

Lent

DEVOTIONALS

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS
FOR THE HOLY SEASON

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2023

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2023



MT. ZION
BAPTIST CHURCH
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What is Lent?

The Lenten season is a 40-day season of prayer, fasting, sacrifice, devotion, and discovery. This year, it begins on Ash Wednesday (February 22, 2023) and ends on Holy Thursday (April 6, 2023) at sundown. It is a period of preparation to celebrate the Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday. During this time, we seek to know the Lord more intimately by devoting time to prayer, reading sacred scripture with intention, and engaging in fasting to demonstrate self-control. All of this is done to reflect the example of Jesus as he prepared to die for our sins and expecting to encounter God. Jesus prayed, so we will pray. Jesus engaged scripture, so we will engage scripture. Jesus sacrificed, so we will sacrifice. And when this period is over, we will celebrate our Risen Savior.

What To Do During Lent?

During Lent, we Read, Fast, and Pray. This devotional was designed to aid you in directed reading and prayer for this season. Every week (7 total) will have a central devotional theme for you to focus on – an area for you to grow in. Within each week, you will have daily verses to read to yourself, with a spouse, a friend, or family. I encourage you to partner with someone and walk the next 40 days together. Finally, each week will have a central prayer. In short, begin each week with your central devotional theme. Read your relevant scripture daily. And pray the prayer daily. And again, do all of this with someone for accountability.

How you fast is completely up to you. You are challenged to give up something of significance, so make it personal. Consider what's commonly done: fasting for certain hours of the day, giving up fried foods, giving up sweets, fasting from social media, fasting from certain behaviors or habits, negative thinking...etc. The purpose is to remove something from your routine that you regularly need or do and replace it with God. For instance, if you give up sweets and feel a craving...PRAY! Ask God for strength in that moment and force yourself to lean on God in your sacrifice. This is a process. If this is your first Lent season, ease into it, but take it seriously. The objective is to experience God in your sacrifice.

You can do it! You will do it! Let's experience God together!



Week 1

February 22 – February 25

~The Blessing of Correction~

Imagine walking a dog down a sidewalk on a leash. During your walk you encounter a pole and the dog attempts to pass on the left side while you attempt to walk on the right. If you both continue, you'll both stop – the leash will catch the pole and stop your progress. So, what do YOU do? You would likely take a step back to pull your dog on your side of the pole to continue walking forward, together. Together on one accord.

In this example, the alignment between the dog and its owner is only possible because the owner corrected the dog's direction. Although the dog doesn't like being pulled backwards, the blessing is realized when the dog can finally move forward in the right direction.

This analogy magnifies our experiences with God. While we desire to walk with God, sometimes we encounter something along the path that causes us to go in a different direction. We get distracted! So, what does God do? God pulls us back through His corrective action. We may not like God's correction, but we overlook how much of a blessing it is. It is better to be redirected with God than to go off on our own and end up stuck. God's correction is not the end of your world...it's the beginning of a better one!

Read

February 22 – Hebrews 12:11

February 23 – Proverbs 12:1

February 24 – Proverbs 29:15

February 25 – James 5:19-20

Pray

Lord, I pray that you keep working on me. Use the same hands that carry me, and comfort me, to correct me. When I am doing right, draw me close. When I am doing wrong, draw me even closer. Whatever you do, don't take your hand away from me. Hold my hand and help me always walk in alignment with you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

Daily Growth: There are areas of our lives where we go in the wrong direction. We either do wrong, think wrong, go wrong or are wrong. We all have them. During our wrong moments, we look for God to make us open to His correction, and not stubborn in following the wrong direction.

Week 2

February 27 – March 4

~Fix Your Focus~

Yogi Berra was a well-known baseball catcher for the New York Yankees. Not only was he a great catcher, but he was also a great trash talker. He was known for saying virtually anything to distract the opposing batter from focusing on the ensuing pitch.

During one particular game, “Hammering” Hank Aaron stepped up to the plate, and Berra went to work on him. He tried to get Hank to look down at his bat. Repeatedly, Yogi would say, “Hank check your bat, the words are facing the wrong place! Move your bat, Hank! Hey Aaron, check your bat!” Just then the pitch came across the plate and Hank connected – it flew out of the park. After Aaron rounded the bases and scored a home run, he said to Yogi, “I didn’t come here to read.” Hank was focused

Every day that God gives us can be looked at as an opportunity to step up to the plate. It’s also an opportunity for the enemy to distract us. In case you haven’t learned, the enemy is very good at his job. We have the power to connect and hit God’s assignments out of the park, but the power is found in our ability to focus on God. We have to commit daily to ignore the superficial stuff that tries to distract us. During this week’s lesson, let’s grow in our ability to focus on God.

Read

February 27 – Colossians 3:2

February 28 – Proverbs 4:25

March 1 – Matthew 6:33

March 2 – Romans 8:5

March 3 – Isaiah 41:10

March 4 – Proverbs 16:3

Pray

Lord, I pray for the power to find you in all things. Help me to see you in every situation. When the enemy shows up during my walk with you, give me the boldness to declare, “get behind me, Satan!” I desire to serve you and focus only on you. Detour and derail every distraction that comes my way. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

There are moments in our lives where we willingly surrender our attention to the wrong things. These are covert attacks of the enemy where the devil doesn’t have to stop you but slow you down with distractions. We can fight back by just learning to focus better.

Week 3

March 6 – March 11

~Fix Your Focus~

Midway during the movie, “Black Panther,” the hero named T’Challa has a duel with an anti-hero named M’Baku, for the throne of Wakanda. M’Baku found himself losing during this duel and decided to surrender during this match to live and preserve his tribe. At the end of the movie, M’Baku reappears along with his tribe to help T’Challa defeat the greater evil that threatened the kingdom of Wakanda. While M’Baku is not the hero of the movie, his decision to surrender to the rightful king allowed for him to accomplish 2 tasks; 1) share in the victory and 2) survive.

Often, the notion of “surrender” carries a negative connotation – it implies that someone has lost during a battle. However, in our movie example, surrendering actually allows for survival to happen. M’Baku would’ve died in his duel, but instead he was able to show up for the victory in the end. The same can happen in our lives. When we decide to surrender to the rightful king, we are granted access to the victory in the end.

Every day we engage in a war of wills – God’s will and our own. It’s a war to determine who is the rightful King in our lives. Surrendering to God doesn’t mean we lose – for us, it’s a means to greater victories. During this Lenten season, let’s grow in our ability to surrender to the will of Jesus. When we surrender, we can have confidence that we’ll reappear in victory at the end of the story.

Read

March 6 – Matthew 16:24

March 7 – James 4:7

March 8 – Matthew 7:21

March 9 – Matthew 16:25

March 10 – 2 Corinthians 5:10

March 11 – Acts 2:38

Pray

Lord, I pray that you will empower me to submit to your will. Help me to trust your path and plan for my life. Whenever I am faced with a difficult decision, show me your will and give me the strength to follow. I desire to pray the words Jesus prayed, “Not my will but YOUR will be done.” Today, help me to submit to you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

We all have moments in life where we willingly surrender our thoughts, words, and actions to the wrong things. This is an attack of the enemy. The devil looks for opportunities to have you believe submit to everything outside of God’s will. Remember, God has your best interests in mind. Trust and surrender to Him.

Week 4

March 13 – March 18

~Clothe Yourself with Consistency~

A preacher tells the story about how he found himself rewarded through his consistency with an airline. Early in his life he had a great experience flying with American Airlines and as his preaching schedule picked up, he committed to flying only American when possible. As a result, American Airlines rewarded him with “Platinum” status. This means they bump him to first class when he didn’t pay for it. Fees are waived for him. They send gifts to his house to show their appreciation for his loyalty. Platinum status has its perks! And it’s all made possible because he chose to consistently fly with them, and not the other airlines.

Consistency is clothing that we should put on everyday as it relates to God. God is looking for us to remain consistent in “flying” with him opposed to any other gods in our lives. Flying with the others can take us to places that are farther away than where we wanted to go, cost us more than we planned to spend, and make us stay longer than we planned to stay.

We do many things consistently, however, following God’s will consistently is difficult at times. Again, you must treat it as a garment that you’ll never leave home without. If it helps, please know that consistent communion with God has its perks! God rewards consistency with “Sanctified” status. God will elevate you, waive off obstacles, and send blessings to your house. During this Lenten season, challenge yourself in consistency.

Read

March 13 – 1 Corinthians 15:58

March 14 – Luke 16:13

March 15 – Matthew 5:37

March 16 – Ephesians 4:1

March 17 – Hebrews 13:8

March 18 – John 8:31

Pray

Lord, I pray to follow you and fly only with you. Reveal yourself to me in all situations. Remind me of your will and your ways whenever I am lost. Keep me from landing in the wrong destination by always drawing me closer to you. Today, give me what I need to remain consistent to you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

We are used to having options with products we buy. Typically, if you have a good experience with one brand, you leave the rest on the shelf. The enemy is trying to throw other “options” your way, but if you’ve had a good experience with God, there is no need to try anything else. Trust God. Try God. Be consistent with God.

Week 5

March 20 – March 25

~The Problem with Parasites~

Parasites have a bad reputation for a good reason. All they do is take. By definition, a parasite is a creature that latches onto a host and sucks a quantity of blood or nutrients at the expense of the host. It contributes nothing in the process. However, we can only be so upset with what a parasite does because it is only doing what it was meant to do naturally. Parasites were created to take away and never to give anything back.

Since we've engaged this brief biology lesson, ask yourself this question, "Are you a parasite?" When you evaluate your engagement with your family, friends, church, and community, are you always taking or do you ever contribute? Think about the last conversation you've had with a loved one, did you dominate the conversation? We hate to hold a magnifying glass over our actions, but it is needed at times. For this lesson, let's evaluate if we act like the world revolves around us or are we giving to the world around us.

It is not our nature to be parasites. God is not upset at the parasite's behavior, but God can be upset with us when we go against our nature. We are created to give, sacrifice, and contribute. Every blessing recorded in the Bible involves a sacrifice of some sort. The ultimate sacrifice happened with Jesus giving his life for us. During this Lenten season, challenge yourself to follow our nature and the example of Christ to be a giver and not a taker. Don't be a parasite.

Read

March 20 – 2 Corinthians 9:7

March 21 – Acts 20:35

March 22 – Luke 6:38

March 23 – Mark 12:41-44

March 24 – Proverbs 3:27

March 25 – Proverbs 19:17

Pray

Lord, gift me with a heart to give. Grant me your perspective on how to treat others. As I live my life to do what's best for me, don't let me forget that my life impacts others. I want to make a great impact. I want to be the blessing you created me to be. Today, give me what I need to give the same way Jesus gave. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

We are in OUR skin everyday of OUR lives. Therefore, it's easy to focus solely on OURselves. While it is in our best interests to look out for ourselves, that doesn't mean we can't look out for others. By nature, we are called to be a blessing to others. A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle. Be a giver.

Week 6

March 27 – April 1

~Blessed Boundaries~

Most bowling alleys have an option available for young and novice bowlers – raising the lane bumpers. Metal railings can be raised along the bowling lanes to prevent the bowling ball from rolling into the gutter. If the ball leans to the left or right, it will bounce off the bumper and continue down the bowling lane; ultimately striking the pins. These barriers are a blessing for the bowlers that need them.

Again, expert bowlers don't need the barriers because they know what they're doing. However, if you can imagine life as a game of bowling, none of us are experts. We all need barriers and boundaries of some sort. As we travel along our journey of faith, sometimes we tend to veer left or right...towards the gutter. Our misdirection is the perfect way to miss what God has directly in front of us. We could all benefit from God's boundaries guiding us.

According to our sinful nature, there's no avoiding our inclination to miss God's mark and venture outside of the will of God. But just because we sometimes head in the wrong direction doesn't mean we have to continue in that direction. Allowing God to place boundaries in our lives will guide us to where God desires to have us. Boundaries can apply to people, places, platforms, positions, and postures. Having healthy boundaries will result in a healthy life. This week lets focus on God's boundaries for our lives to guide us away from the gutter altogether.

Read

March 27 – 2 Corinthians 6:14

March 28 – Philippians 4:8

March 29 – Ephesians 5:1-4

March 30 – Romans 12:2

March 31 – Proverbs 3:11-12

April 1 – Romans 8:5-6

Pray

Lord, I pray to see the boundaries you have for my life. I recognize that you are the only one who can see when I am heading in the right direction and when I'm going the wrong way. Bless me with your divine wisdom to see the healthy boundaries that you place in my life so that I can remain healthy and holy. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Grow

We should all aspire to live lives where God's boundaries are guiding us in the right direction. Consider using boundaries as a tool of self-care in Christ. When our boundaries are compromised, we can be thrown off and find ourselves out of character. Learn to leverage God's barriers for your life, daily!

Week 7

April 3 – April 8

~You've Got a Story to Tell~

Imagine going on a road trip in during the time before the GPS, cell phone navigation, and MapQuest. You were left with two options to get around; either you'd use a map to navigate, or you'd ask for directions. Service stations along travel routes were famous for getting directions. If you found yourself lost, you'd pull into the service station, speak to the attendant, and be given directions to your destination. The reason these attendants were so reliable is because they've likely been down the road you're traveling before.

There are several purposes for us telling our stories to others about the roads we've traveled in life and how God has directed us. First, we have the privilege of bragging on how God has blessed our lives. Secondly, we give ourselves a reminder of how God has saved us. Thirdly, we're able to help direct someone else who may be venturing down a path we've gone through. Our stories should be shared to save our brothers and sisters.

Marketing researchers show that people are 7x more likely to report bad news compared to good news. As believers of Christ, let's challenge ourselves to go against the trend and share our good news as often as possible. Believe it or not, when you share your God story, you are fulfilling the Great Commission. You are sharing the Gospel when you share your story. If God has been good to you, say it every chance that you get! Tell your story!

Read

April 3 – 2 Timothy 1:8-9

April 4 – Luke 8:39

April 5 – Psalm 119:46

April 6 – Acts 1:8

April 7 – Jeremiah 51:10

April 8 – Romans 1:16

Pray

Lord, this week I pray to have the boldness needed to share my stories about you. Help me dismiss the desire to complain about all the things going wrong or could be different. Instead, fill me with the spirit of gratitude for all that you have already done and what I believe you will do. Bless me with the vision to see opportunities to share the Gospel through my personal experience and bless me with the zeal to seize those moments. In Jesus name, Amen.

Grow

We should all take advantage of any moments to say what God has done for us. As often as we say, "thank you" for any blessing we receive, we should get in the practice of sharing what we're saying "thank you" for! Don't hold onto your story. Your story is actually someone else's blessing. Be a blessing by sharing your blessing!

