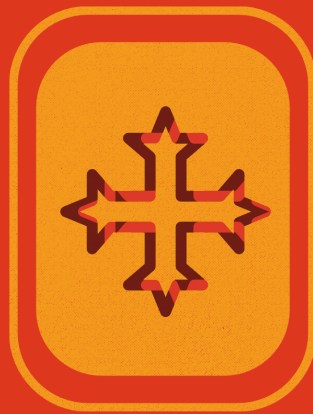
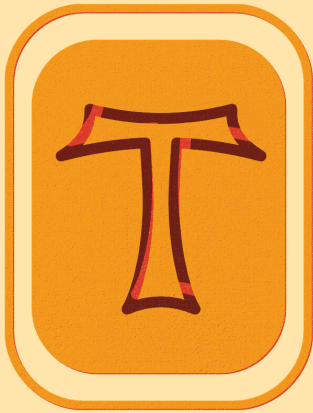
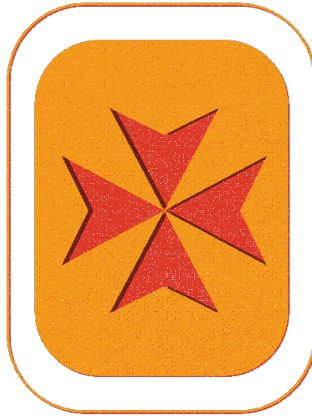


**B  
Y  
  
H  
I  
S  
  
W  
O  
U  
N  
D  
S**



**40 DAYS OF REFLECTING  
ON THE CROSS OF CHRIST**



Oh, the power, the melting, conquering, transforming power of the dear cross of Christ! My brethren, we have but to abide by the preaching of it, we have but constantly to tell abroad the matchless story, and we may expect to see the most remarkable spiritual results. We need despair of no man now that Christ has died for sinners. With such a hammer as the doctrine of the cross, the most flinty heart will be broken; and with such a fire as the sweet love of Christ, the most mighty iceberg will be melted.

— Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Passion and Death of Christ*

For in the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theater, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross.

— John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*

Dear Friends,

I recently came across something that I didn't know existed: The World Death Clock. This online tool calculates the average annual expected number of worldwide deaths per year and then breaks it down to different averages per time segment (months, days, seconds) and then displays a counter you can watch in real time. If you are wondering, it's around 56,000,000 per year, which is over 150,000 per day, and 1.8 deaths per second. I do not know why this morbid tool was created, but that didn't stop me from watching it for a few minutes, becoming increasingly sobered by the prevalence of death.

Out of the billions of people who have lived and died over the last 2000 years, it is staggering to consider just how much we are still talking about, dwelling on, celebrating, remembering and believing in the death of one man, Jesus the Messiah. Never has anyone's death brought such infamy and admiration, such polarization and power. Over time, his death became synonymous with the means of his suffering, the wooden cross.

"The cross" became short-hand for not only his physical suffering, but for the deeper theological significance of his sacrifice. The cross is how we are saved (Col. 2:13-14), what we should boast in (Gal. 6:14), what we should take up daily (Luke 9:23), and how we should live (Gal. 2:20). The cross is so prevalent in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul makes the staggering claim in Corinth that he will talk about nothing else (1 Cor. 2:2).

It was not hard for our team to find 40 passages in the Bible that talk about the suffering of Christ on the Cross. There are many, many more. But we chose these passages from Genesis to Revelation to provide an approachable way to meditate on the sacrifice of our Lord. It is our hope that you would take your time and dwell richly on these Scriptures. The cross is inexhaustibly important, and it is a beautiful thing to get lost in its mystery.

Peace of Christ  
Pastor Gray

## Suggestions For Using This Prayer Guide

1. Find a quiet place, close your eyes, breathe in and out, turn your attention to the Lord
2. Be still and quiet for a minute (Use a timer if you wish!)
3. Read the Scripture passage on the left
4. Read it again slowly 2-3x
5. What words or phrases do you find yourself drawn toward?
6. Read the devotional written by our team
7. Take a few minutes to either meditate on the reflection question, or write a paragraph in your journal (There is some space in the back of the devotional as well)
8. Offer a brief prayer to God using some of the words of the Scripture passage

# MEET THE *Writing* TEAM!

## WRITERS

**Frank Barber:** Day 12 • Day 16 • Day 17 • Day 22 • Day 40

**Megan Bergstrom:** Day 31 • Day 33 • Day 36

**Keith Clemenger:** Day 1 • Day 9 • Day 23 • Day 35 • Day 39

**Erik Coonce:** Day 5 • Day 7 • Day 15 • Day 19 • Day 38

**Shannon Coonce:** Day 4 • Day 6 • Day 13 • Day 21 • Day 26

**Nate Curtisi:** Day 2 • Day 8 • Day 18 • Day 32 • Day 34

**Gray Ewing:** Day 3 • Day 10 • Day 28 • Day 29 • Day 30

**Kate Fuller:** Day 20 • Day 24 • Day 25 • Day 27 • Day 37

**Kim Kroll:** Day 11 • Day 14

## EDITORS

**Gray Ewing:** Project Director • Editor-In-Chief

**Erik Coonce:** Managing Editor

**Megan Bergstrom:** Copy Editor • Design

**Cameron Martinez:** Graphic Design

DAY ONE

## BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES

GENESIS 3:15

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

This earliest prophecy about Jesus’ sacrifice comes immediately after the disobedience of Adam and Eve. God announces judgment first to the serpent, Satan (Revelation 12:9), in a riddle. Men strike a snake’s head to kill it; snakes bite a man’s foot to kill him. And yet here the woman’s offspring is one man (“he”) who fights with Satan himself (“you”). In Jesus’ temptation the battle is joined directly (Luke 4:1ff).

Jesus knew this would involve being “crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5), and saw “that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). By his own death, Jesus gained victory over death itself (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). His resurrection gloriously confirmed it! **Have we marveled at “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23)? His deliberate, costly choice to love sinners?**

DAY TWO

## THE CROSS IS CURSED

DEUTERONOMY 21:22-23

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, the body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Executed as a criminal, Jesus became a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). In crucifixion, he took our place and experienced the shame and humiliation of a public death. Even worse, he was forsaken by God (Matt. 27:46). His shame, however, was short-lived. This is true both literally and figuratively. The Mosaic law requires a quick burial, as even the most brutal of punishments should be accompanied by mercy, and Jesus was buried before the next day. It was also Christ’s death that was the greatest demonstration of God’s glory, making it possible for us to receive the promise of forgiveness. **How does God turn our shame into his glory?**

DAY THREE

## THE STILL FACE

PSALM 22:1

My God, my God, why have you  
forsaken me? Why are you so far  
from saving me, from the words  
of my groaning?

There is a famous psychological experiment called the “Still Face.” In the experiment, a mother interacts with her baby in a high chair. At one point, though, she allows her face to go still and blank and remains that way. Without interaction, the child moves to complete despair in under two minutes. We were built for communion and connection.

Let us imagine something of what it must have been like for Jesus Christ, who had enjoyed eternal, face-to-face communion with his Father, to reach in agony on the cross for these words: Why have you forsaken me? Jesus is the only believer who has ever experienced the true abandonment by God himself. Because He faced it on the cross, we will never know the “still face” of God. **Journal or pray about a time when you felt like God had abandoned you. How do you feel about it now?**

DAY FOUR

## FAITHFUL EVEN IN OUR FEARS

PSALM 31:5

Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD,  
faithful God.

Our decisions are predicated on the perception of an attached reward. If we exercise, we will feel good. If we save money, we can afford a bigger purchase. If we rest now, we will have energy later. But these rewards are not guaranteed; we are never actually certain we will feel good or have enough money, let alone energy! Our worldly hopes so often fail us.

Christ repeated this Psalm during his own death to give us a glimpse of what perfected hope looks like. He was so unshakably rooted in the hope of God’s plan and promise of redemption that he was able to willingly and confidently surrender his own life. This confidence in the Father’s faithfulness can be ours too, when we unite ourselves to the cross of Christ. **What fearful thing can you commit into God’s faithful hands today?**

## A FORSAKING FORETOLD

PSALM 69:21

They gave me poison for food,  
and for my thirst they gave me  
sour wine to drink.

Jesus once asked during the sermon on the mount, “Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?” The reasoning follows: if evil men know how to care for their sons, how much more does our Heavenly Father? This reasoning makes sense.

Yet, this same Heavenly Father gives His own Son to be crucified on another mount — Golgotha. And as the Son of God faces certain death, He is tormented. His hunger is met with nausea; and His thirst with bitterness, as the psalm foretold. How do we reconcile God to our pain, when we feel as if He’s abandoned us?

We call for help and remember that Christ, God Himself, suffered God-forsaken pain on our behalf. Christ tasted the poisoned food and drank the bitter wine that we might receive the sweet wine of his forgiveness and the nourishing bread of his body. **How do you sense God responding when you ask for something?**

## DON’T LOOK AWAY

ISAIAH 53:5-6

But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities; upon  
him was the chastisement that brought us  
peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

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.

At times the harsh truth of the cross—Christ’s suffering and anguish—is difficult to meditate on. Here we are invited to behold his gruesome death as both the inflictors and beneficiaries of his agony. It’s as if Isaiah is saying, “Don’t look away! Don’t ignore his crushed body. This should have been you, and it’s not.”

All the ways we’ve wandered and strayed brought to Christ’s soul and body a mixture of grief we can never fully fathom. But we know what physical pain feels like, and we know what it feels like to be distant from God. Jesus took our pain and distance from God to its furthest degree so that we might reap the restoration and nearness of the Father for all eternity. **What feelings arise within you when you contemplate Christ’s suffering? Can you offer those feelings to Jesus in exchange for his peace?**

## FOLDED

## ZECHARIAH 13:7

“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd,  
against the man who stands next to me,”  
declares the Lord of hosts. “Strike the  
shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered;  
I will turn my hand against the little ones.”

“*Et tu, Brute?*” utters Shakespeare’s Caesar with his dying breath as Brutus, the man who has stood next to Caesar as peer and friend, betrays him. Conspiracy was expected from Caesar’s enemies, but not from Brutus, and so it was Brutus’s stroke that cut deepest; “You too?”

Jesus referred to Himself as the shepherd of His people. This picture from Zechariah reminds us that he would one day be struck suddenly by the hands of those closest to him.

And yet this prophecy had to be fulfilled, for Christ says, “*I lay down my life for the sheep.*” The price of the sheep was the life of the shepherd, and the scattering of the sheep was only temporary, for “*No one will snatch them out of my hand.*”

**How do you experience being a sheep of this great shepherd? How has your awareness of this changed over the years?**

## THE CROSS IS OUR REWARD

## MATTHEW 5:11-12

Blessed are you when others revile you  
and persecute you and utter all kinds of  
evil against you falsely on my account.  
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is  
great in heaven, for so they persecuted the  
prophets who were before you.

Jesus closes the beatitudes with these words. It foreshadows Christ’s crucifixion and serves as a reminder that Christianity does not promise smooth sailing. Rather, it promises the exact opposite: we will be reviled and persecuted. Jesus knew when he spoke these words that he would be afflicted and wrongly prosecuted in the very near future. But he was confident that his coming crucifixion would be what makes our reward in heaven possible. The slights, injustices, and even blatant persecution we face in this world should be expected and normal. Even the heroes of our faith did not get to avoid such experiences. So, instead of wincing the next time we hear Christianity mocked, degraded, or insulted, we can actually rejoice. It is the cross and not public opinion that redeems us. **What price do you expect to pay for your faith?**



## SORROWFUL, THEN STEADFAST

MATTHEW 26:36-39

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Jesus has just celebrated the Last Supper with the twelve. He knows Judas will betray him, knows his followers will deny him. With death imminent, he teaches his remaining disciples precious things (John 14-16), and prays to his Father in their presence with surpassing intimacy and trust (John 17). He seems emotionally invincible.

Arriving at Gethsemane, however, Jesus asks his companions to remain behind but keep vigil. Sorrowful “to death”, he prays again, this time out of deep soul struggle. He took the hours he needed (the disciples fell asleep twice) to settle the matter: starting with a plea for any possible alternative to his trial, proceeding always with a commitment to his Father’s will, and arriving at last at solid acceptance of the desperate sacrifice. He emerged courageous and steadfast to the end. **How can we follow Jesus’ example, and gain his help, in facing our own trials?**

## HIS BLOOD IS ON US

MATTHEW 27:24-25

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

Guilt can have power for generations. This is especially true of what we call “blood-guilt,” the guilt associated with taking a life. Think for a moment what it must be like to be related to Adolf Hitler. His guilt carries a stain that is generations-long. So here, Pontius Pilate gets recorded forever in the Apostle’s Creed (“he suffered under Pontius Pilate”) and the crowd of people glibly place the blood of Christ on both themselves and their children.

The cross, however, reverses even the evil intention of the blood-guilty. The heinous act that leads to their guilt becomes a proof of innocence. “His blood” is indeed “on their children.” But being covered in that blood means that God passes over the guilt of their household, because he has already poured out his punishment onto his Beloved Son. **Where have you seen God redeem some dark part of your family story?**

## THE CRIMINAL'S CROSS

MATTHEW 27:32-36

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

Simon is forced to bear a criminal's cross. A criminal accused of blasphemy, betrayed by his closest friends, freshly beaten, and bloody. Fearful for his own safety, Simon unknowingly enters the humiliation of his Creator.

What must it have been like—experiencing the sufferings of Christ in real time? As the powers of darkness rage, Simon is there with the King's cross. What agony! What privilege! What intimacy! Oh, what sweet words of comfort did the Beloved whisper in Simon's ears on that shared way of suffering?

We readily contemplate how Christ enters our personal sufferings, while we often remain reluctant to enter his. We seek the joy, rest, and comfort of Christ. However, like Simon, we often must be forced to identify with him in his humiliation. **How might Christ be calling you into a deeper knowledge of him not only in his triumph but also in his humiliation?**

## GOD'S LOVING INSTRUCTION

MARK 8:31-32

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

God expresses his love to us in various ways. One way is by teaching us difficult truths that can be hard to accept. When Jesus tells his disciples plainly that he will suffer, be rejected, and killed, how challenging to their emotions it must have been! How challenging this truth can be for us today. And yet, accepting God's truth is always the wisest and most freeing thing for us to do.

Jesus had to suffer for us. His greatest suffering was in taking our place before God's righteous judgment. He had to die for us. His blood was the perfect atoning sacrifice making payment for our sin. He had to rise for us. His resurrection was a promise of our own resurrection. We can be thankful for God's truth which sets us free from sin and death. **How can accepting God's gospel truth help us face difficulties today?**

## HEARING WITH BOTH EARS

MARK 10:42-45

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

When Jesus taught about his kingdom, he often confounded some of his listeners yet comforted others. We may notice the same dichotomy within ourselves as we engage with the Scriptures. The kind of ear we lend Christ determines how we receive the message of his kingdom. The days we feel most self-sufficient, defensive, or vindictive we tend to believe Jesus wants a kingdom of self-reliant soldiers. The days we feel weak, unstable, or even hurt, we may believe Jesus’s kingdom primarily offers us a banquet of self-care. But Christ draws us to himself to teach us and to show us that in his kingdom death is the pathway to life, and self-sacrifice the pathway to honor. **How might you practice noticing the needs of others and blessing them through personal sacrifice?**

## FACES SET AS FLINT

LUKE 9:51

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jesus would be mocked, beaten, and shamed in Jerusalem; it was there in Jerusalem, that those he created in love would revolt. It was there, in Jerusalem, the Christ was to die. Still, Jesus set his face (See Isaiah 50:5-11).

Luke reminds us “the days drew near for him to be taken up” (i.e., to ascend). It is not merely the crucifixion in view as Christ sets his face on Jerusalem, but his ascent to the Father. Christ’s yielding to the Father’s will enables him to set his face as flint toward Jerusalem and endure the cross; he knows it will be a way of suffering yet anticipates glory—the joy of heaven (see Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:17). Together let us set our faces on the once Crucified King, our Risen Savior. **In times of suffering or darkness, what or who do you look to for security and guidance?**

## WHERE ARE WE?

LUKE 23:34

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Everything is backwards! Soldiers crucify their victim by the will of the victim Himself. The afflicters strip Him to shame yet pass around His clothing like a trophy. And the innocent savior pleads his tormenters' ignorance to shield them from judgment. A deeper inversion the world has not seen.

And where are we? We rightfully sing "*Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice; Call out among the scoffers.*" We locate ourselves as the soldiers, the afflicters, for it was our sins that drove Christ to the cross. We marvel at His response: "forgive."

Let us praise God for this intercession! His crucifixion is the very grounds by which His prayer can be answered. Let us rest in his never-delayed forgiveness.

**Do you struggle to rest in God's forgiveness? What would it feel like to hear Jesus' words "Forgive them" and to know that it was directed at you?**

## IN THE FATHER'S HANDS

LUKE 23:46

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

As Jesus hung on the cross, he knew his work was finished, our redemption accomplished, and the debt for our rebellion fully paid. Then with a loud voice he declared, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Jesus quotes Psalm 31:5, a testimony to his death being in accordance with the Father's will.

There were no mistakes made, no miscalculations to consider. Jesus' utterance was not one of failure but faithfulness. His last words were spoken not in resignation but victory. Our hope does not rest in a great effort by a great person. Rather, our hope rests in the perfect work accomplished by the perfect man, Christ Jesus. He committed his spirit into the Father's hands and now we too, through Christ, are committed into the Father's hands. **How can our knowledge of being in the Father's hands strengthen our desire to love and serve Christ?**

## THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

### JOHN 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John the Baptist makes an incredible proclamation as Jesus approaches him: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus offers himself as the final perfect sacrifice, his precious blood like that of a lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:19).

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a sacrificial lamb led to the slaughter, upon whom the Lord has placed all of our iniquity (Isaiah 53:6-7). But though Jesus is our sacrificial lamb, he is not helpless. He chooses this sacrifice willingly, purposefully: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:17). Our sins are like scarlet, but the Lamb of God, a perfect willing sacrifice, can make us white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). **How does Jesus’ willing sacrifice set an example for us to follow?**

## JESUS FACES THE CROSS

### JOHN 12:27-28

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo’s immediate reaction to hearing about the task of destroying the ring is to explain to Gandalf, “I am not made for perilous quests. I wish I had never seen the ring!” It’s a poignant and relatable moment for all of us who have ever felt burdened by a duty we had no choice but to undertake. Of course, such a reaction is normal for the protagonist of a great novel, but it’s jarring to see Jesus share a similar sentiment here in John. The difference, however, is that Jesus’s immediate response to being troubled by his impending crucifixion is to remember that he came to earth exactly for that purpose. Instead of wishing away his task, He asks the Father to use it to glorify God, and the Father promises to do so. **As you consider what is troubling for you right now, how might God use that for his glory?**

## THY WILL BE DONE

### JOHN 13:1

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

*What will happen at the end?* How often we turn this question over, wondering about our own lives, our memories, our loved ones and our homes. These thoughts trigger anxious preparation in some and apathetic procrastination in others. Ironically both reactions are guided by the same fear: It's out of our control.

When John tells us that "*Jesus... loved them to the end,*" he is stating a degree of measure, a point of fullness. In other words, Jesus couldn't love his own in the world any more than he already has. His end, His death, answers the uncertainty of our own end. "*We shall be like him.*" Loved by Jesus in the world, taken to be with Jesus in His restored world. The end.

**Pray for the grace to know Christ's love even more. To what "ends" does Christ's love prompt thanksgiving and worship? Express that to Him.**

## THE TRUTH

### JOHN 18:38

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."

Accused of blasphemy by the Jews before the Roman magistrate, Jesus speaks truth. The Jews, seeking the death penalty, manipulate and deceive. Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews.

Jesus answers "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Jesus gives the boldest answer. Jesus is Truth embodied, God incarnate, the Truth for ALL who listen to him, not just the Jews. Pilate's thoughts are unknown; his response "What is truth?" is ironic to us. Truth is right there.

Pilate is not seeking truth. He dismisses Jesus. The Jews disregard Pilate. They are not seeking truth. Lies seem to prevail, but with Jesus' death and resurrection, truth wins. Ultimately. Always. **What practice grounds you in Gospel truth?**

## SHAME ACCEPTED, SHAME RELEASED

JOHN 19:16-18

So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.

Few instincts are more intrinsically human than preserving dignity and avoiding shame. We learn early in life how to effectively curtail the stinging effects of shame—how to move through society in such a way as to make ourselves honorable, reliable, and free of others' harsh judgment. In his sacrifice on the cross, Christ suspended his own human impulse to preserve his honor and released himself to die a criminal's brutal and shameful death. He hung naked between society's most guilty as one of them. All so that we may never feel the deep and lasting shame of our own sin. Yet in our humanity, we see our sin as something to hide and often fail to release it to Christ. **What shame do you continue to clutch as your own? How can you release it to Jesus?**

## DELIVERED UP FOR OUR DELIVERANCE

ACTS 2:23

“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

At Pentecost, Peter no longer denied Jesus, but boldly proclaimed him. Peter used God's Word to show his Jewish audience that the one whom they crucified was their anticipated Messiah (2:36). The audience is broken over their sin and directed by Peter to “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...” (2:38).

Peter's audience likely included some who had shouted to Pontius Pilate, “Crucify him.” And yet, God graciously and mercifully extends the gift of salvation even to them. Jesus' crucifixion may elicit a righteous anger toward those who killed him, but it was God's plan all along to deliver up his Son for our deliverance: to save not only the listeners in attendance at Peter's address, but us. **How do you feel about Jesus' death being planned by God? Does it cause concern, comfort, praise?**

## RECONCILED

### ROMANS 5:8-10

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Earlier Paul summarized our plight, quoting Psalms and Isaiah: “None is righteous, no, not one... no one seeks for God... in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” (Romans 3:10-17). We were sinners: in conflict with God and others. We were enemies of God: alienated from him and facing his just wrath. Then, beyond all hope, “God shows his love for us... Christ died for us.”

Such familiar words, but so deeply wonderful. When we were enemies of God and unworthy of his love, he chose to love us with an astonishing act, the sacrifice of his own Son. And Jesus chose to love us by dying a bloody death to accomplish this sacrifice, turning away God’s wrath and reconciling us to God. **When we are reconciled to God, what changes take place in our everyday lives?**

## BAPTIZED INTO DEATH

### ROMANS 6:3

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

We rejoice at baptisms! The symbolic “washing” is full of promise; it represents cleansing and new life.

But baptism also represents death — Christ’s death for us, our death to sin. Baptism itself does not put sin to death. Jesus Christ does.

In his death on the cross, Jesus took us with him. He took our old nature, enslaved to sin, and plunged it below, burying it with his death.

Only through Christ’s death on the cross is our new life possible. And just as Jesus was raised up from the water, in the Jordan river with John, so he was also raised from the dead at the resurrection, by the Father. He broke the bonds of death; he broke our bondage to sin. We have been raised to righteousness! **In what ways has Jesus freed you from bondage to sin?**



## TRUE WORSHIP

## ROMANS 12:1

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship.”

Prior to Paul’s instruction (“Therefore...”), the subject is the mysterious, overflowing, deep, rich, MERCY of God. The response of the believer? Offering.

Christ’s sacrificial death should move us to offer our very selves to God, daily, hourly, every fraction of a second. Our sacrifice is continual — living out, not burning out. We are aware that we are not our own; we belong entirely to God. We sometimes consign worship to just singing. Singing can be worship. As can praying, working, loving others.

But at the heart of true, proper, God-pleasing worship is sacrifice. Foundational to our sacrificial worship is a transformed will. In the words of theologian John Stott, “Every prayer we pray should be a variation on the theme, ‘Your will be done.’” **What are some specific ways that you could offer your life to God today?**

## FOLLY OR POWER

## 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18, 23

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

We all want to save ourselves. We want to have the kind of control over our lives that places us in command of our own destiny. We dread the thought of losing our comforts and security. So how could relinquishing control bring us peace? Even further, how could a public display of weakness result in power?

Against our every sensibility, the cross is the very means God used to demonstrate his power to save us. When our eyes are opened to this Gospel of Grace, we are confronted with the reality that we are incomprehensibly inadequate to save ourselves. The cross is a relief to those who feel this weakness, because through it we receive the very power Christ laid down. **Does the message of the cross bring you dread or relief? How can you offer your weakness to Jesus today?**

## THE MAIN THING

### I CORINTHIANS 2:1-2

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

Words often fail us. Or so we think. “I should have said this or that differently. I could be more eloquent. I wish I knew the right words. Then I would be effective for Christ.”

Desiring to speak effectively is not wrong; but concluding that my own lofty speech and praiseworthy wisdom would be more effective than the plain Gospel, driven by the Holy Spirit, is false.

Paul, the great writer, educated orator, knows this, and his message was simple: The cross of Christ plus nothing is everything. **How have you seen the Holy Spirit work through your own inadequacy?**

## A DEATH THAT STAYS WITH US

### I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

In our culture we avoid thinking or talking about death. We hope people will “move on” from the deaths that they’ve experienced of those closest to them. We shroud the ugly word from its stark reality with euphemisms, like he “passed away,” “departed,” “left us.”

It seems significant then that when Christians are told to dwell on Christ, we are instructed to remember and proclaim his death. It’s like Christ is commanding: **Keep my death alive! Make it a present reality. Remember it, taste it, proclaim it, and do so often!**

But we only keep proclaiming it “until he comes.” When Christ returns, he will destroy death. Death itself will die. Then there will only be life and no need to remember and proclaim the death that made that life possible. **In practical terms, what do you think it means to remember Christ’s death?**

## THE GREAT EXCHANGE

### 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who  
knew no sin, so that in him we might  
become the righteousness of God.

We are accustomed to fair and equitable exchanges. If we exchange an item we have purchased, we expect that we will get something fair in return. We will get our money back, or perhaps store credit to have the same purchasing power. If the item was broken before we bought it, we expect a full refund. If we were the ones who broke it, we don't expect an exchange to be accepted.

Today we reflect on what theologians often call "The Great Exchange." It refers to what Jesus accomplished on the cross: he gets our sin, and in exchange we get his righteousness. The beauty of this exchange is that it's not fair. It is disproportionate. It involves the greatest possible loss to the Giver. This exchange is entirely "For our sake." **What words could you write down or pray out loud right now, in response to God's disproportionate love?**

## THE LIFE I NOW LIVE

### GALATIANS 2:19-21

For through the law I died to the law,  
so that I might live to God. I have been  
crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who  
live, but Christ who lives in me. And the  
life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in  
the Son of God, who loved me and gave  
himself for me. I do not nullify the grace  
of God, for if righteousness were through  
the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The cross is more than a historical act, a theological necessity, or a demonstration of pure love. It certainly is those things, but it is also a new life. Paul describes this as living "to God." What is the difference between living before the cross and living after the cross? It has to do with the source and motivation for obedience.

Before we are "crucified with Christ," we try to achieve righteousness by means of law. Every human culture has ways of saying: Obey this and you will be accepted. This is righteousness through law. To be crucified with Christ means that now we live with the freedom of beloved sons and daughters. We don't build lives of *achieving*; but rather *receiving*. Everything we have is ours because God has given it. **What is one thing that is different about your life now than when you were outside of Christ?**

## HIS CURSE, OUR BLESSING

GALATIANS 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

We are taught from a young age that there is a correlation between behavior and consequences. In the family of God, these lessons are taught through the lens of His covenant. To obey His law is to receive blessing, while disobedience results in curses. As an Israelite, Jesus understood this truth more than anyone else and yet, as the Messiah, He was the one exception to this rule.

His perfect obedience was to result in the full wrath of the law upon Him. Our Lord, who lived wholly committed to doing the will of the Father, gave up His own blessed position to bear our curse. His cursed tree has become our blessed cross. For in this great exchange He gave us His perfect righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). **As you meditate on Christ’s redeeming work, how does knowing God is pleased with your obedience help in your battles with sin?**

## BOAST IN THE CROSS

GALATIANS 6:14

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

One of the themes of Galatians is that we are justified by faith and not by works. This is made possible by Jesus’s crucifixion. Therefore, our joy and boast is that Jesus has conquered death. Regardless of our most impressive accomplishments, the crucial factor for our salvation is that Christ died on the cross. Similarly—and thankfully—our worst deeds are also forgiven because of the cross. That is, remembering Jesus’s death on the cross has a stabilizing effect on the Christian life. When we accomplish something and are tempted to boast, we look to the cross and boast in it instead. When we grievously sin and are tempted to wallow, we look to the cross and boast in it instead. The cross covers it all. **In what things are you tempted to boast?**

## FRAGRANT SACRIFICE

EPHESIANS 5:2

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Jesus never committed an unloving act. What a thought! His whole life was an object lesson from which we can glean what it looks like to walk in love. Yet the one example Paul emphasizes here is that we are to imitate Christ's death; His giving up of Himself. It's hard not to see the irony in this statement. How can one be a *walking* sacrifice?

Herein lies the beautiful paradox of Calvary love. In the giving up of ourselves God's love springs forth. It is a love that blooms only in the soil of sacrifice with a fragrance so powerful that it reaches to the heavens. **Is there an area of your life where you are reluctant to "give up" yourself for the good of another? What is one way you can move toward sacrificial love in this area?**

## SHAME OF THE CROSS

PHILIPPIANS 2:8

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The Old Testament tells us that Jesus's experience as a human would include sorrow and rejection. (Is. 53). Nowhere is this humiliation more evident than in the recognition that He, the omnipotent Son of God and God himself, became a human and consented to a public and painful execution. It was this humiliation, however, that results in his exaltation. Because he yielded his life on the cross, he received "the name that is above every name" before which "every knee shall bow." (Phil. 2:9-10). The result is that the chief mechanism of his humiliation—the cross—becomes the very thing that glorifies Him. God redeems the injustice, ugliness, and pain of the cross and turns it into a means of salvation. **If God can redeem the cross, why do we doubt that God will redeem our struggles?**

## MADE ALIVE TOGETHER

COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

We were trespassers: outlaws rebelling against God's good commands. We were doubly ruined: dead in sin, and in debt to God. Earlier in Colossians we read that Jesus is God himself, the Creator of all; we were created by him and for him (1:15-16, 2:9). But the ways of the world and forces of spiritual darkness ("rulers and authorities") seized on our rebellion, taking us captive (2:8).

Into this tragedy, Jesus came to rescue us. He willingly died, so that he could make us "alive together with him". He was nailed to the cross, so that our record of debt could be publicly canceled by being nailed there with him. In one bold and deeply costly stroke Jesus triumphed: saving us from death, and from our debt to God. **What practice could you do today to help you have confidence that your debt is forgiven and that you are alive with Christ?**

## PERFECTLY PURIFIED

HEBREWS 9:14

...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

It is hard to imagine perfection this side of the Fall. Even the purest of the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament must have hidden some defect that the Lord, in His kindness, overlooked. Nor could these sacrifices be willing participants on the altar. An animal sacrifice for human sin is merely insufficient. But Christ, from the moment of conception until He yielded up His spirit, was entirely perfect. And in His full humanity, He willingly placed Himself upon the cross.

"How much more?" the author of Hebrews asks. The answer is, "so much more!" The blood of Christ has purified us more than any animal ever could. So powerful is His blood that it has washed us clean once and for all. So completely has He purified us that we can live lives pleasing to a holy God. **Where have you seen the power of Christ's cleansing from sin in your life? Praise Him for it!**

## WOUNDED TO HEAL

1 PETER 2:24

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”

All people have been physically sick and wounded. We have longed for healing. Sometimes our healing involves suffering. Surgery. Treatment. Zero guarantees.

And yet physical sickness is just a faint picture of our real illness, which is debilitating and ultimately fatal. We are born sin sick and separated from God.

Perhaps we show no obvious signs of our condition, but we are the walking spiritually dead. No amount of self care or self punishment can heal us. We need a savior.

Enter Jesus, God in the flesh. With his death, he mortally wounded our sin nature. Jesus is the only cure. Peter quotes Isaiah’s prophecy: “...with his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

Jesus took our bitter, deadly pill. His suffering is our permanent, effective cure. Guaranteed. **In what specific ways has Jesus spiritually healed you?**

## TAKE-BACKS

1 PETER 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...

The Avett Brothers sing these lyrics, “*The weight of lies will bring you down, and follow you to every town.*” Their words are true. Sin brings earthly suffering.

While we still experience the consequences of sin, the Scriptures teach that for Christians the judgment of sin has already been given at the cross, where Christ was put to death in our place. “*The righteous for the unrighteous.*”

A lie can still bring earthly suffering, but a lie cannot undo the work that Christ has done once and for all: We have been bought back and brought back to God.

**Read Galatians 3:3, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” In what ways are you tempted to perfect yourself in the flesh, rather than trust in the spirit and rest in what has been done?**

## TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION

### REVELATION 1:4-6

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Before John's apocalyptic vision, he introduces Jesus with titles of highest honor and exclamations of praise. Jesus is adored as the one faithful image of God in our world, the one who triumphed over death as firstborn of a new creation, the preeminent and supreme sovereign.

But what we see next is even more amazing: "To him who loves us..." The Lord of Creation loves us! He has freed us! He has rescued us from our own sins, redeemed us by paying with his own blood! Ponder the depth of the love of God: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) So indeed, "to him be glory and dominion forever and ever." **How can we be "lost in wonder, love, and praise" at what Jesus has done for us?**

## THE WORTHY SAVIOR

### REVELATION 5:9-10

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

John recounts his magnificent vision of the Lamb of God being praised in heaven. There is only one who is worthy to accomplish God's plan and purposes of redemption for, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Jesus has ransomed his people, setting them free from the darkness of sin. He has purchased our freedom with his precious blood, and we rejoice in his worthiness as Savior and King. We praise his name for it is the name of Jesus, at which "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10). **How does Jesus' worthiness help to encourage, comfort, and inspire us in our daily walk?**



# *Personal* REFLECTIONS

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for notes.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for notes.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for notes.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for notes.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for content.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for content.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for content.

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Empty rectangular box for content.



**A S C E N S I O N**  
C H U R C H O F P H O E N I X