



Thank you for joining us on our Lenten Journey this year! Each week's devotions are based on the sermons preached the previous Sunday by our pastors, Eddie Herring and Ed Archer. We hope that you will use these writings to guide you as you pray and meditate on the Scriptures for the week and that you will hear God speaking to you.

Please visit our website at <http://calhounfirst.com> for more information on our church and for a daily online link to these devotions.

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2017



**Monday, March 6**

**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**

**Matthew 4: 1-11**

**Reverend Ed Archer, Associate Pastor**

*1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. 2 For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. 3 During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, 6 and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" 7 Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'" 8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." 10 "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'" 11 Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus. Matthew 4:1-11 NLT*

Most people tend to think of the devil as we usually see him depicted at Halloween: the classic red suit, horns on his head and having a tail, carrying a pitchfork. However, to deal with the devil is serious business.

The devil is described in Scripture as a powerful and personal being whose primary purpose is to oppose God's work in this world. How does this happen? It happens primarily through the hindering of a Christian's witness and usefulness through deception but also by temptation, doubt, lies, guilt and fear. When this happens, even good things can be used for evil purposes if we place the world ahead of God.

Think about it! Can we recognize modern day idol worship? In today's world we too often worship money, power, careers, sports figures, and political leaders. Whatever holds first place in our lives or controls us is our god. We need to ask God to help us dethrone the "foreign gods" in our lives and make the true God our first priority just as Jesus did in the wilderness.

*God, help us to make you the first priority always, Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 7**

**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**Ginger Anderson**

Temptations are an inescapable part of the human experience. I must have faced a dozen of them just this morning: Sleep in or get up early? Play hooky or go into work? Eat a nutritious breakfast or stop for a biscuit? Gossip with a coworker or hold my tongue?

When temptation gets the better of me, which it often does, I sometimes sooth my guilt and shame by using God's nature to justify my weakness. *Doesn't God love me, flaws and all? Doesn't he want me to be happy?*

I Matthew 4: 1 – 11, we learn in which Christ is tested in the wilderness. Jesus, having fasted for forty days and nights, is tempted to turn stones into bread. He is tempted to test God in order to comfort himself. To turn away from Him and toward Satan in exchange for power.

Matthew reminds us of just how human Jesus was. I think we need this reminder. Sometimes we think about the ways in which Christ was tempted, and we say, "Of course *He* can resist temptation, He is *God*," but we know that, in Jesus, God was human in every way. He, like we, was repeatedly in a position to either give into his desires or act in spite of them. In truth, he suffered from temptation more than any of us, because he never yielded to his earthly desires.

Whose are we? We are the sons and daughters of an empathetic, understanding God. When you pray about temptation, you are in the presence of a friend who says, "I know just how you feel."

To be sure, God does loves us, flaws and all. Unlike Satan, who seeks to weaken us through our weaknesses, God seeks to refine us. To make us new. More like Him.

Satan tempts. God tests. There is a big difference between the two. The goal of temptation is failure. The goal of testing is advancement. God, when he tests us, is not unlike a teacher who tests a student to be sure he or she is ready to move on to bigger and better things.

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for enduring temptation and suffering on our behalf. Thank you for teaching us that we are more than slaves to our desires and that, through you, we can make choices that align with your will. Thank you for forgiving us every time we succumb to temptation, and thank you for helping us grow and mature during those times in which we are tested and, in you, find the strength to pass.*

**Wednesday, March 8**

**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**Lisa Archer**

Ed and I have recent experience watching our children take their first steps into the world as adults. Katie went first leaving to live on campus at Kennesaw State University at 18 and then getting married at 20. Ryan followed in her footsteps also living on campus at KSU and getting married at 22. Zack has taken a slightly different first step that has taken him farther away to live on campus at Georgia Southern. I miss the closeness of family living under one roof and worry and even fear for them at times.

However, I find that solace comes from two things. We always parented with the belief that our job was to raise adults, so we were always preparing them. We also brought them up to seek and know the Lord. Because we were blessed to witness them growing into and living out their faith, we came to know them not only as our children but as our brothers and sister in Christ. They know us in that way as well.

When I re-read the passage in Matthew 4:1-8, I pictured Jesus with a bit of a smirk on His face as He responded to the temptations and lies the devil laid before Him. I can picture Him chuckling at the efforts to convince Him to turn His back on what He knew to be true, to forget Whose He was.

Jesus had the unique perspective of knowing all of God's promises. He knew the promise we read in Jeremiah 30:22, "You will be my people, and I will be your God." He knew the promise in Revelation 21:3, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them." He knew Whose He was. The devil's attempts at convincing Him otherwise were laughable.

As we navigate through this world, face temptations, hear lies, let's face them knowing the same promises Jesus did. Let's face them with the firm assurance of knowing Whose we are. Let's go farther than that. Let's live every day looking for opportunities to invite others to be our brothers and sisters, to share in the promises, to be part of the family.

As a mom with a newly empty nest, I remind myself often that God has this. When I start to worry or to let fear creep into my heart, I am going to remember that smirk I imagined on Jesus's face that told the devil that he had no power here. It said, "I am His and He is mine." I am going to remember that I have a big strong family, a growing family, a family led and loved by God Himself.

**Thursday, March 9**

**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**Margaret 'Mugsy' Thornton**

“You’re not the boss of me!” I remember hearing and saying those words as a child, in the midst of typical squabbles among groups of playmates. And maybe you too, recall that there was always at least one super-bossy kid around who thought it her place to be in charge. In that situation, the usual response was voicing a rebellion against that “boss”. ( For sure, though I may have said those words to a peer, I knew better than to say them to my mother, because I was carefully taught that yes, she was!)

So, the question, “Whose am I?” begs an answer. If we buy into the prevailing worldview of our “all about me” culture, then the answer, obviously, is “I’m the boss of ME!” On the other hand, if in the spirit I know that I am in need of salvation and I cry out to my Father God to deliver me from SELF, He has provided redemption through the Son, and I become reconciled to the Father. Paul reminds me, in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The reconciliation provides that “peace with God”, but it also points out that to maintain that peace, I must relinquish my control over self to Him! In I Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul issues a profound reminder: “Or do you not know that your body is the TEMPLE of the HOLY SPIRIT, who is IN YOU and whom you have from God, and you are NOT your own. For you were BOUGHT at a price, therefore glorify God in your body AND in your spirit, which are GOD’S. Couldn’t be much plainer than that, could it?”

We have all encountered a strong-willed child, somewhere, sometime. We might have been one of those! And in adults, self-included, too often I see the attitude of “my way or the highway”. So I am developing the habit of repeating the Lord’s Prayer as often as needed to remind me, “Our Father, Who art in heaven, HALLOWED be THY name. Thy kingdom come, THY will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” And another observation: YOU are the POTTER, I am the clay. And last, when it comes to clashing my will against His, I remember that someone famously said, “Yo’ arms too short to box with GOD!” I really don’t want to do that, but rather I want to embrace the truth that I AM HIS, AND HE IS MINE.

**Thursday, March 10**  
**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**  
**Matthew 4:1-11**  
**Copelan, Kyndal and Karcyn Brown**

Copelan (age 13)

To who do you belong?

I belong to God. He created the earth, the heavens, and everything in the Universe. I believe He created all this because it is written in His Word. HE has given me a family, church, friends, and life.

What sort of life has HE given you?

God has given me the ability to wake up and walk; to breathe; to have an eternal life in Him when we die. Everyone will have an eternal life (Heaven or Hell) but in Him we have the promise of hope in His Word and Heaven. We need to be a temple of God (protect our body that He has given us), don't trust Satan or anything from him, and rebuke him. We belong to the One and Only GOD.

Kyndal (age 11)

To who do you belong?

I belong to God because He is the One that made us and gives us power by living in our heart and power in His word. In the scripture Jesus turned to God's word for every situation given Him from Satan. We should never trust a bad person. I believe I belong to God and Jesus because they are the most important. If they did not make everyone we would not be here today at this very moment.

What sort of life do you have in God?

A physical and eternal life.

Karcyn (age 11)

To who do you belong?

I belong to God because HE gave us Jesus who died on the cross for us. That shows me how much Love HE has for me. In the scripture Jesus rebuked Satan by using God's Word; this shows me Jesus belongs to God and so do we". I believe if we do not trust God we would be in a bad place. We don't need to listen to what Satan says or others that try and get us in trouble. Satan tried to tempt Jesus in the scripture and make him do bad things. Jesus rebuked Satan by the Word several times and did not go against God's Word.

*Dear God, help us today to come to you with the simple faith of a child. Keep us safe. Amen*

**Saturday, March 11**

**Spiritual Questions: Whose are We?**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

**Millicent Flake**

We have been asking ourselves this week who we belong to as Christians - and if we answer, "We belong to God," then the question becomes - "What does that mean in our day to day life?"

Jesus was trying to figure some of this out for himself when the Holy Spirit led Him to the wilderness immediately following the "mountain top experience" of his baptism. There the Devil was waiting to tempt Him, to try to win Him away from his goal of saving humankind. This was a high stakes battle.

What I notice about these verses in Matthew 4:1-11 is that in each of the three instances, the Devil offers Jesus the easy way out -

"Jesus, you are hungry, just turn these rocks into bread and you can eat!"

"Jesus, you know deep down you don't want to go through the pain of the next few years, as well as death on the cross - just jump off of the temple and God will send His angels to catch you - then everyone will believe in you!"

"Jesus, you can live in splendor like a king should - Just worship me and I can give you all the wealth and power you want!"

Yet Jesus, even in his weakened state, digs deep into the Scripture on which he was raised and finds the strength to tell the Devil NO! I can't imagine how hard this would be after fasting for 40 days. If I miss even one meal I'm so cranky I give into most anything. But following Christ isn't about taking the smooth and well-worn path. It involves climbing over some rocky and steep trails, often not being able to see the way ahead.

Sometimes I feel that if I am having a hard time being loving and kind and "Christlike" that it is all my fault, that I just have not spent enough time in prayer and Bible study, and many times that's true. But the Devil didn't just go away and leave Jesus alone after their time in the wilderness, and he doesn't quit trying to pull us down and away from the truth. He keeps after us and often that can make our journey difficult.

Jody Bryson recently shared a quote from C.S. Lewis that struck me and relates to these verses from Matthew:

*"I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."*

So if you are looking for a quick fix, instant gratification, or an immediate answer to all your problems, don't come to Christ. If you do not want to feel empathy for those who are suffering, don't want to give your time and money to something outside of yourself or have no desire to share your burdens with others, stay away. But if you crave a fuller, deeper and more multi-faceted life, with the Holy Spirit in you each moment to guide and comfort you, and the promise of eternal life - then I recommend Christianity.

*Dear God, we pray this day for the courage to follow you, even when it is difficult. Thank-you for your Holy Spirit, who is always with us to give us strength against the temptations and trials that come our way.*

**Monday, March 13**

**Spiritual Questions: Born Again?**

**John 3:1-17**

**Dr. Jim Gentry**

*There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*

*Jesus answered and said to Him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."*

*Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"*

*Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:1-8, NKJV)*

*Born Again.* We have heard this moniker bounced around all over the media for many years. It has become a watchword for evangelical Christians, first made famous to the general public by President Jimmy Carter in the '70s. The common definition is brief but to the point: Born again means that a person has had a life changing experience with Jesus Christ, has been baptized and now has a personal relationship with God. That may be good enough for most folks but, as right thinking Christians, we need to delve deeper into the real meaning of this phrase, Born Again.

Some synonyms might be applied here: Regeneration, Rebirth through the Holy Spirit, a realignment of the will, the liberation of new capabilities and powers, "Washed in the blood". Most important is first believing Jesus was who he said he was, The Son of God. Less we forget, this experience is not just a one-time thing. Through His grace we can continue to repent and be forgiven our trespasses which we will continue to do and continue to receive His Holy Spirit.

The real heart of the concept of "Born Again" is found in John 3 when Nicodemus approached Jesus at night as a representative of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees, religious teachers and rulers of the law, to ask him questions because they knew he was one "come from God" and who spoke with authority.

*Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind*

*blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:1-8, NKJV)*

Well, there you have it. But, what did Jesus really want us to understand? First, it is obvious that Nicodemus was representing his Pharisee brothers. He mentioned “we” several times. He came by night which implies that he did not want to be seen with Jesus. Also, the Pharisees knew that He was a “teacher come from God”. They wanted to know more, no doubt trying to find something to ensnare Jesus.

Another interpretation is that Nicodemus came on his own accord and felt the call to know Jesus more intimately as “one who came from God.” I like this one better.

From the Greek Jesus uses a word that has a dual meaning, “again” or “from above”. Jesus meant simply that we need to be born twice, once from our mother and once from the Spirit of God (from above).

Some interpret the “water” as being baptized. I prefer the implication of a natural birth. Spirit is described as the wind which can come and go as it wills. We can see the results of wind by rustling leaves, bending trees, etc. Likewise, we can see the results of wind/spirit by the actions of people once they have sought out Jesus, repented and received the Holy Spirit by their fruits.

So, being “Born Again” is our second birth, a birth “from above”, a birth by the Holy Spirit of God.

Being “Born Again” also means that we seek God's face first, then repent, then receive the Holy Spirit. Throughout our lives we can continually seek out the Holy Spirit to help us in good times and bad. We are “adopted sons and daughters of God by way of the Holy Spirit and as a result of our “seeking Him” and His dying for us!” The result is a life that can be filled with joy and peace, “not of this world”. If you have not been “born from above”, repent of your sins and do a 180 degrees and receive his Holy Spirit. Then you will come into God's family and you will have been born a second time, but this time into God's Kingdom.

How will you know? His Holy Spirit will “breathe on you” and His joy and the Peace will be with you.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to each of us. Help us to show the results of your Spirit blowing in our lives this day. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 14**

**Spiritual Questions: Born Again?**

**John 3:1-17**

**Terry and Jeff Blair**

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless she/he is BORN AGAIN" (John 3:3).*

We are going to split up our thoughts of being "Born Again", as we have come to know that two different ways:

**Jeff's Story:**

Being born into a Christian family and attending church regularly growing up you would think I would have had a strong understanding of John 3:1-17, and the importance of being Born Again. But the depth of my understanding was actually very shallow, as I went through the "acts" of what I was "supposed to do". I believed...I knew God...I knew there was a Heaven...I knew right from wrong...I prayed when someone needed prayer...I attended church most of the time. But I did not know there was something really BIG missing in my relationship with God.

Then we had a work opportunity to move to Australia. Although we would live in a small town south of Sydney, we flew into Sydney, and due to the length of the trip with 3 young children, our new company put us up for 2 days in Sydney to sightsee. On Sunday morning we were walking along some back streets, and heard some wonderful music. We opened a door to follow the sound and walked into a smallish open area, where a band was playing songs. As I listened and watched, it turned out to be a worship service and the band was playing Contemporary Christian, which as an Episcopal and Lutheran, I had never heard before. But boy did it speak to me.

As we became settled in the small town of Wangaretta, we became involved in a small church, with devoted members, that simply had a different outlook on life, and Contemporary Christian music continued to fill my soul. I could not explain what I was feeling, but, "I had a feeling in my soul...and I prayed that I was not wrong...that the life I have now..it was only the beginning...it felt like I was born again...it felt like I was living...for the very first time in my life..." Lyrics from "BORN AGAIN" from the Contemporary Christian Group, Third Day...enjoy the link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m\\_dp2n-5W8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4m_dp2n-5W8)

**Terry's Story:**

When I was 12, maybe 13, I attended a Lutheran church. This is where I was being confirmed. Luckily for me, God worked in ways only a middle school student could relate to: a young pastor who put an illustration of running shoes on his office wall rather than the Last Supper and the Broadway musical, Jesus Christ Superstar. Pastor Linders made the stories I had heard in church and Sunday school meaningful and relevant through stories of everyday events. And a trip to New York City to see Jesus Christ Superstar helped me understand the story of Christ and glimpse Him and all those around Him in a personal way.

You never know what is going to change the course of your life. But one day I was searching to understand who this Jesus was, and the next day, it was as if my eyes and heart had been opened, and I loved Him profoundly. My born again moment changed the course of my life. I believe I would be a very different person - a slave to my selfishness and stubborn nature. With God as my compass and Christ as my Savior, I live a more contented life. I still fight my shortcomings daily (just ask Jeff), and my life is not immune to the hardships and sorrow of everyday living. However, sometimes, just sometimes, the Spirit opens my eyes to the joyous workings of God, and I am humbled and overwhelmed to be a part of how God uses his people to carry out His plan bit by bit in everyday life.

*John 3:8 "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

**Wednesday, March 15**

**Spiritual Questions: Born Again?**

**John 3:1-17**

**Rodney Mathis**

BORN AGAIN. As I write this, the Atlanta Falcons are preparing for the Super Bowl. By the time you read this, they will have won or lost. Will the results change the message of this devotion? Maybe. Maybe not. How does the Atlanta Falcons turn around season relate to the Spiritual question of being born again? Let's look at Quarterback Matt Ryan for instance. Last year was his 8<sup>th</sup> season as a professional quarterback and his first season playing for a new head coach and new offensive coordinator. He struggled and had the worst season of his career. People were calling him washed up.

This year is a different story. Matt Ryan is having the best season of his career and is the leading candidate to win the NFL Most Valuable Player award. What happened? I read an interview with the new offensive coordinator, Kyle Shanahan, and this was his response (paraphrased): "Matt had to learn to play with his back turned, looking away from the action. In the past, he had to see everything in front of him." This year he adapted to the change and excelled. He learned a new way to play. He learned to trust his teammates more, to have faith in his coaches' plans and in his teammates to execute those plans. He no longer had to "see" everything before it took place.

I am reminded of several verses of scripture. Hebrews 11:1 proclaims that "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Romans 8:28 promises that "In all things, God works for good through those called according to his purpose."

This week's scripture, John 3:1-17 captures Jesus' debate with Nicodemus about being born again. Jesus tells Nicodemus that to enter the Kingdom of Heaven we must be born again. Nicodemus takes Jesus literally, but Jesus replies figuratively and spiritually in John 3:13 when he states that "Spirit gives birth to Spirit". When we are born again, we let go of our old ways, open our hearts to His Spirit and have faith His plan.

*Dear God, help us to trust you when we can't see the way ahead. Thank you for your promise to take care of us as we open our hearts to you.*

**Thursday, March 16**  
**Spiritual Questions: Born Again? John 3:1-17**  
**Joe Kauffman**

### **Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**

*3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."<sup>[a]</sup>*

*<sup>4</sup> "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"*

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit<sup>[b]</sup> gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You<sup>[c]</sup> must be born again.'<sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."<sup>[d]</sup>*

*<sup>9</sup> "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.*

*<sup>10</sup> "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."<sup>[g]</sup>*

*<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

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There is certainly a lot to unpack in this passage. The main part of this message has to do with Nicodemus having trouble understanding “born again”, to the extent that Nicodemus was applying his earthly understanding “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born” as oppose to Jesus’s spiritual explanation.

Jesus talked about being born of “water and spirit”, this being a purification by the spirit of the earthly and/or fleshly self and the outward expression of “water” through baptism purifying the person.

With the Holy Spirit taking up residence in your heart, you will find that you may look at things differently than you used to and through more of a spiritual lens rather than a fleshly lens. I sometimes like to remember my baptism, maybe you do as well, though for me it was a long time ago at age 13, I still remember standing in the front of a little country church in western Kentucky and being sprinkled with water. Coming from a military family and having a military haircut, I can still remember, and feel, the water as it ran down my head and on to my Sunday best church clothes. I did not, at the time, feel all that different, but my change has been a journey that truly began at age 13 and is now entering into my 46<sup>th</sup> year since age 13.

As I look back at the changes in my life, say in five year increments, I can see how my thinking has changed as teenager, to young adult and moving into middle age. Not to say that things have been easy, but through all the circumstances and struggles of life, I have had the peace of Christ within me and the guidance that only God can provide.

If you want this peace in your life and guidance, just ask Jesus into your life then talk with your pastor about being baptized (outward expression of the purification and decision you have already made). You will find that your baptism will be an experience you will remember for the rest of your life. If you have not been baptized and made the decision for Christ, always remember, no matter what any of us have done, God will always accept us, no exceptions!

I remember a devotion I read a while back concerning baptism. There was a pastor leading a Hispanic congregation in a baptismal service. They borrowed a school pool and the pastor was baptizing in the shallow end of the pool. There was an individual, speaking in Spanish, that the pastor could not understand, and as his time came, it was explained to the pastor that the individual wanted to be baptized at the deep end of the pool, because of all that he had done in life that he was truly sorry for, he wanted a complete covering from Jesus. This individual wanted as much of Jesus’ covering as possible so that he knew he was washed clean in Christ!!

*Dear Lord, thank you for forgiving us no matter how many sins we have committed. And thank you for your gift of baptism.*

**Friday, March 17**

**Spiritual Questions: Born Again?**

**John 3:1-17**

**Laura Holland**

I often wrongly compare myself to others using the “apples to oranges” method. I am the apple and a 25-year-old woman is the orange. (Or vice versa) I look at her flawless skin, her wrinkle-free face, her hair that is the original color God gave her and I think, “Why can’t I look like that? Why can’t I go back to the days when my skin was tight and my knees were my own and not the Stryker titaniums that replaced mine at Redmond Park Hospital many years ago?”

Going beyond physical appearances, I further wonder about the “road not taken.” What if I had gone to a large university rather than a small college? What if I had tried to make a career of writing? What if I had stayed in my former neighborhood instead of moving to my current one?

But would I really want to? Would I really want to start over and go through the same or worse problems, stresses, and losses that seemed nearly unbearable at the time?

The fact of the matter is that it’s really a moot point. You can’t go back. You can’t re-do. You can’t start over. You can’t transform. You can’t be born again.

Or can you? Jesus did not mince words when he spoke to Nicodemus. He didn’t tell Nicodemus he *could* be born again. He told him he *must* be born again.

Jesus said that “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” ( v.6) If I were to physically start over, my physical attributes would eventually be the ones I sometimes disdain now. Different life choices would still lead to the occasional “What if’s?” Being born again in the Spirit, however, involves no regrets. No concerns about wrinkles. No “only her hairdresser knows for sure” musings. They don’t matter.

Being born again in the Spirit does mean this- a life of forgiven sins, trust in God, belief in what Christ did for us, and an assurance we will enter the kingdom of God. The fleeting gives way to the eternal, and the rebirth is evidenced by the work the Holy Spirit does in us and through us.

And that is a transformation I can live with forever. Literally.

*Dear Heavenly Father, You made a way for us through your son Jesus Christ. We thank you. You gave us forgiveness of our sins. We thank you. You gave us a rebirth that doesn’t concern itself with temporal flesh but eternal spirit. We thank you. Through the evidence of the Spirit in us, please let us be a light that leads others to be born again. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 18**

**Spiritual Questions: Born Again?**

**John 3:1-17**

**Dr. Cindy Brown**

What does it mean when we say or hear someone say "I'm born again" or "I'm a born-again Christian." How can we be born a second time?

In the John 3:1-17, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus one night and asked him about this law of salvation. Jesus replied "unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; "unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God": " what is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the spirit is spirit".

Our "first birth" (physical birth) is the "water birth" (not baptism). We are all born sinners (from the inherited sin of Adam) and must be cleansed spiritually from above in our "second birth" which allows the Spirit of God to come and dwell in us. God and His Spirit cannot live in an unclean vessel. We are saved (born-again) by our faith in God's son, Jesus Christ, and then it's grace from God that allows our spiritual cleansing and salvation , with immediate indwelling of His Holy Spirit in us. Being "born again" is very simple and free for all. It is a gift from God because of his extreme love for us. We "recognize" Jesus as the Son of God, "repent" of our sinfulness and unworthiness, and "receive" the best gift imaginable.

I cannot recall my exact age of salvation (I know I was an early teen) but I do recollect a tremendous feeling of thankfulness and peacefulness come over me. I remember vividly sitting in First Baptist Church, Hartwell, Georgia, at the time thinking that irrespective of what happens in life, "it's all okay because my eternity is sealed" by His flesh and blood shed for me. What a joyous moment!

With the year 2010 and an illness of my father, I recall a tremendous "awakening" of my spirit in Him. His Spirit never left me from the time of my re-birth but I had allowed life's chaos and distractions (what I call the "rat race" of life) to dampen his voice. I had forgotten all too often to "be still and know" that He is God. During that painful time I immediately returned to His truths and the knowledge that I had no inherent strength apart from Him. I knew He was always with me and would give me the strength needed to face the future with my Pop. As a matter of fact, I received from Him during that time a renewed appreciation of what this life is truly about ---the saving of other's souls and a strength of actually talking about God and salvation with others along my journey.

**Monday, March 20**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Reverend Ed Archer**

*1-5 "Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it."*

*6-10 Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. "I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of."*

*11-13 "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for the money. The sheep don't matter to him."*

*14-18 "I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."*

*John 10:1-18 MSG*

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God is generally compared to a shepherd in relation to the people and fully revealed in the person of Jesus. The imagery of John 10 offers us an example of the way church leaders are to lead and care for God's people but always being dependent on the care, compassion, and grace of the one true Shepherd.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, he used a parable of the sheep recognizing his voice and then following him. Our spiritual journey will inevitably follow the same progression. As young fledgling sheep, we learn how to follow Jesus by his voice. As we grow, we find ourselves out in the world as a more deeply committed follower of Jesus. You may be in the midst of distractions and worldly temptations but Jesus has not abandoned or forgotten you.

*Let us pray: Jesus, may we always hear your voice and follow you in all things, Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 21**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Missy Hathcox**

*"Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." John 10:1-9, NIV*

Have you ever thought "What led me here?" Whether it be a simple shopping trip to Kroger or a train of thought that has taken the wrong path, wouldn't it be simple if everyday we had a shepherd that guided our path and reminded our feeble mind what it should be focusing on? Being a mother of three, I cannot fathom how many times I have been misguided by my own lack of control, meanwhile doubting the decisions that I have been entrusted to make with these mini-me's of mine.

John's continuous theme of Jesus being the one and only way to salvation takes on a metaphorical and very simple understanding with the statement "I am the gate." In these times, sheep would've been kept in a court surrounded by walls but open to the sky, and with only one entrance, the gate. This shepherd was in charge of a large fold. The sheep weren't herded out of the court, but lead by the unique voice of their shepherd. His sheep, and only his sheep, would follow him.

Jesus warns of the "thieves and robbers" that have come before him, tempting to lead the sheep astray. He warns in an earlier passage that the sheep will run away from a stranger's voice. What if we could so clearly hear our Savior's voice and know, without fail, what direction we should go? So many times we listen to every voice, but the one we should.

Ultimately, Jesus is very clear about the gate that is to be entered, knowing that the Jewish leaders are still divided. He continues on and says that "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them with me." Jesus states that other sheep, meaning the Gentiles, will also follow his voice. They will come to Jesus and go back out to pasture to find a place to rest.

*Dear God, thank you for being our Gate. Help us today to listen to your voice only. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 22**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Max Parrott**

*I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. John 10: 9-11.*

Jesus was talking with the Pharisees after He had healed a blind man, not only of his physical blindness but, also, of his spiritual blindness. As Jesus continued teaching and answering the Pharisees' questions they began to see that He thought they had spiritual blindness (stubbornness and stupidity). They did not see that Jesus is the True Messiah, the gate to eternal life.

As I read these verses I wonder, how do they speak to me? I am a believer. I do not think I am like the Pharisees. Then I remembered a Sunday when as a part of the pastor's sermon he challenged each person in the congregation to bring one person to Christ. I suddenly understood. As I witness to a nonbeliever I can be the gate to Jesus and He will be the gate to God's salvation, the access to safety, security and Eternal Life.

*Dear God, thank you for opening the door to us to come in. Help us today to allow You to work through us to bring others into Your fold. Amen.*

**Thursday, March 23**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Millicent Flake**

Our verses this week in John 10 paint a vivid picture of Jesus as the Shepherd taking care of us and protecting us from the dangers in life. Since most of us don't keep sheep any more, we can transfer this to the way we treat our pets. We make sure our dog and cat family members have nutritious food, warm beds and the love and attention they need. We do our best to keep them out of the road and to make sure they are safe in the house or yard. Other than a cat who might catch a mouse for a snack, our pets, like the sheep in John's passage, are totally dependent on us to survive. And when something bad happens to one of them, we grieve.

Out in the country where I live I often hear coyotes howling at night. When my little cat prowled in the woods behind our house, I was always afraid one of them would snatch him up and kill him. In the same way we have dangers around us that want to pull us away from God. We read in I Peter 5:8 (The Living Bible):

*Be careful—watch out for attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion, looking for some victim to tear apart.*

These attacks are often subtle - the immoral messages that come through the TV shows and movies we watch, the constant barrage of advertisements for us to live beyond our means, the pull of so many activities away from church. But like a gate, Christ is there as a barrier to keep us safe, because He loves us.

Wedged in between these wonderful verses about Jesus as our Good Shepherd, is one of my favorite verses in the Bible:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10, RSV)*

This verse sums up the Gospel to me - when I give myself over completely to Christ, my life becomes richer, fuller and more joyful. I am able to rest in comfort, knowing He is watching out for me.

*Dear God, thank you for your love and protection in our lives and in the lives of those we love. Help us today to relax in that love and to experience the abundant life you desire for us to have. Amen.*

**Friday, March 24**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Katie Hartel**

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6*

When reading this scripture, Isaiah makes us question, How are we like sheep? The comparison may upset some people; after all, who wants to be compared to such a smelly, vacant animal? However, the Lord calls Himself our shepherd because, though we may not always smell as unpleasant, we really are a lot like sheep.

First of all, we are followers. If you were to put a flock of sheep in the middle of a pasture and turn your back on them for two minutes, you'd find them all scattered about, poking their noses into things they shouldn't be. Humans have a tendency towards this too. Oftentimes, we fall subject to a group mentality—we wear what everyone else is wearing, laugh at what everyone else is laughing at, and go where everyone else is going. We are also prone to be naive, trusting and following those who are not necessarily doing the right thing. Without the supervision of their shepherd, sheep may wander and end up poking their little noses in things a little too close

to the edge of the cliff. Sound familiar? We as humans may wander into trouble and, like sheep, are too stubborn to put aside our way of doing things and ask for forgiveness and guidance. But however deep of a rut we feel we have wandered into, we can find peace in knowing we have a faithful Shepherd of our own: God.

Like a shepherd, God leads us. A good shepherd leads the sheep out in front of him, not from behind. There isn't a place where the lambs put their feet that the shepherd hasn't already walked. There isn't a valley the sheep go through that the shepherd hasn't gone through first. There is nothing coming into your life that isn't terrain the Shepherd has already covered and given His full approval—including the rocky ground, the most difficult times. When you run into hard times in your life, don't forget the Shepherd leads you through that ground. He will use it for your good and bring you through it to the place He has planned.

Like a shepherd, He protects us. Like sheep, we are incredibly vulnerable. While sheep are vulnerable to disease, weather, and predators and thieves that come to steal them, we are exposed to worldly and spiritual enemies who wish to terrorize us, harm us, or steal our focus. Sometimes these enemies tempt us to chart our own course—but our Shepherd protects us. It's just as Jesus says in John 10:9-10: "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Know that you're reading this today because the Shepherd is leading and protecting you.

Like a shepherd, He feeds us. A shepherd's job of taking care of his sheep is not limited to leading them and protecting them from danger, but also making sure they are healthy. For sheep, this means plenty of green pastures and still, clear waters. Our Shepherd keeps us healthy in mind and soul in countless ways by filling us with His word and spirit. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." (Psalm 23:1-3) God acts as our Shepherd by helping us take hold of the abundant food He has provided to feed ourselves day by day.

Through all our trials and tribulations, we must remember that the Good Shepherd is walking with us and will protect us, his flock, from harm. He gave His life for us, to save us from being eternally lost because of our sin. As Isaiah foretold centuries before that happened, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Having taken away the weight of our sins, Jesus is willing to lead us every day as only the Good Shepherd can.

Take time to thank God today for the ways that He is your faithful Shepherd.

*Lord, thank You that even though I am embarrassingly like a sheep in so many ways, one way I'm not is that I can talk to You. I can come to You with my difficulties and needs, knowing You will care for me. I praise You for the many ways You are my Shepherd. Thank You that in Your leading, protecting, and feeding, You have never failed. Your faithfulness has never faltered. There hasn't been, nor will there ever be, a circumstance or danger You can't handle. I rest my life in Your care. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Saturday, March 25**

**I am the Gate, John 10:9**

**I am the Good Shepherd, John 10:11**

**Buddy Looney**

When I was in high school my family lived on a farm where we kept a small herd of cattle. My folks also had a business to run which demanded a lot of their time. So, I generally got home from school well before they got home from work. I would usually look after the cows and feed the chickens before my parents arrived home.

In my senior year we had a rain that lasted for several days. The Blackwater River, which was normally about 400 yards from our west fence line, began to overflow its banks. I arrived home from school one day to find our entire lower pasture under 4 to 5 feet of water. Then I realized the cows were in that same pasture with the gate shut. They were trapped and helpless to free themselves on their own.

I dragged my canoe out of the barn and paddled out to open the gate. The cows had already crowded themselves against the gate. Their heads were barely above the water. As soon as I opened the gate they escaped the still rising flood waters and headed for the higher pasture on a hill. On the hill they would be safe and could graze in peace.

Living in a sin stricken world, we can become flooded with uncertainty, stress and other anxieties brought on by circumstances in which we find ourselves. Or perhaps, we see loved ones having to endure painful circumstances. We can all feel trapped and helpless to save ourselves from the rising flood.

God in His unconditional love and unfailing grace has provided an open gate through which we can pass and find peace and safety on higher ground above the flood.

Jesus said, "Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pasture."

John 10:9

*Dear Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season may we truly seek and find that Gate of salvation which is none other than Jesus Christ our Lord. May we enter into His freedom and the abundant life He offers. For it is in His Holy Name, the Name above all names, the Name of Jesus Christ we pray.*

*Amen*

**Monday, March 27**

**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**

**Carol Inman**

*John 15:1-4 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. "You have already been pruned for greater faithfulness by the message I have given you. Remain in me and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine and you cannot be fruitful apart from me."*

The vine on my mailbox has been pruned to the ground. The support trellis is still there but nothing is growing on it. I had been thinking it needed pruning, it had many dead branches choking out the little bit of greenery left. Last summer it displayed less blooms than anytime since it was planted, and that was some twenty years ago. It needs fertilizing and tending by my gardener if it is to return to usefulness and beauty.

To be honest, that plant has always been a source of disappointment to me. I thought I was getting a big blooming, purple Clematis, one of the first signs of spring. Instead, it was a tiny bloom white star plant that bloomed only in August. A landscaper made a mistake in installation, and we just went along with it..

Reading today's scripture I could not help but think of my vine. It needed to be cut back for many reasons, one being it hid the house number on the pole in case of an emergency that could have been a problem.. Then, it was not growing, not producing just like we read in the scripture. We are like that. Sometimes we need a good pruning to be rid of the old dead wood, that keeps us from being all we can be in the Father's kingdom.. That pruning is never pleasant, it hurts. It can take many forms. God uses our circumstances sometimes to do a work in us. Loss of loved ones, health issues, loneliness, problems in relationships, nothing is wasted with our God. I think He allows and uses the normal circumstances of our lives to shape us into His image and usefulness in the Kingdom.. Sometimes we see things about ourselves that disappoint us, just as I have been disappointed about my plant.

I know God is teaching me many things right now. I know He will not waste any experience I have come my way, if I am faithful to His word and keep myself in His care. If I keep praising Him despite the situation, as one of my favorite song says, " I can praise the pain away." He is with me. He is fertilizing me with His Holy Spirit, and His word, as I sit in His presence. He is watering me with Living Water. He has provided a support trellis of church family and friends for me, that I cling to, who will help me grow and be useful and support me though this drastic pruning time.

Yes, the pruning is severe on my mailbox plant and in my life, but the outcome is going to be more fruitfulness, more usefulness, as I share my experiences with others. I would not have chosen this growth pattern for myself, but I know God will not waste anything that happens in my life. That's God's Good News and for that promise I give Him praise. How about you?

**Tuesday, March 28**  
**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**  
**Maddie Crump**

*“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

*– John 15:4-5, ESV*

I think it's important to remember that in this verse Jesus isn't commanding us to bear fruit, He is commanding us to abide. Without drawing near to Christ, our fruit has no power to grow. Just like a vine wraps itself around anything it touches, Christ will wrap His hands around us, as long as we make the effort to stay close to Him and abide in His Word. The measure we let Christ grow in us is the size we are allowing our fruit to grow. Simply, obey God and the fruit will come naturally.

The main lesson I took from John 15:4-5 is to be careful wanting the end result and forgetting the means of getting there. Sometimes I feel the need to skip steps or ignore the process to achieve something faster. This habit is always a temporary fix and never leaves me satisfied with what I do. Just like anything we do in life, our relationship with Jesus is a process. It's a learn-as-you-go, sometimes confusing, and slow journey that forces you to recommit yourself to Him every single day. It's not always smooth, but in the end, it's completely worth it to have a Father up in Heaven who is on your side and who loves you eternally. The vine and the branches have reminded me of this because sometimes I crave a perfect relationship with Christ without wanting to put in the effort. It's hard to pray every day, be constantly in His Word, and have full trust in the Lord. But I try to remember that it's the small steps, small prayers, and the small acts of kindness that keep us connected in our faith. Jesus is patient and there is no rush to creating the perfect relationship with Him, in fact, it's not expected of us to ever get there.

So, enjoy the journey of getting to know God. Be patient and give the fruit time to grow right. Learn to know God, not just know of Him. God will be patient with you when you think you can do things on your own and He will encourage you when you realize you can't. Keep a childlike faith, always being open to discovering new things about what the Lord can do in your life and the successes and blessings will follow.

It's also worth pointing out that Jesus never says to abide in Him without also saying that He will abide in us. Our relationship with Jesus is not one-sided and can't thrive without equal participation from both us and Jesus. The branches without the vine can't fulfill their purpose, just like the vine can't bear fruit without the branches. Jesus promises to never leave our side, never abandon us, and to never let us live on our own. Because of this promise, we can faithfully and confidently lean into Him knowing that He is strong enough to hold whatever we can't carry. Just like the vine is the foundation of the branches that bear the fruit, Christ is our foundation that allows us to thrive.

*Dear God, thank you for your infinite patience with us. Help us to trust you for each step of the way. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 29**  
**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**  
**Randy Black**

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener” John 15:1*

I do not have a green thumb and it is safe to say that I would have a hard time keeping a cactus healthy that only has to be watered 3 times a year. That being said, the imagery in this passage instills a natural feeling of abundance and bounty. When I think of our Savior I can use this as one of the many visual representations of His presence among us. While Christ was on Earth he was cultivating the soil that His salvation would be planted in. People in early Christianity were an agrarian society so the images of lessons taught through a farming lens are very powerful. The statement that Jesus is a vine would be directly relatable to a long, sustaining, and living organism that has many branches that can be evaluated as individual pieces that are part of something larger than themselves. Each branch can be either a positive or negative influence on the plant as a whole.

The gardener in this passage brings to light a feeling of comforter and nurturer that will take care of His crops and plants to make sure they are bountiful. If there is a part of the vine that is unhealthy and hindering the fruitfulness of the plant, then it will be sheared off. I do not see this as being done out of malice but as being done out of love for the harvest. As a metaphor, I see our health as a body of Christ being managed by a loving God that is concerned for the harvest of our salvation and will remove unhealthy parts of our lives to ensure that we are bountiful.

In our own lives, we can become stronger friends, family, and followers of Christ if we remove things that are unhealthy in our lives and keep the good parts of our lives from flourishing. I think about the opportunities that we have to use our time and talents to show love to our friends and family and I believe that we have a need to nurture and fertilize that opportunity to be fruitful. The interesting thing about this passage is that I imagine this vine being a fruit bearing vine like a grape vine. The vine itself is not what I think about being consumable but the grapes that a healthy vine can produce. Now grapes and raisins being a byproduct of this vine are perfectly normal but in the context of scripture and our lessons about the life of Christ I think about wine.

Christ is the vine which produces a bountiful grape harvest...that is converted into wine...and then that finished product symbolizes the blood of Christ shed for our salvation. That last sentence is a step by step image of the process of our salvation which starts with a base (Christ) that has a product (Humans) that is eventually offered salvation (Christ's blood). I am thankful that we have such a healthy vine to grow off of and my desire is that I constantly fertilize by branch on that vine as His follower and can be a positive and healthy branch of the body of Christianity.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son who you sent down to become a vine for us all to grow off of. I pray that you will continually remove the unhealthy things in my life that keep me from being a healthy and flourishing branch on the vine of Christianity. I know that I have to constantly keep my faith and relationships from withering on such a fertile vine but I am thankful that you have given us the salvation to make all things possible. Amen*

**Thursday, March 30**  
**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**  
**Angie Prater**



“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.”

John 15:1

I have always been saddened by the slow destruction of once beautiful homes by advancing vines of kudzu or ivy. These scenes are easily spotted in areas all throughout the south. In my mind, I envision the excitement and hopefulness of those planning and building the home. The original owners must have taken pride and joy in selecting details for their home. I then reflect on the lives lived in the home-the birthdays, the Christmases, the Easters...and the ‘everydays’. As the old adage states, “if these wall could talk”.... Then, as time flies by, the once proud home no longer rings with the laughter of children or the sounds of political discussion during election season - or the sounds of prayer. The vines growing throughout the house obliterate the memories of the house.

John 15:1 is one of the verses that is easily recalled. While I understand its meaning, I tend to think of the vine in a different way. The vine that is Jesus is not only the conduit for us to spread His message of hope to others, but is also the vine that obliterates our sin from God’s memory. The very thing that can intrude in our lives, our ‘houses’, and take them over, can alter their appearance to others. While a vine covered home may appear neglected, a ‘vine covered’ Christian not only has the peace of knowing their sin is covered, but can then share that peace with others. We can be secure in the knowledge that this vine is strong and everlasting.

*Dear Father, thank you for the security we have with you covering us with your love. Amen.*

**Friday, March 31**  
**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**  
**Bob Daniel**

What did Jesus mean when he said, “I am the True Vine.”?

“I am the True Vine” is the last of seven “I am” declarations of Jesus recorded only in John’s gospel. These “I am” proclamations point to His unique divine identity and purpose. Jesus said, “I am the True Vine” to closest friends gathered around Him. It was only a short time before Judas would betray Him; in fact, Judas had already left to do his infamous deed. Jesus was preparing the eleven men left for His pending crucifixion, His resurrection, and His subsequent departure for heaven. He had just told them that He would be leaving them. Knowing how disturbed they would feel, He gave them this lovely metaphor of the True Vine as one of His encouragements.

Jesus wanted His friends, not only those eleven, but those of all time, to know that He was not going to desert them, even though they would no longer enjoy His physical presence. His living energy—His spiritual reality—would continue to nourish and sustain them just as the roots and trunk of a grape vine produce the energy that nourishes and sustains its branches while they develop their fruit. Jesus wanted us to know that, even though we cannot see Him, we are as closely connected to Him as the branches of a vine are connected to its stem. Our desire to know and love Him and the energy to serve Him will keep flowing into and through us as long as we “abide” in Him.

He said that no branch can even live, let alone produce leaves and fruit, by itself. Cut off from the trunk, a branch is dead. Just as a vine’s branches rely on being connected to the trunk from which they receive their energy to bear fruit, Jesus’ disciples depend on being connected to Him for their spiritual life and the ability to serve Him effectively. The fruit we produce is that of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23). Our source of life and spiritual fruit is not in ourselves; it is outside us, in Christ Jesus. We can live, live rightly, and serve Him effectively only if we are rightly connected to Him in a faith/love relationship.

Then Jesus underscored His point even more strongly by saying, “Apart from me you can do nothing”. This illustration of the vine and branches is no thoughtless generality or careless simile. It is absolute, stark reality. No believer can achieve anything of spiritual value independently of Christ Jesus. He also reminds us that there are some who are “in” Him who bear no fruit. But these are not, as some would suppose, true branches that just happen to be fruitless. All true branches bear fruit. Just as we know a healthy, living tree by the good fruit it produces, so do we recognize fruitless branches as having no connection to the True Vine. This is why Jesus tells us, “By their fruit you will know them”. Those who do not produce good fruit are cut away and burned. The reference here is to apostates, those who profess to know Christ but whose relationship to Him is insincere. He neither called them nor elected them nor saved

them nor sustains them. Eventually, the fruitless branches are identified as not belonging to the Vine and are removed for the sake of truth and the benefit of the other branches.

Father, we depend on You for everything, starting with our very life- it is or in You we live and move and have our being” including our reconciliation with through Christ Jesus. Help us to realize that we can only serve You effectively when we are connected with Jesus Christ by faith. Jesus is our only connection with You, the one who gave us life and who produces in us a fruitful life of righteousness and service.

(Note: This devotion was borrowed from Got Questions Ministries. I pray that you find it helpful and enlightening. Robert Daniel)

**Saturday, April 1**

**I am the Vine, John 15:1-17**

**Margaret “Mugsy” Thornton**

We have knock-out roses and each year around the middle of February the roses need to be pruned, cut way back, to encourage new growth and ample roses. As I walked by one bush, I noticed a branch which was broken off, completely severed from the bush. That branch will never again bear a bloom and will be thrown away.

Jesus, ever the Master Teacher, often gave His listeners lessons from their day-to-day life experiences. They would be familiar with the work of the tender of vines. They understood the need of both lopping off and purging. The analogy likely made perfect sense to them.

In verse 4, he reminded them ,and us, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.”

In the next verse, he makes it clear: “I am the vine; you are the branches.” The reminder, “...apart from me you can do nothing...” is for every person who has acknowledged need of a Savior and desires to follow Him in obedience. A branch not connected to the vine becomes useless, fruitless and ultimately, dead.

So how does one “remain in Christ,” wholly connected to the vine? It’s a very human tendency to focus on self, MY life, MY family, MY ambitions, MY desires, etc. So to remain in Him, a new focus is necessary. Study His life, His words, His admonitions. Offer Him your life, your praise and your thanksgiving. He states, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love...my command is this: love each other as I have loved you.” (V. 9,12)

In following these instructions, one will be led by the Holy Spirit, who always points to Jesus. He will enable us to,”...see You more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow You more nearly, day by day,” as the song from Godspell so aptly puts it!

**Monday, April 3**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Dr. Jim Rewis**

Have you ever had a concept repeatedly presented to you in school that just left you staring, open mouthed, completely lacking in understanding? Then, sometimes, months or years later, you finally “got it” and wondered why you were so obtuse while your long suffering, patient teachers tried to open your mind?

For me, it was diagramming sentences. Literally, for years, I would stare at the board while instructors vigorously filled their lungs with chalk dust making stick diagrams depicting the parts of speech and how, joined together, they made human communication possible and transferable. I sat dumbfounded as if I were staring at stick figures created by some demented people playing a game of hangman while on LSD. I even took three years of German still not having any idea about predicates, articles, or direct objects and only squeaked by because of being blessed with a good memory and some German friends who helped me limp along.

Finally, in high school, I took Latin. Honestly, being lazy, I took it because there was no after school language lab, since no one really knows how to speak it as Caesar and his pals did. The teacher, an aged, kind, fierce, old fashioned matron, Mrs. Betty Farr, made the scales fall from my eyes. At last, I saw how language was like a puzzle and, when fitted together, sculpted the beauty of speech and literature. Plus, magically, if one knew these concepts, you could learn just about any new language by just figuring out the rules for that puzzle: Italian, French, whatever! I thought, “So, THAT’S what they’ve been trying to tell me all those boring, frustrating hours!”. Well, I think that Jesus must have felt the same frustration as my teachers when he was trying to explain to the people who he really was in his “I am” statements as recounted by John in his gospel.

Jesus was no fool. He knew that many of his listeners were uneducated peasants living from hand to mouth, so he cleverly used metaphors that they could understand...if only they would try!

In John 6:22-61 he uses bread. Rich or poor, we all have to eat, a point well understood by people who often suffered famine and want, to whom seeing undernourished countrymen would be commonplace.

Around Passover, the ancient Hebrew festival intimately involving special bread and meals, Jesus fed 5,000 curious followers with five loaves and two fishes in a desolate area beside the Sea of Galilee. While I’m sure many of them were there for spiritual enlightenment, I also suspect it was pretty hard to think about salvation of one’s soul if you hadn’t eaten for two or three days! That night, the disciples depart via ship, Jesus walks on water, joining them, and they proceed to Capernaum.

Well, the crowd, having enjoyed full bellies, was probably a bit put out when they awoke without their miracle worker, so they found him and asked why he had left them in John 6:25. Jesus, like my teachers, realized immediately that they weren't getting it and were still concerned only with their next Earthly meal, and he tells them so: "Ye seek me...because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."

He chides them a bit, trying to get his point across, telling them not to labor for transient, Earthly nourishment, but to expect everlasting fullness from God, via the Son of Man. Feeling peckish, and, probably, a bit peeved that Jesus isn't magically producing breakfast, the crowd reminds him that their ancestors enjoyed manna from Heaven. They're still stuck at the back of the class staring at the chalkboard!

Jesus finally decides that with this bunch he is going to have to be a bit more blunt to get the point across that HE is sent from Heaven to fill their souls forever, not just satisfy their daily appetites, reminding them that Moses didn't provide any manna, God did. And, in 6:49, their ancestors still died! Even more directly, in 6:35, he finally says, "I am the Bread of Life" and that believers will never hunger or thirst. He bluntly tells them that HE has been sent by The Father to raise them up and provide everlasting life.

I imagine Jesus must have rolled his eyes when those dullards first questioned his authority saying, "is this not Jesus, whose father and mother we know?" Then, he gives them their final exam, using the metaphor of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Most of the crowd fails abjectly, thinking that this is some kind of crazy man, even though in 6:63 he clarifies, "It is the SPIRIT that quickened; the flesh profiteth nothing..".

Many walk away and "walked no more with him". Sadly, they flunked out in spite of having a teacher sent by God. Hopefully, they found breakfast somewhere.

The twelve, lead by Simon Peter, realize "Thou hast the words of life". They "got it" and, using these revelations, were able to put Jesus' ideas to use to piece together the puzzle of our relationship with God through Jesus while here on Earth.

John probably wrote his gospel late in life, trying to define and clarify who Jesus was before the apostle's death. He was trying to help us become star students, understanding the divinity of this man Jesus.

John didn't want us to keep thinking of our rumbling stomachs, as we often do on Sundays when the pastor goes on too long. He wanted us to always hunger after satiated souls, completely filled with the knowledge that Jesus was sent by God to "raise us up". When we are physically hungered, we should pray and remember Jesus' metaphor of Bread of Life, being thankful not just for our "manna", but for His sacrifice that will feed our souls forever.

*Dear Lord, we thank you for the manna you have sent to us, that our souls will never hunger.  
Amen*

**Tuesday, April 4**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Janice Burrell**

*I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:35*

In reading this scripture, one has to ponder - there is only so much we can do. God does it all. We only need to believe in Jesus Christ, His son, for he is the bread of life which sustains us.. In Jesus Christ there is no lack.

In February 1982 I had to have major surgery. On February 2nd, the surgeon informed me that the surgery would take place on February 7. This was short notice. My four children were young and my parents were middle aged. I had to prepare them for what was to come and make important decisions concerning the course of events. My parents could not take me to the hospital, since it was in Atlanta. Sister Kate, a nun who worked in my church, volunteered to take me. We prayed as she drove - for my family, the doctors and me.

The surgery went well, but rehab was a long and slow process. My ex-husband's sisters came to the hospital and took me to their home, where they took very good care of me. My parents were taking care of my children and through it all did a very good job. My mother went grocery shopping at the Piggly Wiggly and the manager recognized her and asked about me. She told him about my surgery and that I was recuperating at the home of my sister-in-law's home in Atlanta. The manager told Mother that he had groceries for the family and that she would not have to pay anything for them. It was a surprise for Mother and Daddy! Of course they thanked him. They called me as soon as they got home to tell me the news.

God does provide!

*Dear Father, thank you so much for filling our needs, even when we least expect it. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 5**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Heather Kauffman**

Have you ever been hungry? I mean really, really hungry? There are people right here in Gordon County who know what it means to be hungry. Men, women and children who don't know where their next meal is coming from.

Thankfully, there is a place they can go to get a hot meal that will give them the daily nourishment they need. It's called the VAC- Voluntary Action Community. It's a warm and welcoming place where anyone who is hungry can sit down to a meal served with a meat & vegetable, bread and dessert. Yet, the meal only satisfies for a little while and the hunger returns. The food at the VAC fills a person's stomach. But, what if they could find food that fills and satisfies the soul?

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He alone can fill our lives so we hunger no more. People try to satisfy their souls with all sorts of earthly things... money, success, works and fame to name just a few. But only Jesus Christ can fill the God-sized void in everyone's lives.

God sent bread from heaven, called manna, to the Israelites in the desert. (Ex. 16:14-15, 31) He also sent bread from heaven, called Jesus Christ, to us. (John 6:51) He is the sustainer of life...eternal life. We can be confident that if we embrace him, we will never be hungry again. (John 6:35)

Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer to pray for our daily bread. (Luke 11:3)

Have you asked for your daily bread today? Not the bread that will fill your stomach but, the life giving bread that will satisfy your soul?

*Prayer- King Jesus, you are the Bread of Life. The life you offer is eternal. You taught us to pray for our daily bread. Please help me to seek you daily in your word and in prayer so that my soul will be satisfied by you alone!*

**Thursday, April 6**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Jeff and Michelle Arwood**

## **Food for Thought**

These days every time you turn around there is something new that you should or shouldn't eat. The dietary options out there are astounding. There's gluten free, lactose free, dairy free, sugar free, peanut free, organic, vegan, non-GMO, low carb, low fat; and the list goes on. Some people choose to eat certain foods; others are forced due to allergies, intolerances or other medical issues.

It is wonderful to be able to tailor our diets to our own unique nutritional needs. We are blessed to have access to such an abundance of food to nourish our bodies.

We should also realize that we have access to an abundance of food to feed our souls. For Jesus said,

*"I Am the Bread of Life" - John 6:35*

We can each have a personal relationship with Jesus. He knows what our unique spiritual needs are and can fill us up, if we allow him to. It is really up to us to stop, listen and open ourselves up to receive the bread of life.

So when you pray the prayer God taught us to pray, remember that when we say, "Give us this day our daily bread" we are asking two-fold. We ask for bread to nourish our bodies (even if that means gluten free) and, we ask for the bread of life to enter our souls, to feed our spirits and fill us up with the love of Jesus Christ. And we ask this just for today, because Jesus asks us not to worry.

*"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*

Have faith.

*Heavenly Father, Thank you for blessing us each and every day with the food we need to sustain our bodies and for your son Jesus Christ who feeds our souls and sustains our spirit. Let us be open to receive the bread of life every day and grow closer to you as a result.*

*Amen*

**Friday, April 7**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Mike Willett**

This is one of the “hard sayings” of Jesus along with “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:16) and others stating that He was the Messiah! These are the matters we must consider have the deepest meanings to our lives and prove that Jesus was who he said he was, or as C.S. Lewis writes “ he would be a lunatic- on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg”.

Of course Jesus knew that bread and water were the staples of life for the people he was addressing in these scriptures. But, once again, his words were carrying a deeper meaning. He was not talking about the bread they baked daily or the delicious, huge biscuits we can buy in all shapes and sizes, but about True Bread that, sustains the True Life abundant, He came to give. (Another saying of Jesus.)

**In my life situation right now, I am experiencing That Bread, That Life, in a special way as I feel God's Grace being given to me through the prayers of many people. I am feeling each day the infusion of the Bread available to us because of Jesus.**

This makes me remember hearing a report (not from internet) of a survey asking people the 3 things they would like to hear others say to them. The sayings were: **I Love you. You are Forgiven. Supper's Ready.** You know. this is what is said to us at the Communion Table each time we come to celebrate Jesus' giving of the True Bread. Maybe we ought to do this more often.

*Lord I am ever grateful for the fact that you provide the life sustaining Bread for or lives every day through your Son and your Spirit. I know it is by Your Grace this is possible. We merit nothing on our own efforts. We need to explore these deeper meanings of Your Word to be what we should be. All Praise and Glory and Honor belongs to You my God! Amen*

**Saturday, April 8**

**I am the Bread of Life, John 6:35**

**Carol Howel Gomez**

This verse is from the well-known “bread of life” discourse and comes shortly after Jesus and the disciples feed a crowd of 5000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. After all were fed, Jesus walks on the water to the western side of Sea of Galilee and the crowd follow by boat in search of Him. To their queries, Jesus replies, “You seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.” In verse 35, Jesus declared, “I AM the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

The importance of bread is found throughout the Bible. As a matter of fact, my concordance lists some 226 Biblical references to bread, including its use during the Last Supper and as manna for the Israelites during the Exodus. Bread is also mentioned in many of our hymns and our prayers. Bread...the staff of life; a universal food; a staple item. Bread...given in hospitality, taken for nourishment, provided for strength. By equating Himself with bread, Jesus is saying that He is essential for life. Further, Jesus is not simply referring to this physical life, but to eternal life.

As I worked on this devotional, I was struck by the timelessness of this powerful analogy. Jesus accused his followers of following simply because their bellies were full. Modern times encourage us to put ourselves first, to fill our own bellies. When we do that, we miss the signs, and opportunities just like Jesus’ followers did. Jesus cautioned against working for food which perishes. There are people today who equate doing good works with God’s grace. Jesus tells us faith in Him is all we need. In this season of Lent, let us remember that HE is our bread of life, our staple, our strength, our nourishment.

*A prayer from my great-grandmother at Easter:*

*On this glorious Easter, our hearts are filled with joy and love, for Thou hast given us our daily bread, and hope of life eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We know that faith, love, and hope are real, just as we know the lilacs will burst into fragrant bloom in spring. Mayest Thou keep the light of faith glowing in our hearts for ever and ever. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

**Monday, April 10**

**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**

**Gale Trantham**

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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

I love to camp with my scouts. And anyone who has been camping knows that you depend on light. We need the sun in the daytime. We use the moon and stars, lanterns and flashlights at night. And of course we use lighters or matches to start our charcoal or backpack stoves to cook our delicious food.

But the most important light in the world to all of us is Jesus. We follow Him for guidance and depend on Him to help us make the right decisions now so that we can be with Him in heaven. He is always with us, even in our darkest times and He is always there to forgive us when we stumble. Many times we have to work to remember to follow His path as our only guiding path, lit for us, even when we cannot see or understand it.

*Dear God, help us to remember to follow you in all that we do so that we won't have to walk in darkness. Help us to let our light shine so that others will see what your love has done in our lives. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 11**

**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**

**Krista Hall**

## In the Spotlight

When I was six, my family was in the middle of some difficult times. It wasn't an easy for my family, and although I know I still don't understand the scope of the entire picture, I knew that at times things were bad. For the most part, my older brother and I lived in a family struggling for money and struggling for identity. My parents were new Christians and learning a new life following a bout with addiction followed by rehab.

It was late one evening when my mom awoke me.

"Krista, I need your help," she shook me awake with a frail voice and a glimmer of tears streaming down her face. Peering up at my mom, I knew something was wrong and at that point, with no one to turn to, she turned to me, her innocent baby girl. My mom told me she was worried about her husband. He had not returned home after a trip to north Florida. (I'm not really sure how we survived before cell phones!) She asked me to pray for him.

“What was he wearing?” I questioned her in a meek and sleepy voice. She replied relaying his last known garments as well as his last known whereabouts.

I’m not sure how I knew what to do, but what happened next was my first experience with God touching my life and showing his love. I prayed for my step-dad, and I remember it perfectly. I envisioned him on a dark stage, in his clothes that my mom told me about. He was standing center stage with a bright spotlight shining down on him from heaven. I prayed believing that God would answer. I prayed that my mom would feel relief from concern she had. I prayed that this light, shining from heaven, would lead our family to a place of healing. God shined his light down on our lives that night. Within a few hours, Dan called. He told my mom that something told him to just pull over and make the call. He was coming home; it was time to fix some things.

My parents remained married and steadfast through a time that many would have chosen to give up. I can’t deny, that in the days, weeks, and even years to come, there were many nights I wondered why and how the family stuck together, but in the same way God shined down on us that night I prayed, he continued to shine his light down on us. He never gave up, so we never gave up. Thirty-plus years later, I know that God was with us then and still is shining down on us in both good times and bad.

John 8:12 tells us, “Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” At age six, I didn’t know this verse by heart, but I knew, innately, that Jesus was the Light that could bring my family peace. I knew that God’s love was much greater than man’s addiction to the world, and I believed it fully. Today, I hold dear the memory of that moment when God revealed the incredible ways He answers prayers.

I share this story with others now as a reminder of the faithfulness of our Lord. My parents will tell you that they do not recognize themselves thirty years ago, and while I agree, I’m also thankful for the lessons we learned as a result. Life is not always easy, and as a child I lived some difficult times, but God is what brought me and my family through. Many people today face similar difficulties. Sometimes the darkness can be caused by other’s choices, but I pray that you too can grow from them, and faithfully pray for the light to shine down and provide clarity and connections.

Matthew 5:16 stresses this point, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” To be a light shining in darkness is what God calls us to do. He does not want us to focus on the past, but rather live in the light that he provides and be a light to others. Imagine if we went through life with a spotlight shining down on us. How would we let that light shine?

*Let us pray: Dear Lord, just like that light shining down during a humble and innocent prayer so many years ago, please let us see others in your light. Lord, help me to be willing to experience prayerfully and faithfully, and be open to you.*

**Wednesday, April 12**  
**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**  
**Jennifer G. Rewis**

Are you afraid of the dark?

Considering that question, we might recall a time, in our childhood, when we were afraid. Did you sleep with a nightlight? I wasn't allowed to leave a light on, so before getting into bed I had a ritual that made me less afraid. First, I searched the closet, then under the bed. Finally, I'd jump into bed and pull the covers up to my eyes. I was sure that whatever evil lurked in the dark wouldn't recognize me with my face covered.

Darkness is a scary thing, even to adults, but it's often a different kind of darkness – a darkness of the heart or mind; a hopelessness or loneliness that darkens our days. A soul that cries out for light. Yearning for a light to illuminate the dark corners of our hearts.

*“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” 1 John 1:5*

This message from the apostle John was preceded by a promise long before.

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2*

Our hope and our joy is found in God the Father, the Creator. The God of eternity. He has always been, is now, and will always be. We are not alone. In all our circumstances, we can rejoice in Emmanuel, God with us, .God, who loves us beyond what we can even imagine. He is the light that illuminates our steps, casts our our fears, brightens our hours, and awaits us in all our tomorrows.

*Dear Lord, thank you for illuminating the dark places in our lives. In thy name we pray, Amen.*

**Thursday, April 13**

**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**

**Virginia Todd**

From my childhood bedroom window, I could see the beam of Fire Island Lighthouse. The lighthouse itself was seven miles away across Great South Bay and not visible, but the steady rhythm of that beam of light was a comfort. It was reassuring to know that it was always there.

There are many occasions and verses in the Bible where we are drawn to a physical light. Think about Jesus' baptism, or when He appeared after his crucifixion.

In John 8:12, however, we are focusing on a spiritual light. "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." I want that kind of life, don't you?

But what does it mean to follow Christ? It's a huge question, with many answers that are both simple and complex. In the Gospels, we read about His teachings. Adhering to all of the lessons He taught is a way to follow Christ. There are so many "laws" to follow to reach the kingdom of heaven. Would we fall short of doing it all? Probably!

However, He did make it simple for us with just two main headings: Love God and love your neighbor. If we try our best to do both of them, we will not walk in darkness, but enjoy the light of life.

And like the beam from the lighthouse, this light will be steady and never fail.

**Good Friday, April 14**

**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**

**Kyle Smith**

When I was asked to contribute to this devotional booklet and saw the scripture references, I knew immediately that I wanted to write about "the light." You and I can think of many contrasts, but light and dark are quite obvious. Close your eyes. Now open them. There it is!

There are many references to light found in our sacred scriptures prior to our reading these words of Jesus as he taught in the temple. In the very beginning we learn that "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. Then God said let there be light; and there was light." (Genesis 1:1-3) God must have thought light was pretty important! Later we learn "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:2b).

What do you do when you enter a dark room? Try to find the light? Or do you carry a light with you? Would you choose to fumble around, not certain of where you are going as you wander in the dark searching for the light? Had you rather carry a light with you into that dark place?

Earlier, John tells us that the “Word (Jesus) was light for all the people and that darkness cannot extinguish that light.” (John 1:4-5). On this day, Good Friday, darkness tried to extinguish that light, but it could not. That light (Jesus) shines today in these dark times and beckons us to follow. We can catch that light and reflect it to others.

I cannot help but recall that song I learned in Sunday School many years ago. I bet you know, too. “This Little Light of Mine, I’m going to let it shine.” Make today and every day one when you let your little light shine so others can find the way.

*Oh gracious Father, thank you for providing the light for us to follow. May we share that light so others will follow. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 15**

**I am the Light of the World, John 8:12**

**Stella Arnold, age 9**

*“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12*

I sleep with a nightlight every night. I’ve done it all my life. I’m 9 years old. I sleep with a nightlight because it helps me feel safe and it helps me see in the dark. It helps me know where I am. My nightlight helps me not fall on any toys when my room is messy. When my nightlight is not on at night, I feel scared and I can’t see anything at all. I do not like that.

Nightlights are kind of like Jesus. Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” What he meant was that if you worship him and believe in him, he will help you. He will guide you. He will make you feel safe, he will help you know where you are, and he will help you know the way. Just like my nightlight.

*Prayer:*

*Dear Lord, thank you for being the light of our world. Thank you for guiding me and making me feel safe. Please help more people worship and believe in you. And, help us be light to others. Amen.*

**Monday, April 17**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Deb Adcock**

***John 11:25** Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they may die like everyone else, will live again.”*

***John 14:6** Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.”*

During my first year at Reinhardt College, I worked 80 plus hours a week, and was studying in a pre-med degree curriculum. Because it was a private Christian college, I had the opportunity to observe new people in my life who walked great examples of faith-filled lives. I would often question, “Who is this Jesus that these people in my life speak of so lovingly and reverently? Who is this Jesus, that no matter their circumstances, they seem to trust and use as a life guide ever steady faithful to the course, even when they couldn’t ‘see’ Him?”

Being the scientist and realist that I am and having had adults in my young life who proved so untrustworthy, there were many difficult questions rumbling around in my head and my heart, but yet a tugging at my heart that I simply could not ignore. I was a self-sufficient, hardworking, and very responsible young lady who helped others. Why did I need an “unseen” Jesus? I had read the Bible growing up; however, I read it more as a literature book, analyzing characters and story/plot lines and literary elements. But during this period of time in college, I began to read the Bible seeking answers to real and often difficult questions that life had handed me down through the years, and to attend church and Bible studies regularly to learn more about these things. John 14:6 and John 11:25 were verses I heard and read often, but I had difficulty with personally relating to them.

I remember begging God to “show” me what this was all about, but you have to be careful what you ask for sometimes! I had begun attending church regularly for the first time in my life, and sacrificing one day of income for Sunday church worship and related activities. I was beyond dirt poor and missing four days a month of income could’ve been disastrous to my living needs and educational goals at that time, but due to my faithfulness and God’s “eye” for my other needs at this time, I never missed the money once! What a mighty God we serve!

As the Holy Spirit interceded on my behalf through my prayers, Scripture reading, worship experiences, and other God-wing-touches, the Scripture began to come to life. I continued to pray diligently to fully trust and invite Christ into my heart. Reading **Romans 12:3**, “For I say, through the grace given unto me,....God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Reading

this humbled my “tough” spirit, and I realized that in Christ Jesus I could have that measure of faith and that my own self-sufficiency was nothing compared to what Christ Jesus could give me if I learned to depend on Him and that awesome resurrecting power and Holy Spirit Christ gave after His crucifixion on the cross. A short time later, I accepted Christ into my heart at an old-fashioned altar.

That was in 1986. I still vividly remember the day and testimony I have from accepting Christ. Life has its ups and downs for all of us, but never, since that day, have I ever doubted my salvation, God as my Heavenly Father, Christ as my Savior, the power of the Holy Spirit, or the power of resurrection in multiple ways each provides for our lives. My God is strong enough to handle all we bring to Him, even our questions, and to provide means by which to guide our lives, to show others Christ’s love, and to serve Him with multiple opportunities. Believing in the resurrecting power of Christ gives great meaning to Christ’s words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

The Bible is no longer just a literature book, but the living word of God that is an active part in touching and changing hearts and lives, and Christ and God are no longer just “imaginary characters” someone made up, but instead are personal entities who love all of us sacrificially beyond what words can describe. The Resurrection story started with Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on the cross, and God raising Him from the dead after three days, but the rest of the resurrection story lived in a life through Christ Jesus has the ability to continue in our hearts and lives in life-changing ways every day!

*Gracious God, thank you for your resurrecting power through Jesus Christ. Thank you, because of His dying on the cross and being resurrected and the power of the Holy Spirit given, we may find “the way, the truth, and the life” in a world that can often be confusing. Thank you for your amazing grace in forgiving us and loving us. Thank you for the power of the Trinity, the Scripture, prayer times, and worship experiences. May we always seek to follow you with sincere hearts and to embrace the many opportunities you provide to witness and to serve you here on Earth. Thank you, also, for providing Heaven as our home when we have finished our journey.*

**Tuesday, April 18**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Anna Grantham**

*“Peace is the beauty of life. It is sunshine. It is the smile of a child, the love of a mother, the joy of a father, the togetherness of a family. It is the advancement of man, the victory of a just case, the triumph of truth.” –Menachem Begin*

Even though this quote makes no direct mention to God, it does mention some of the ways that He allows us to see Him. Sometimes I miss seeing God’s love, but other times it is so blatantly obvious that God is at work that I don’t understand how someone could miss it. Menachem Begin spoke of peace, truth, and love, which are just a few of the characteristics we should see in God daily.

In John 4:16, Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He mentioned yet another characteristic God allows us to see each day: life. Being able to see God in everyday life is one of my favorite things about being a Christian because not everyone sees and feels God in the same way. I know God is there when I hear music I love, feel the sunshine on my face, and when I see people’s happiness. But the most important, peace-bringing part about being a Christian is that God is always with me; He is my truth and life, and I will dwell with him forever.

*Dear God, thank you for showing yourself in everything around us. Help us to share Your love to those we come across today. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 19**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Judy Prater**

### **Jesus Paid It All**

*When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. Mark 16:19*

Because of the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, we no longer are required to take spotless animals to be slain for our sins. Jesus was our spotless, sinless sacrifice.

Many years ago we had a white fluffy pooch. We took her to the groomers in the winter for baths. Honey bear came home white as snow...we thought..until it snowed and in comparison, she wasn't white at all.

We can do everything right and good and we still are not sinless. No do-it-yourself sin washing, we aren't capable. Only the blood of Jesus covers our sins and makes us white as snow, and brothers and sisters, that's WHITE.

An old hymn written in 1868, *Jesus Paid it ALL*, is in an old yellowed, frayed, shape-note hymnal. Years ago I starred the third verse in that old hymnal:

*"For nothing good have I whereby Thy grace to claim,  
I'll wash my garments white in the blood of 'Calvary's Lamb'.  
Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe,  
Sin has left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow."*

*Father, we thank you for God's redemptive work. Keep us close to you. Amen.*

**Thursday, April 20**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Carol Inman**

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who lives and believes in me shall live even if he dies. and every one who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? " John 11: 25-26

Good Lord willing, I'm moving to a new home, sizing down, getting rid of excess things that burden me. I am swapping my old life style for a new life style more joyous and more care free. It will be a new start. It will be kind of a Resurrected life, if you follow me. A reminder of the resurrection I received when I made Jesus my Lord and Savior and came to know what it is to have life in Jesus.

Just like when I received Jesus, there's no going back to the old. I plan to stay in my little cluster home (the good Lord willing and if my health holds out) until the Lord calls me home and I experience the final resurrection and eternal life that started way back when. When He calls me home I will go upscale for sure, and move once more into a mansion that Jesus has prepared for me.

When I answered today's question in my life, "Do you believe this?", and accepted Jesus, I laid hold of this magnificent promise that Jesus gives us today..I was just 10 years old and I was baptized, died to my old 10 year old self, buried with Jesus ,and raised up with Him to newness of life. And what a life it has been! All the old burdensome things were laid aside and I was the same me living a new life in a new way.

But there is so much more to this earthly life in Jesus. I pray to know the power of the resurrection in its fullest, to enable me to live in a way pleasing to God and that brings glory to Him. That's my desire, no matter where my physical residence might be. How about you?

**Friday, April 21**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Laura Holland**

Sometimes a trip to the grocery store is just a trip to the grocery store. But sometimes it is so much more...

About two months had passed since my father's funeral. I should have been at the point where I wasn't constantly on the verge of tears. But I wasn't.

I should have managed a smile every now and then. But I couldn't.

And to top it all off, a well-meaning woman with whom I was barely acquainted stopped me in the grocery store parking lot and offered her condolences on the death of my UNCLE! I had to shakily correct her and tell her it was my father we had buried, not my uncle. Her heartfelt condolence abruptly changed into a murmured apology and a lightning-speed dash to her car.

I had been praying to God for those two months that He would send me some measure of comfort, some assurance to bolster my faith and cement what I had always known to be true about life after death but was now seeming somewhat weak.

I had continued into the grocery store, eager to beat the 5:00 crowd and get home to put my version of dinner (Stouffer's) on the table. I froze in my tracks and took a startled breath as I saw a man in the produce aisle who, from behind, looked just like my father. And yes, I was "sore afraid." (Weren't there supposed to be angels who came at this point to tell me, "Fear not"?)

As my fear slowly subsided, I found myself walking toward the man, the word "Daddy?" about to leave my lips. Then the man put Brussels sprouts in in his buggy and I was jolted back to reality. Daddy would never have bought Brussels sprouts!

Still, I couldn't help but follow the man through the store. I knew the man could not be my father, but he seemed so ...fatherly. The resemblance was uncanny, or maybe my desire to see my father walking and talking and shopping made the likeness more real than it was. I didn't care. I wanted to be on this man's heels a while longer. He turned around, spoke to someone, laughed with the person, and then I knew. I cannot explain it. A feeling came over me that said, "This isn't the end. What you've known all along you still know. There is still life. There is still laughter. There will always be life and laughter."

Of course the stranger wasn't my daddy. Ad he wasn't just a vision. But my daddy was happy. My daddy was all right. I would see my daddy again and we would laugh together like we had so many times before. I am no theologian, but I have enough knowledge to know that right now, my daddy doesn't have a body like he had, or like the man in the grocery store had on that day. But that makes him no less alive. That makes him no less happy. He is happier, having the conversations with Jesus that I long to have someday. And if I could beg Daddy to come back, I know what he would say. He would kindly but emphatically say, "No, I don't want to. And you wouldn't want me to if you knew what I know. But I'll be here when you get here, and you will love it as much as I do."

And because Jesus, and Jesus only, is now and forever the Resurrection and the Life, Daddy's new, perfect "never-going-to-have-heart-problems-again" body will someday be joined with his soul that is very much alive right now. And maybe- just maybe- he'll like Brussels sprouts then!

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*We have come through this season of Lent with a range of emotions, but we have emerged exhilarated and victorious because of your love for us - a love which manifested itself in the sacrifice of your Son, our Savior. We know there are no truer, more defining, more comforting words than "I am the resurrection and the Life." Thank you that through Easter you have done for us what we could never have done for ourselves. Thank you that the words of Jesus are true, and that we can look forward to that day when we are reunited with our loved ones and most importantly will fellowship with Christ through eternity. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 22**

**I am the Resurrection and the Life, John 11:25**

**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6**

**Reverend Eddie Herring, Senior Pastor**

### **Living a Resurrected Life**

#### **John 11:25-26**

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." If we believe in Jesus, we live. Even though we will die one day, we live. Then Jesus asked, "Do you believe this?" Because if we believe Jesus' words, it changes our life.

We live today and in the future. We have a bounce in our step and a gleam in our eye. Yes, we may get knocked down by the circumstances of life. But when we do, we can get up. Nothing can defeat us. Nothing can separate us from God's great love.

If we believe this, we need to live a resurrected life. We need to trust God and focus on God, when things happen to us. Don't fall apart. Take Jesus by the hand and stand on God's promises. Joseph trusted God. Job trusted God. God was there for them. God is with us as well.

Live a resurrected life for all the world to see. Point the way to Jesus.

*Jesus, live in me today so that I will be able to radiate Jesus' love and grace to the world.*

*Amen!*



