more to you. As we have experienced, words can have more than one interpretation. But what may be more difficult for us to do than arguing over the definitions of words, is defining things from God's perspective. Thankfully the Lord is willing to help define the parts of our lives. It's sort of like God offering a tag-team partnership to help us to define our lives. Recognizing this partnership is a defining moment for us unfolding as an ongoing process of courage and patience. And even when it does not seem that God is working to help us define our path in life, God is always on the job.

We're human and we all make mistakes. But it's in times where we miss the mark that God's mercy shines through the most. Our failures and our sins cannot be overcome without his help. So hear the good news: God is ready and willing to help us define, rearrange and transform our thoughts and desires from our own to his will.

There are times in life when our sin will be overpowering with a relentless force, but God can reduce its power. God wants to purify our hearts and souls and make us new. It is he who, in the defining moments of

our lives will come through. Will you allow him to change your definition for life? Will you let him take the parts of your life and make them his during this season of Lent?

Erica Robinson
Sociology
Sharpsburg, GA

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for the love you've allowed me to receive. Thank you for your eagerness to help me define my life. I pray that you help direct my thoughts and desires so I will follow your word and commandments forever. Amen.*

Tuesday, February 26

Remedy for a Hectic Life

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

Often we are too busy to notice the specific needs of others around us. On the other hand, however, there are times when we are so preoccupied with others that we don't recognize our own obvious needs. In times like this, we slowly realize that it is not easy to balance the scales of human need.

Society teaches us to get involved and to try new things. This type of lifestyle can be rewarding and yet we have the tendency to forget when and where to stop. Perhaps we never learned how. Unfortunately this treadmill of 'busyness' may lead us into a hectic lifestyle, one that is far from what we initially intended.

It's very hard for us to truly relax these days. We aren't quite sure what to do without technology at our reach or some activity to attend. Because of this 'go, go, go' schedule, we frequently lose touch of what's most important—serving. "I don't have the time," we say. Pre-occupied or not, God gives us daily opportunities to serve him. There is no action too small that can't be done to glorify him. It is our choice to either grasp them tightly or watch them dissipate. Henry Drummond claims that the greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of his other children.

So... what can you do today? Smile at the person you meet on the street and ask them how they really are. Offer to pay for the meal of the person ahead of you in line. Call a friend, old or new, and make plans to visit a nursing home. Practice forgiveness. Bake your favorite dish and share it with the needy. Be content with what you have. Listen when you don't want to and pray before you need something. Burden others

with your dreams. Regardless of what you do or how you do it know that it will not go unnoticed by our King. And if you have yet to find a reason for doing something, now you have one—to glorify him!

LeeAnn Brooks
Sociology
Arlington, GA

Prayer: God, thank you for creating this day. Please grant us the wisdom to have the right attitude. Inspire us to have great expectations for today's opportunity to serve. Remind us of what it means to enjoy and to embrace. Help us to acknowledge your presence wherever we may go. I ask these things not only believing in your word but acting through all means. Amen.

Wednesday, February 27

Big Prayers, Bold Prayers

Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm that it may not pain me!” And God granted him what he requested. 1 Chronicles 4:10

We all pray, glorifying God, thanking him for the abundance in our lives, pleading for his mercy, asking for his intervention and guidance. But, because we are human, most of us hesitate to ask too much of our God, afraid of overstepping some unnamed, unknowable boundary. We fear, perhaps subconsciously, offending God.

Jabez’s prayer realizes no such boundaries. With no hesitancy, Jabez asks God to bless him, to increase his land holdings, to be with him, and to keep him from harm and pain. The prayer, a marvel of simplicity, is a great example of prayer big and bold. It reflects Jabez’s deep and abiding faith in God; more importantly, it evidences Jabez’s personal relationship with him. Proverbs 28:1 says that the “righteous are as bold as a lion.” Jabez is that lion; through his huge prayer he acknowledges God’s sovereignty, his grace, his immense love for every single one of us. Jabez prays such a prayer because he *believes* such a prayer!

The Psalmist tells us that God will give us our heart’s desire (Psalm 37:4). God wants us not only to love him but to *need* him, daily, eternally. He is faithful to those who seek him. In the most glorious bit of this Chronicles verse, in the *gift* of this verse, we see God’s love, his grandeur: He grants Jabez his heart’s desire.

Lent – this time of reflection and sacrifice and quiet – is a great time for big prayers, for bold prayers. It is a time to discover just how immense God’s love for us really is.

Dr. Jack Slay, Jr.
Dean of Students
LaGrange GA

Prayer: ***Dear Heavenly Father, grant me the strength to pray boldly. Grant me the faith to expect big things from you.***

Thursday, February 28

The Examined Life

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Matthew 7:7

Lent is the time to examine our lives. We are invited to look at our assumptions, values and behaviors. An unexamined life is a life that avoids questions. Our questions lead us to other and more complex questions where we find a deeper faith that is richer, more rewarding, and more interesting. Living the questions of life can be an exercise of faith. This shifts our focus from looking for an answer to our problem to being open-ended and dependent on God to show us an answer in his timing. To live the questions requires faith and trust in God.

Jesus encourages us to live the examined life of faith for the sake of the kingdom of God. Through a faith that seeks understanding, we are invited to trust God in the fog of the unknown. Living in the fog requires that we become more aware of God’s gracious presence in uncertainty and his promise that he will always be with us.

Quincy D. Brown
Chaplain
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: ***Dear God, please help me to keep asking questions, knowing that you will give to me the answers I seek. Amen.***

Friday, February 29

Favorite Hiding Place

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah

Psalm 32:7

When we were children most of us had our favorite hiding places. These places came in handy for games of hide-and-go-seek, as well as hiding from siblings who were becoming annoying. Some of us hid behind the couch, some in the coat closet, and some even in our mom's kitchen cabinets.

As we grow older and move closer to God, we realize that he is our "couch" and our "kitchen cabinet" when we need a safe place to hide. God is the hiding place for our souls. He is our refuge. God protects us from the evils of this world. He is the one who can make all things happen in his own time for our benefit. God's comfort surrounds us in a way that is unending and everlasting and we need only to ask for it.

Elizabeth White
Spanish
Powder Springs, GA

Prayer: Holy Father, watch over me and give me strength in the face of my fears. Be my protection and comfort; surround me with your love and devotion.

Saturday, March 1

Keep Living

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26

The verse that follows this passage asks the question, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” The answer is that no matter what we do in life there is no way we can guarantee another day. Jesus uses birds to illustrate this great point.

By not worrying, the birds in this illustration can do what they were created to do – LIVE! If we do not worry and trust that God will take care of us and his creation, then we can do what we were truly created to do – LIVE! Learning how to live the life that God intended for us is the ultimate way to glorify our Father. Just keep living.

Sean Englert
Sociology
New Orleans, LA

Prayer: God, thank you for showing me through your creation that we are valuable to you. I want my life to glorify and honor you. Help me to do what I was created for. Help me to be alive and truly live. Amen.

Sunday, March 2

The Potter's Clay

And yet, LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We are all formed by your hand. Isaiah 64:8

Sometimes bad things happen. Some things are caused by our own sinfulness while others are consequences of this fallen world. We sin and things happen. That's just how it is. But I'm thankful that when bad things happen, God is bigger than our sins. He is the potter and we are the clay.

Like clay in the potter's hand, God molds and shapes us into people who will bring him glory and honor. God is the Creator and we are God's creation—the work of his hand. We are God's children and we are completely dependent upon our Heavenly Father, the Creator of heaven and earth. God listens to our cries and forgives us. He is never far away. He is here with us.

Continual praise is due to our God! He alone is the Creator and we are the creation. We are all formed by his hand. God chooses to love us and to bring us closer to him. He chooses to use us to further his kingdom. He chooses us! May you choose today to become more like our Father. May you allow yourself today to be molded and shaped by the Creator.

Tiffany Englert
Business Management
Arabi, LA

Prayer: ***Father, thank you for creating us all by the work of your hand. Thank you for allowing us to be the clay with which your hand works. We give you praise, O God, for creating us and not leaving us. Thank you for being right here with us through every season of life. You are here even now, listening to this very prayer. Please continue to listen to the cries of our hearts and forgive us. Father, thank you for***

your grace and mercy and continue to mold and shape us into your people—the people whom you have called to grow in intimacy with and further your kingdom. O Lord, I pray, that we would give you glory and honor to the fullest. Amen.

Monday, March 3

A Wise Investment

“Because your loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you. Thus I will bless you while I live; I will lift up my hands in your name.” Psalm 63:3-4

There are a number of things in life that we invest our time, resources, and ultimately ourselves into. Years of study toward an education, a few hours’ wages into a date with a prospective companion, or endless physical exertion into a rigorous workout routine: all investments with an expected return.

Often I’ve found my own quests for love and meaning take the form of such investments, requiring seemingly endless sacrifice and struggle in hopes that such would yield a lasting friendship or a rival’s respect. The words of the Psalmist throw into stark contrast the love he knows as God’s love which we too often reap as the reward for our investments. Regardless of personal circumstances or of past failures, it is God’s love for humanity, his kindness toward his children, in which we should find our joy and meaning. May we be content to find his loving kindness, unearned and undeserved, better than life itself.

Chuck Peek
*History 2006; Cross Country Coach
LaGrange, GA*

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank you for your love, made all the more perfect in my imperfections. May its place in my life be so prominent that it brings you praise. Amen.

Tuesday, March 4

Avoiding Distractions

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Mark 8:34-35

What does Jesus mean when he says he wants those who follow him to "deny themselves?" I want to focus on these two words. This is very important, Beloved. Jesus calls us to follow him. But so often we follow the things that the world puts in front of us and we soon become controlled by them. Some of the things that can control us are TV shows, music, internet surfing, pornography, gossiping and our own selfish desires. We are led to believe that we can keep these desires in check and do what we please and still call ourselves followers of Christ. But we cannot. We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

We cannot act like the world by cursing and using the Lord's name in vain, drinking, partying, and filling our minds with all sorts of perversion and at the same time call ourselves Christians. So if someone were to meet you today, do you think they would be able to tell that there was something different about you? Would they be able to tell that you serve Jesus?

Telling something different about us is the result of allowing Christ to change us by denying ourselves and taking up our cross. This is a peculiar thing. In 1 Peter 2:9, we are described as a peculiar people. That means we are to be set apart and people should be able to tell we are Christians. So if others are not able to identify us as Christ's followers then perhaps it may be time to check our hearts (Psalm 139).

The only ways we can truly know the Lord is by denying ourselves and taking up our cross to follow Christ. This requires us to study God's word and pray every day. We must put away all the things that sway our focus from Jesus. For if we try to hold on to those things of the world that we know in our hearts do not please the Lord, we will miss what great things God has in store and ultimately "lose our life" (v. 35). But if we give up all of our worldly desires and take up our cross and follow Jesus, being all he desires us to be, we will find life in the end! In doing this, God is able to use us for great things. It is then that we are truly followers of Christ.

Sharon Coffey
Music
Hogansville, GA

Prayer: ***Dear Father, forgive me for my selfishness. Teach me to deny myself daily and take up my cross and follow you. Show me the things in my life that are keeping me from knowing you more and give me the strength to let go of them. Put within me a deep desire for you and your word so that I can focus on you without distraction (1 Cor. 7:35b). Help me to focus on you, God, by drawing me closer to you!***

Wednesday, March 5

Removing Our Robes

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Matthew 7:1-2

There are many times in our lives when we look upon the world through a tarnished lens. Seeing through this lens dimly, we declare for ourselves the things that we deem holy and righteous. We spy from afar the sins of others. We are sure not to get too close so that we do not dirty the pure white robe that we wear for the world to see. We enjoy standing before the mirror and seeing how wonderful and crisp our robe's exterior remains. In our primping in the mirror, we are careful to keep the robe tied. We dare not open it up and look upon its interior, for what we fear most is seeing the stains of our own doing.

Christ urges us to change our judgmental attitudes. At some point in our lives, each one of us steps off the path God calls us to follow. Each one of us falls short of God's glory; and yet, God freely gives us the incredible gift of grace through salvation in Jesus Christ. With this amazing gift, God looks upon us in a new light.

God sees not the stains that once entrenched the interior of our robes, but a new creation made pure and holy through his son. God sees us through a clear lens, one that removes all distortions once present in our lives. We are called to remove the robes that attempt to cover our indiscretions and allow Christ to purify our hearts, minds and bodies. In doing so God will cast out our distorted vision that focused on judging others and show us a new world, a world of wonderment we may travel, which will give us the opportunity to share with others the same amazing love given to us by God.

Chris Driggers
*Biology,
Brooklet, GA*

Prayer: *Dear God, help me to remove the things that hinder me from being in relationship with you.*

Thursday, March 6

More than Appearances

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him.’ The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the new king over Israel. When Samuel sees Jesse’s eldest son Eliab, he thinks that surely this tall, good-looking, confident man is the Lord’s chosen. But God tells Samuel that he does not consider the things that humans consider. And God tells the prophet Samuel that David, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, is to be anointed king of Israel.

I often find myself thinking that I cannot possibly be used by God. I am too young, too awkward, and too inexperienced. I am not great; I am simply me. But this verse reminds me that God looks at people differently. God sees more than our outward appearance. God looks at the heart. He can use the young and untalented, the immature and self-conscious, just as he did when he anointed David as king of Israel.

Laura Dresdow
Biology
Sugar Hill, GA

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for using me despite my inexperience and immaturity. Help me to be like David and strive after you with all of my heart. Amen.

Friday, March 7

You are Worthy!

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1 Corinthians 15:10

The subject of grace has been one of the most difficult things for me to wrap my head around in my walk with Christ. It's always seemed to be too easy and, paradoxically, too hard. Even lately it's been getting under my skin—I keep thinking that my past makes me unworthy of God's use, or if I accomplish something for Christ, it will be my own effort that makes it happen. But God keeps reminding me that I'm not seeing the whole picture. It is God's grace that makes me worthy of his use.

Despite what I've done, it's this same grace that accomplishes things and not my own strength.

Paul explains it best in 1 Corinthians 15:10. He's describing how Christ died for our sins, was buried for three days, and was witnessed by the apostles when he was raised. I'm paraphrasing Paul, when suggesting what his comments may sound like today.

“Way after all the original apostles saw Christ when he was raised from the dead, I saw him too. When I think about it, it really doesn't make sense, because I am just not worthy of it. I've done a lot of crappy things like persecuting others for their beliefs. But wait! What I am now is different than what I was. And I am now worthy. This isn't because of how hard I have worked—which is a lot harder than everyone else—but it's because God *chose* to pour his grace over my life. So I'm really not the one doing any of this, it's Christ *in* me.”

These last sentences are the key as Paul realizes that the only reason he is who he has become is because of the Father's grace. And he understands that his effort would be meaningless if it weren't covered by grace. Nothing that we do will amount to anything if God's grace is not

present in and over our lives. Think of it like this: pens without ink are just useless pieces of plastic. You can scribble with them 'til your fingers turn blue, but they will not really leave a mark unless they are filled with ink. We are like those pens. We are pretty much useless until we are filled with God's grace and presence.

As you enter into the last leg of Lent, remember this and be encouraged: God has filled you with his grace and it has made you *worthy* and *useful*! If you let go of trying to make things happen with your own strength and really let God and his grace work *through* you, then what you do will truly be powerful. Why? Because when you decrease self-sufficiency, *then* God can increase.

Hayley Curlis
Art & Design
Tulsa, OK

Prayer: ***O Holy Father, thank you for making me worthy by Christ's death and resurrection. Help me to receive your amazing grace today. In Jesus' Name. Amen.***

Saturday, March 8

Correcting Injustice

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

There are times when we are concerned that we are not living the way God wants us to. We tend to gauge our faithfulness and love for God by what we do that is visible to others: tithing, church attendance, mission trips, and so on. While all these acts are important, they tend to only please ourselves. God is not concerned with what we offer physically if it is not from our hearts. Micah reminds us that God has commanded what is right and wrong, and that we should abide by those laws. Beyond that, the Holy Father’s requirements are quite simple: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with him.

Simply believing in justice is not enough. We must use every power we have in life to correct injustice. This can include being fair to others, spending time with them, showing interest in them, and caring for them in times of need. We must act similarly if we love kindness. Being kind to others only on the surface is insufficient. We must truly care about their spirits and be a support to them when they are in need.

In order to walk humbly with Christ, we must be obedient to him. We must hold a steady and faithful course in life and never veer from that path. By doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God, we are giving something of ourselves in a spiritual way to Christ, which pleases him above all else.

Elizabeth Cummings
Accountancy
Smyrna, GA

Prayer: ***Heavenly Father, help me to understand all that you require of me as your faithful servant, so that I may walk humbly with you all the days of my life. Amen.***

Sunday, March 9

Not Taken for Granted

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

These simple, yet elegant words contain a majesty that is overwhelming when truly examined. However, it is safe to say that many of us do not stop to take in the magnitude of the sacrifice made so many years ago for us. Jesus, the Son of God, took it upon himself to free us from our sins.

All the immature and stupid decisions that we have made are forgiven because Jesus has paid the price. The times when we have done wrong, thinking that we've let God down, have been made right again. Jesus willingly strapped on the yoke of our pride and has assumed the weight of our sins. Christ gave his life for our forgiveness. So when we participate in Holy Communion we are invited to see the taking of the bread and cup as more than a simple symbolic message. It is much more.

It is our living representation of the mighty majesty of our God. It is God's grace reaching out to meet us where we are so that we might connect with God and our neighbors. Let us hope that we never again hear these words without concentrating on the wonderful forgiveness offered to us through Jesus.

Bill Stikes
History
Griffin, GA

Prayer: ***Dear God, let me never take your word for granted again. Let the Holy Bread take on a deeper meaning through each and every experience. Amen.***

Monday, March 10

Trust in God

In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me. Psalm 31:1-2 (KJV)

The Lord tells us in Proverbs 3:5-6 to trust him with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding, but in all our ways to acknowledge him and he will make our paths straight. When we start trusting in ourselves and leaning on our own understanding, we begin to stray from the straight path.

We become self-centered and not Christ-centered. Our Heavenly Father wants us to focus on him by fully serving and trusting him. Only he can deliver us from the times where we miss the mark, stumble and fall into trouble. He will keep us on the path of righteousness that leads to life.

Zach Hall

Music

LaGrange, GA

Prayer: Father, help me to trust you with all of my heart and lean not on my own understanding. Help me to stand for truth, honor, and integrity. Do not let me be put to shame for standing up for the truth. Keep me in your righteousness, that I may walk holy and blameless before you and men. Be quick to deliver me when I stray from the path of righteousness. Jesus, you are the rock of my foundation, my refuge in time of trouble, and the lover of my soul. For the sake of your name lead and guide me through today and the days to come. Amen.

Tuesday, March 11

God's Time

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Psalm 27:14

It seems like every year there are a million goals that we want to achieve. Whether it is receiving a good grade in a class, or a promotion at work, it is human nature to attempt to obtain everything that our hearts desire, even though it may not be in God's divine plan for our lives. When all of our desires are part of our personal agendas and not God's agenda, then life becomes more difficult. Getting an "A" on a term paper or a promotion at work may be even harder to obtain and life will feel as if everyone or everything is out to get you.

We need to remember that everything is perfect in God's time, and not ours. What you may think is your life's direction may not be the same as God's direction for your life. Don't forget to stop, think, and pray about what God may be calling you to do. Things are much easier if we realize and follow God's will, rather than our own.

Noël Winter
Accountancy
Dalton, GA

Prayer: ***Father, what is your will in my life today? Please help me to listen to your will and not mine, and give me patience to do so as I wait on your plan in my life. Amen.***

Wednesday, March 12

Compassion

Let Israel now say, that his mercy endures forever.

Psalm 118:2

Sometimes it seems like there's no hope and things don't seem to go our way. We lose our wallet, our car breaks down, or we don't hear our alarm clock go off and we miss an important meeting. There are also situations that we are put into that seem too hard for us to handle alone. In these times, we need assistance and that is when God's mercy comes to us. No matter what we have done, God's mercy is there for us. Although trials and tribulations come, God's mercy will always be there for us.

Mercy means "having compassion for the miserable." So the most important concept that accompanies mercy is *compassion* that God has for us. By the atoning sacrifice of Christ, a way is open for us to receive compassion, mercy, truth and righteousness. God's compassion for us is so great that his mercy endures forever. During this Lenten season, remember to always put God first and to place your total trust in him.

Demetris Render
Business
Newnan, GA

Prayer: *God, I know there are times when things seem so hard to handle or it seems like people are always beating up on me emotionally and spiritually, but through it all I will place my trust in you for I know your mercy endures forever. Amen.*

Thursday, March 13

Distractions

After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Matthew 14:23

Cars, people, and odd sounds constantly distract us. Our world is filled with noises and distractions that are hard to avoid. We are so easily distracted by these things, which is why it is a good idea to get away. Many times Jesus would leave the crowds, his friends, and go out to be alone and pray. This sets forth an example for us all.

Each day during Lent, we should try to get away. We should find a place that is peaceful and away from distractions and use it to pray and grow in our relationship with the Lord. Jesus knew what he was doing when he went up on that hill! So follow after him by spending some alone time today in prayer.

Danielle MacMinn
Columbus, GA
Nursing

Prayer: *God, calm our world and quiet our spirit. Help us to follow after you and get away so that we may grow and learn and deepen our relationship with you. Amen.*

Friday, March 14

The Key to Success

Except the lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Psalm 127:1

What's your major? This is the first question we are asked as freshmen. There are so many choices to choose from and sometimes we aren't sure who we want to be or what we want to do when we grow up. All we know is that in order to be successful in life, we must go to college and get a degree in something.

But success isn't so much in having a degree, a lot of money or a big office. Success can be experienced when we find God's will for our lives. This passage reminds me of how unsuccessful life can be without God. He created us to depend on him for our needs, but being flawed and human we forget that until a tragedy happens or we come into misfortune. Lent is a time where we can learn not to take God's love in vain and to stop trying to do his job.

Corey Pope
Art and Design
Tuscaloosa, AL

Prayer: God, I come to you with reverence and in a spirit of apology. Help me to never forget that nothing I do can top what you can do for me. Amen.

Saturday, March 15

Wake Up!

***Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.
“Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?”***

Matthew 26:40

Jesus is our Savior. He died for the forgiveness of our sins. We as Christians, no matter which denomination or church we are members of, know of Jesus' sacrifice of dying on the cross. God became human to heal our wounds, to listen to us, to become our friend, and to be the light guiding us in the way to our salvation. However, many times we forget about Jesus' sacrifice and the reasons why Christ became human. It is as if we are blind and deaf and we do not pay attention to what he is trying to tell us. We ignore Jesus just as sometimes we turn our backs to our closest friends.

In Matthew 26:40, the disciples could not stay awake to wait for Jesus to come back from praying. The disciples were Jesus' closest friends but they could not stay awake to support him in the difficult situation he was going through. He knew his destiny and slowly his disciples began to realize it too. However, they turned their backs on him letting their exhaustion get the best of them. There are times when we behave as the disciples did that night. We know who Jesus is and that he died on the cross for us, but we still do not follow his example. Can we stay awake during the season of Lent for Jesus' sake? Will we ignore Jesus by turning our backs on him?

Cindy Angulo

*Business Management in International Economics
Costa Rica*

Prayer: Lord, there are times when I sleepwalk through the day. I'm on autopilot and I'm going through the motions. Please forgive me. Help me to wake up and experience your forgiveness. Amen.

Sunday, March 16

Love

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:12 (NIV)

As a child, I remember my Sunday school teacher ending each lesson with the words “let your little light shine.” Sometimes as Christians we forget that others are watching our actions and comparing them to our testament of faith. We are to be examples of Christ, the way he lived, and his message of love. Indeed one of many examples we have of God can be found in the Church. A church congregation is to be a reflection of faith, hope and love. The Bible says that of the three attributes of a congregation that will stand the test of time is love and God is love (1 Cor. 13:13).

There are times when we struggle to love one another, our neighbors, or enemies. And there are other times when we are tormented with the wrongs others have done to us. The reality is that we live in a world where people hate, quarrel, and fight; where Christian goodness is seen as odd. However, we remember that love covers a multitude of sins so we seek to be forgiven by forgiving and loving others.

It is only with God’s help that we can accomplish the difficult task of loving others. For loving another human comes through receiving God’s compassion in our hearts. This is the love of genuine action and not a matter of words. It is the kind of love that led Jesus to die on the cross and be raised from the dead for you and me.

Neene Gichaara
Sociology
Kenya, East Africa

Prayer: God, save me from falling into anger. Help me to love even when it seems the most impossible thing to do. Let my little light shine especially in the dark. Amen.

Monday, March 17

Doing God's Will

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us.

1 John 4:12 (GNT)

Lent is a time when we must always be prepared to do the will of God. Doing God's will is challenging at times and we often get in the way of ourselves and God. This happens when we allow our selfish desires to supersede our desire to please God and to be used by him. We please God by loving him and others with all of our soul, heart, mind and strength—this is doing the will of God.

Through prayer, service and loving one another, we can be sure that God will live in union with us, and his love will be made perfect in us. So when the circumstances of life threaten to overwhelm us, we must always be watchful and in a spirit of prayerful openness to do God's will and receive God's grace.

David Harris
Music
Manchester, GA

Prayer: God, give me the strength to do your will and not to give in to my selfish desires. I open myself so that I can be available at all times to be used by you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 18

There's Hope

Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared. Psalm 130:1-4

David is crying to God from the depths of his soul because of his sinful actions. A rewriting of this verse might read, “Out of the depths of my sin I have cried to you.” David’s heart is weighed down with the “guilty stain” of his sin before a righteous God. It appears that at this moment he might even be more aware of the righteousness of God than even his own sin for he asks the Lord to simply hear his voice.

During David’s despair and sorrow, which seems to almost break him, God shows comfort to him. The Lord reveals to David that if he should mark iniquities against guilty people then no one would stand. If God were not patient, gracious with redemption, and full of mercy, we would not stand a chance. There would be no hope. Yet there was hope for David and for us. David learned that there is forgiveness with God!

The Lord responded by forgiving David. David cried for God’s favor as if he were the publican in the New Testament who cried, “Father, have mercy on me a sinner.” It is essential to understand what David was going through because we too are in this depth of sin. We stand before God no more deserving of forgiveness than anyone else. Yet there is a hope for us and all humanity: God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ!

Mason Gentry
Music
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: O Holy God you owe us nothing. You would be completely just in not forgiving us of our crimes against your holiness. Please hear our cry today. God we cannot appease you with sacrifices or with works or else we would do it. But a broken and contrite heart, O Lord, you will not despise. You lift up the humble. You beautify the meek with salvation. So God we ask for your forgiveness of our sins and we pray that you will create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Hallelujah Lord, you make all things new! Amen.

Wednesday, March 19

Dealing with Uncertainty

And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:20

There is a great deal of uncertainty in this world. With so many natural disasters throughout the world and contentious political issues swirling around us, it is hard for us to know who to trust. This verse helps us see that no matter what is happening in the world around us, God will always be there, helping and teaching us along the way.

God wants to use each situation to teach us and he gives us commandments to follow. All we have to do is trust in him and he will be there with us through all our trials and tribulations.

Many times we may feel as though we are all by ourselves. Like a battle between a powerhouse and an underdog, we feel like it's us against the world. It is during these times that God reminds us that it does not have to be this way. With God we will always have a companion to stand with us even until the end of the age.

Michelle Stewart
Spanish
Stockbridge, GA

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise to be with me until the end of the age.*

Thursday, March 20

Too Busy

Now when he was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20-21 (NKJV)

As the Pharisees eagerly awaited the end of time, they became so busy trying to do good works in the name of the Lord that they failed to see what was really important. Because their efforts were self-centered and not God-centered, they soon grew tired of doing works. The Pharisees failed to realize that salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ, not by works. We must live each day by faith, rather than just works.

As Christ's followers, we must seek to live in this world, but not be of the world. We are encouraged not to worry as the Pharisees did. They were so obsessed with the Lord's coming that they missed his presence in their lives. Only God knows the exact day and hour of his return.

Many times we are so busy at being busy that we fail to find time to be alone with God. God is always around us, working everyday in our lives. We need to discover and use his energy as our source and comfort from day to day. Are you operating on his power as you seek to find his kingdom inside of you? Take time to recharge your spiritual batteries by spending time with him today.

Theresa Miller
Human Development
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: *Lord God, please help me not to worry about troubles, but to seek you daily in all that I do. Let my service always be about you Lord, never me. Strengthen my faith day by day as I seek and experience your presence. Amen.*

Friday, March 21 Good Friday

Shedding Tears

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ...After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." ...When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 18:25-27; 28, 30

Good Friday is God's Friday. It is when we celebrate the Passover when Jesus, "the Lamb of God," was crucified and died for our sins. Like a funeral service, it was a dark day when the disciples were scattered and Jesus' mother wept. It was a day for tears. When I visited the Western Wall (a.k.a. the "Wailing Wall") in Jerusalem several years ago, I experienced the emotion of what many must have felt during the first Good Friday. I witnessed hundreds of people weeping over a piece of paper as they pressed toward the wall looking toward heaven.

I remember shedding tears over grades and relationships during my college experience. Even though I was taught that men don't cry, I could not overcome the powerful emotions that I felt that caused tears to well up in my eyes. The eyes are the windows to the soul and shedding tears is the soul's way of expressing the deep emotions of joy and pain. So when we cry, our souls are expressing heartfelt grief and sorrow. The shortest verse in the Bible comes to mind when I think about Good Friday and reminisce about my trip to the Western Wall: Jesus wept.

It was while Jesus was in Bethany that he joined Lazarus' sisters and friends in weeping at Lazarus' tomb. One of his best friends had died, and he was aware that he too would soon be crucified. Psychologists suggest that tears are a cathartic way of dealing with heavily charged

emotional situations. I have experienced that tears often clear our minds to help us find a way to deal with the problem we are facing.

Jesus solved the problem of Lazarus' death by crying with a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!" and he came forth from the tomb in burial clothes. The tears of pain were transformed into tears of joy. This is what Good Friday means! It is the day when Jesus bore our tears of sin on the cross and through God's power transformed us. Good Friday gives us the strength to face difficult and highly charged emotional situations. Our weeping will endure through the night, but joy will come in the morning!

Quincy D. Brown
Chaplain
LaGrange, GA

Prayer: *Forbid it Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God! All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood. – from "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross," text by Lowell Mason, 1825*

Saturday, March 22

God is with Us

I cried to the Lord in my trouble, and he answered me and put me in a good place. The Lord is with me. I will not be afraid of what man can do to me. Psalm 118:5-6

How many of us believe we are in control of our lives? We go along making decisions and plans. But it isn't until our lives go wrong that we will call out to God. We call on him to repair what we have damaged when it would have been so much simpler to speak with him first. When asking for God's advice and guidance the most important thing for us to do is to listen. God will answer us. He will whisper in our ears, and show us the right path through our life experiences. God will care for us and watch over us.

And what happens when things go wrong that we could not have even anticipated? God is still there for us. He will still answer us and send us on the right course. Our faith in God will see us through any trial. Put your faith in God. He will take your problems and make them his own. The ultimate example of this is God sending his son Jesus to die for us. As Samuel Wesley said in a poem: "Behold the Savior of mankind, nailed to the shameful tree; how vast the love that him inclined, to bleed and die for thee."

While I was in the process of writing this devotional, I had a few things go wrong in my life. The problems ranged from medical concerns to automobile-related issues. When it became all too consuming, I took my own advice: I sat down to talk with God. The problems are still there, but I am no longer overwhelmed. Peace came over me because I know, "the Lord is with me."

Pamelia J Mayne
*Master's Program, LaGrange College at Albany
Leary, GA*

Prayer: *Father, thank you for today and all that it brings. I know that you are beside me and if I listen to you, I will receive your guidance. Amen.*

Sunday, March 23

Easter Sunday

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Mark 16:5-6

Our journey of Lent has come to an end. We now celebrate Easter—the day that Christ was raised from the dead. For Christians, Easter or Resurrection Sunday is the most significant event in history. Without Easter Sunday, the name of Jesus would be about as recognizable as the name Theudas. Who, you may ask, is Theudas? That’s the point. He lived in Israel several years before Jesus. He was, in his time, a popular prophet and teacher. He attracted hundreds of followers proclaiming that he was the Messiah. But when he offended the wrong people, he was put to death.

Sound familiar so far? Then why haven’t we ever heard of him? Because after his death his followers scattered and went on to other things, and the world soon forgot about Theudas. When Jesus died, it looked like the same thing would happen. Before Jesus was dead, the majority of his followers had deserted him stating that his teachings were too hard (John 6:53-66). When Jesus died, it appeared that his cause would die with him, and that he would become as obscure as Theudas.

But oddly enough, it didn’t happen that way. The followers of Jesus didn’t fade into oblivion. In fact, they all came back bolder and more courageous than ever before. What happened? What made the difference? The resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday made the difference. Jesus died. They put him in a tomb. And everyone assumed that this was the end of the story. But a new story was beginning as God raised Jesus from the dead.

Seeing firsthand resurrection appearances of Jesus changed the disciples’ perspective on life. Their encounter with the risen Christ filled them

with grace upon grace. Have you had an encounter with the risen Christ? Has Christ changed your perspective on life? Celebrate Christ's death and resurrection as you create space for grace in your lives. Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!

Prayer: *Holy God, you raised up Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday. By your Holy Spirit, help us to witness to him so that those who have not yet encountered him may come to believe that Christ has died; Christ is resurrected and Christ will come again! Amen.*

