

# **NO DOUBT**

## **40 Days of Passion**

**40 Day Spiritual Journey leading to Easter**

**Wednesday, February 25 – Sunday, April 5 2015**

By:

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&

Dr. Matthew Farlow

# **No Doubt 40 Days of Passion**

## **Guide**

For these next 40 days we are asking you to step out of your comfort zone. We are asking and challenging you to step out in faith. This road that we will be traveling together will be bumpy. There will be times you want to call it quits, give into temptation and simply say why in the world am I doing this. My encouragement to you is never give up. Yes, this will be a hard and rigorous 40 days of spiritual journey but by the end of these 40 days you will look back and be thankful you followed through and finished strong. There are 5 different areas we are asking you to pray about and hopefully complete with us over this 40 day journey.

### **1.) Daily Devotionals**

Be in the Word everyday. Challenge yourself to work through each day's devotional. Don't skip a day. Everyday for 40 days.

### **2.) Fellowship and Worship**

Don't miss a single Sunday Morning Worship for 6 weeks (40 days).

### **3.) Practical Evangelism**

Bring someone new to Church on Friend Day (Sunday, March 1<sup>st</sup>) and bring him or her and a new friend back to our Easter Sunday Celebration (Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>). Invitation cards are available to help extend your invite to others.

### **4.) Self Sacrifice**

Sacrifice something in your life that hinders or distracts you from your relationship with the Lord. For example, I (Pastor Matt) am giving up my personal Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts up for 40 days. By following through on this commitment you are communicating to Lord that He is first no matter what. Nothing can come in between you and your relationship with the Lord.

### **5.) Prayer and Fasting**

Pray and Fast with us for these next 40 days. Now I know some of you are screaming, "FAST for 40 DAYS! You're crazy!" Hang on. We are not completely giving up food; some of us are going to follow the Daniel Fast from Daniel chapter 1.

### **Daniel 1:12-13 (NIV)**

*"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see."*

Daniel says, "Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink." So they basically ate a strict Vegan diet. Nothing from animals, nothing processed and nothing with yeast. No coffee, no soda and no tea. Water only. We realize that this may be very difficult for many people in our congregation so we are going to have three options of fasting. Remember, you are voluntarily fasting for these 40 days. Nothing is forced. We are simply giving a guide for these next six weeks.

**Plan 1-**

Strict Daniel Fast as described above. Vegan diet. Nothing processed. Everything fresh and whole. No Dairy, No meat and No eggs. Following Jewish Law from Daniel's time we cannot have anything with yeast.

**Plan 2-**

Vegetarian plan. Continue with the whole veggies and fruit and add in milk, cheese and eggs for protein.

**Plan 3-**

Healthy, Balanced Plan. Continue to eat vegetables and fruit but include lean chicken, fish and other lean meats. Don't run out and grab a 4x4 from In & Out or fry up some bacon. You can find more information about this healthy option at [www.saddleback.com/thedanielplan](http://www.saddleback.com/thedanielplan). Saddleback Church is followed a similar plan but for the entire year of 2011.

The idea with fasting is that prayer is intertwined with it. You cannot do one without the other. Each time you are feeling that "In & Out" urge or craving some late night ice cream, go to the Lord in prayer. Recite verses to help strengthen you. For example,

**Philippians 4:13 (ESV)**

*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Use this time of fasting to pray for our church. Pray for your family or marriage. Pray for this Valley, our country or for your neighbor. Pray for those who are sick and for those who are in need. Give everything over to the Lord whom you are fasting for!

We are not only fasting for spiritual reasons but also for health reasons. Look at what the Apostle Paul says about our bodies.

**1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)**

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

Our bodies are a temple! When the Holy Spirit indwells within us we literally become God's temple. His Spirit resides within us! How many of us are taking good care of that temple. I know that I can say for myself, "Poorly!" Paul encourages a young guy in the ministry, Timothy with this truth.

**1 Timothy 4:8 (NIV)**

*For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

This whole journey is training us in godliness which Paul says holds the most value, but do not miss the first part of that verse, physical training does have value as well. We need to be concerned about all areas of our life, including our health and fitness.

**Disclaimer-**

The fasting and diet plans described above are only a suggestion and a guide to help your

spiritual growth. It is not a substitute for, nor does it replace, professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of health conditions. Please consult your physician or other healthcare professional before beginning or changing any diet or fitness program to make sure that it is appropriate for your needs; especially if you have a history of any of the following:

High blood pressure (you or your family)

Heart disease (you or your family)

Chest pain when exercising

Chest pain in the past month when not engaged in physical activity

Smoking

Have high cholesterol

Obesity

Currently pregnant

Bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in physical activity

Diabetes

If you have any concerns or questions about your health, you should always consult with a physician or other healthcare professional. Stop exercising immediately if you experience faintness, dizziness, pain or shortness of breath at any time. Do not disregard, avoid or delay obtaining medical or health related advice from your healthcare professional because of something you may have read on this guide. Current health and fitness research may exist that could impact the educational information provided in this guide, and advice found here may not be based on the most recent findings or developments. Therefore, the use of any information provided in this guide is solely at your own risk.

**NO DOUBT**  
**40 DAYS OF PASSION**

**PREFACE**

Faith. It is hard to grasp sometimes, yet in the gospel of Luke, we are asked, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18.8b) What, then, does it mean to say we have faith? That is, what is the writer of Hebrews intending when he states that “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”?

Faith is the essence of the believer’s life from beginning to end. By grace, through faith, salvation is received (**Eph 2:8-9**). Faith is thus distinct from the basis of salvation, which is grace, and from the outworking of salvation, which is good works. The apostle Paul declared that salvation is through faith, not through keeping the works of the law (**Eph 2:8-9**).

- In modern times, the meaning of faith has been weakened: some people use it to mean self-confidence. But in the Bible, true faith is confidence in God or Christ, not in oneself.
  - **C.S. Lewis:** We must not encourage in ourselves or others any tendency to work up a subjective state which, if we succeeded, we should describe “faith,” with the idea that this will somehow insure the granting of our prayer.... The state of mind in which desperate desire working on a strong imagination can manufacture is not faith in the Christian sense. It is a feat of psychological gymnastics.
  - **A.W. Tozer:** I do not recall another period when faith was as popular as it is today. If we only believe hard enough we will make it somehow. So goes the popular chant. What you believe is not important. Only believe.... What is overlooked in all this is that faith is only good when it engages truth; when it is made to rest upon falsehood it can and often does lead to eternal tragedy. **FOR IT IS NOT ENOUGH THAT WE BELIEVE; WE MUST BELIEVE THE RIGHT THING ABOUT THE RIGHT ONE.**

Let’s be honest with each other, though. So often doubt clouds our minds and weakens our faith, but believe it or not, we are not alone as the apostles also asked Jesus to increase their faith (Luke 17:5). What was Jesus’ reply? He said, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

The hope of this devotional study is that by the end of these 40 days you will be able to answer some of your doubts. We hope these passages will spark or reignite a passion deep within for the One that unceasingly pursues us. No one is immune from doubt. In fact, there is a glaring example of doubt in Scripture. Thomas, one of the twelve chosen by Jesus to follow Him and rock the world for Him after His return to heaven, doubted. Let’s take a peek into the gospel of John and get a glimpse of Thomas.

**John 20:24-29:**

*Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.*

*Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

Get this, folks; let us remember, Thomas had seen Jesus walk on water! He saw Jesus feed the 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread and witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead! Now if you ask us, it seems that Thomas had plenty of proof that Jesus was who He said He was, and yet Thomas still doubted. He literally had to touch the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. Even amidst all this doubt, Jesus met Thomas where he was. In His loving embrace, Jesus not only answered Thomas’ doubts, thereby strengthening his faith, but He gave to all of us a clear and vivid picture as to how God constantly and intentionally pursues each of us. Can you imagine the reaction from Thomas? It is understandable that from this point on, there was nothing Thomas would not do for the Lord.

None of us will ever have the opportunity to see and touch the wounds of Christ until we kneel before Him in Heaven for all of eternity. How will we then have our doubts answered? What will strengthen our faith? The good news is that Jesus was speaking of you and me in John 29. Listen to what Jesus says to us: “...*blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” (John 20:29) None of us have seen, yet we still believe. Even though we do not know everything, we still believe. We still have faith.

Now, before moving forward, it is kind of neat to look at the Greek root of the words “believe” and “faith”:

- **Believe** – the greek root is “Pistis”. Webster’s says: “to take as true, to have faith”
- John uses this verb 99 times in his gospel.
- **FAITH** – the greek root is also “Pistis”
- When used in the New Testament, it always talks of faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual.

Okay, it seems crazy, but nothing is coincidental or random with God. Remember back to Tozer’s statement: “it is not enough that we believe; we must believe the right thing about the right one.” Combining this thought with the apostle Paul’s words “by grace you have been save through *faith*,” we begin to see the importance of understanding our faith to deepen and understand our beliefs. Fortunately, we have two foundations to help us build our faith and strengthen our belief, the Holy Spirit and God’s Holy Word, Scripture.

God has given us the Holy Spirit to help guide us and speak to our hearts. Check out these verses that confirm the Spirit’s role in our life.

**Psalm 143:10:**

*Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!*

**Ezekiel 36:27:**

*And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

**John 14:26:**

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

**John 15:26:**

*But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness about Me.*

**John 16:13:**

*When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.*

*(For further study: Acts 1:8; Romans 5:5, 7:6, 8:2-16, 26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14, 3:16, 12:1-12; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:17-18, Ephesians 2:22)*

Now I only gave some of the verses that speak of the Spirit's role in our lives, but the truth is the Holy Spirit is real and He dwells within us. As we grow in our relationship with the Lord, the Holy Spirit moves and works in our hearts to grow us closer to Him. Galatians speaks of how we are to stay in step with the Spirit. Where God's spirit moves we are to follow. Staying in tune with the Spirit takes faith and spiritual maturity. Through prayer, Scripture, and other people, the Lord will speak to us and confirm His direction for our lives. Because we all have the same Holy Spirit working within us, we can grow in our faith.

Now, examine what Jesus said about the Word.

**Matthew 7:24-27:**

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

No matter how intense the storm, the trial, or the doubt, if we build our life and our faith upon the words of Christ and Scripture, we will have a house built upon the Rock. That house will be unshakable, steady and secure. Scripture will strengthen our faith. For these 40 days of Passion, we want to help you dig into the Scriptures and solidify your faith. We want to help you grasp why you believe what you believe. If we build our faith upon anything besides God's Word, we will be placing it on shaky ground where there is no security.

§ 2 Moving Towards the Impossible Possibility

Now, we have heard some people say that it's okay to have doubts because all the Lord wants is faith. That is not completely true. Yes, God does want us to live by faith. Hebrews 11 makes that clear: *"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."* (Hebrews 11:6) It is impossible to please the Lord without faith, but that does not mean that we don't investigate and learn more about what we believe. Listen to what the Apostle Peter said:

**1 Peter 3:15-16:**

*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Peter tells us to always be prepared. Examine yourselves. Could you give an answer to someone who questions you about your faith? Is your answer “just because”? We are all created with a mind and intelligence. Being a follower of Christ doesn't mean you have to give up knowledge and wisdom. If anything, we should honor our Creator and search out the answers. We could say, “I know why I have faith in Christ.” Can you say that today? Are you prepared to give answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for your faith in Christ? Hopefully, at the end of these 40 days of Passion your will be able to say, “No Doubt!”



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**February 25, 2015**

DAY ONE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Isaiah 40:25**

*“To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.”*

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted and built on the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days of this devotional will present the core values of COV’s beliefs. As a reminder, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT GOD

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God. This one God has always existed in eternal relationship as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each identical in nature, equal in power and glory, and having precisely the same divine attributes. God is sovereign in all things. He created all things freely and without pre-existing material.

Most often, when we speak of God we are speaking of God the Father. Through Jesus, humanity comes to recognize God the Father of the Son as being Father of all. From the Father comes the sending forth of the Son. God the Father is the one who gives being to all beings, the one to whom humanity looks when it looks upon the Word, the image of the unseen God. The presentation of the Father by the Son is established through the reality that God is the foundation of life and the initiator of such giving.

In today’s broken world, so many want to deny the love of God the Father because our perception of Fatherhood is earthly rather than heavenly. However, every family that exists derives its form from God as Father within the Trinity. Remember, Fatherhood does not come from mankind, but from God. Christianity simply brings people back to the originator of the Family—God the Father. Followers of Christ have been given the Love of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) through the Father’s willingness to put His own Son on display. The demonstration of God’s love on the cross is made in front of the entire universe so He could say to all humanity, “this is what you are worth to me.” God the Father is well worth knowing because His quality of

love does not depend upon performance or potential, but upon our person. There is nothing or no one more absolute in their love for us than the Lord our God, the One revealed in and through Holy Scripture.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

How does the reality of God's absoluteness impact our faith? Why does it seem that the world has trouble in believing or even recognizing the absolute love of God?

What kinds of things can we do that will allow us to begin seeing and feeling God as our *true* Father?

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to continue to awaken you to His absolute glory!

Genesis 1:1,26,27, 3:22; Deut. 6:4; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24, 8:58; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**February 26, 2015**

DAY TWO

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 14:6**

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that "we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!" In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV's beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

Salvation is found *only* in Christ – it is a person and not a religious system. Though the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually indwelling one another, Jesus Christ is the only begotten incarnate Son, the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. The person, Jesus, is dedicated to delivering us from our past failures and sin, giving us peace in the present, and securing our future with Him. Jesus delivers us from our past, present, and future sins as He takes us into the Being of God so to transform us into our intended imago Dei. It is in Christ and through Christ that all things were made and through whom all things came into being.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

How does it impact our daily lives that salvation is a person and not a religious system?

Jesus presents to us the ultimate example of love – to lay down your life for the sake of the other. He calls us to "Go and do likewise." How can we begin to live and become more like Jesus?

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to continue to awaken you to His amazing grace and love!

Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5, 18; 14:9-30; Hebrews 1:1-4, 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Colossians 1:16; Titus 2:13; Revelation 13:8.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**February 27, 2015**

DAY THREE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 14:16-17**

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV’s beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son of God. He is the eternal third Person of the Trinity, who is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the regenerator and Sanctifier of the redeemed, the Bestower of spiritual fruit and gifts and the abiding advocate who lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer. As Christians, we seek to live under His control daily.

One might view the Holy Spirit as a loving ambassador, who by nature possessing all of the authority of the King Himself, chooses rather to usher His subjects of affection to the presence of the Father and the Son, serving as the personal communicator of this divine love to and from, till the time when the entire kingdom will commune in glorious person. “The Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God.”

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The Holy Spirit is the eternal seal, God’s constant reminder of His love for us. What are some reasons that we might need the Holy Spirit in order to build our confidence in God?

How do we grieve the Spirit sometimes? How can we begin to recognize more the leading of the Spirit?

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to continue to awaken you to His amazing indwelling!

Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 3:17; John 4:24, 16:7-13, 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12, 3:16-17; Ephesians 1:13-14; Galatians 4:6, 5:25.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**February 28, 2015**

DAY FOUR

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Isaiah 40:8**

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV’s beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT THE BIBLE

The Bible is God’s Word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error. The OT and NT are the only inspired texts that hold divine authority over the individual and the church.

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, we can affirm the Biblical record, heard or read, to be the most authoritative and complete revelation of Jesus Christ as well as the primary written source revealing salvation in Christ through the Spirit for humanity. The Scriptures testify of Christ, provide wisdom leading to the person of Christ and thus, salvation, instruction toward sanctification, guidance for good works, direction toward glorification, and Truth. They are profitable to instruct the church and its members in matters of Godly wisdom, unity of heart, and proper conduct with and towards one another.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Today, while still being the most bought book in history, for many, the Bible remains in the cupboard or gaining dust on the bookshelf. Why do we choose to pick up the I-Pad, kindle, sports section or Tom Clancy as opposed to the Bible? How much time are you spending in God’s Word?

Make a commitment this day to God and to yourself to get into His word so as to get into living Christ.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to imprint and enact His word in your heart and in your life!

Matthew 15:15-17; Mark 13:31; John 5:39; Acts 4:11-12; Roman 14:11; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:13, 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Psalm 119:105,160, 12:6; Proverbs 30:5.



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 1, 2015**

DAY FIVE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 139:13-14**

For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV’s beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS

People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God’s creation, created from the outpouring of love of the Godhead. We, humanity, are destined to be both a gift for the Son and the chosen recipient of divine love. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called “sin”. This attitude separates people from God and causes many problems in life. However, even “sin” cannot, and does not, eradicate the truth of humanity being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). We believe that each person has been and will always be a divinely created being. Furthermore, it is equally valuable to assess the idea of “image and likeness” from a relational perspective. There is a special way in which humanity participates in relationships that adds to one’s understanding of being “made in the image and likeness of God.” In his relational image, humanity participates as temporal agents of his reconciling ministry.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Today, many question the beauty and profundity of life. We have quite a lot of ways to try to “cosmetically” spruce up life, yet in doing so we often neglect the very reason why this is a *beautiful life* – God!

Take some time to reflect on the many ways in which God has blessed your days. Pray for ways that you might be a blessing to someone this day.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to make you more and more aware of the beauty and preciousness of life!

Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6a; John 6:37; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 2, 2015**

DAY SIX

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**1 Corinthians 1:18**

*For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV’s beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT SALVATION

Salvation is God’s free gift to us but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God’s offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin’s penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. Apart from the saving pursuit of God toward man, there is no permanent remedy for sin (Col 1:13, Heb 10:18). As a result of man’s relationship with *sin*, his relationship with God has been utterly alienated (Col 1:21). However, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Christ, who knew no sin, became sin on behalf of man, so that those who believe might become the righteousness of God in Him.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Our American mindset does not like to be told that we cannot “pull ourselves up by the bootstraps” and procure our own salvation. Many balk at the Christian faith saying that I do not need a Savior. And for most of us, while we do not outright deny Christ, many of our actions and thoughts go against His reconciling and redeeming message of love.

Pray right now that God would open your heart to the ways in which you try to control life and God as opposed to being faithful and obedient to His call. Thank Him for your redemption and ask for forgiveness for anything that is or has been keeping you from the beauty of your salvation!

Take some time to reflect on the many ways in which God has blessed your days. Pray for the salvation of someone you know.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to make you more and more aware of the beauty of His salvific performance in your life!

Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9; John 14:6, 1:12; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26; Romans 5:1; 2Cor 5:19-21.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 3, 2015**

DAY SEVEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 17:3-4**

*“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”*

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that “we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!” In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV’s beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT ETERNITY

People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence. All who remain enslaved to the mastery of their sinful desires are in hostile relationship to their first love and subject to His everlasting punishment (Matt 25.46, Col 1.21). Apart from a saving pursuit of humanity by the Godhead, there is no reconciliation to this relationship (Col 1.13, Heb 10.18).

For most of us it is hard to comprehend something lasting forever – well maybe not if we remember back to some sermons or classroom lectures! The point is, our *imago Dei* (image of God) is in the likeness and image of an everlasting God. The writer of Hebrews tells writes of Christ, that “Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever.” (v8). The eternal nature of Christ rests within each of us as eternal life is what we were created for but again, this cannot come apart from Christ. From the beginning God has loved us and His love is not bettered or created through our efforts. Instead, God desires that we respond to His eternal love through our desire to love and commune with Him for all eternity. This is what it means when we speak of the reality of the Kingdom of God here and now, to be in relationship with God, in Christ through the Spirit so to live in and live out God’s divine love. This love and for that matter, our comprehension of eternity, come by our positive response to Christ’s reconciliatory act.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

So much of life reminds us that nothing lasts forever. Yet each one of us wants to live a life that counts. However, many today are not building their lives on the eternal—God’s Word—but rather cultural thinking, tradition, assumptions and self-projected ideas of who God is. But if we seek God in His Son and His Scripture, we will grow more and more like Him so to realize eternity within us. As 1 John 4:16-17 states, “We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” Jesus wants us to be with Him for all eternity, the question we have to ask ourselves, do we want to spend eternity with Christ? We have no excuse, for God has made His will available to us. We need to continually reflect on what is guiding and motivating our life on this earth? Am I after my Father’s business?

Take some time to reflect on the many ways in which God has increased your capacity to imagine the possibilities of tomorrow, the blessings of heaven and eternity lived out today.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to continue to increase your capacity and recognition that you were made for eternity.

John 3:16; John 14:17; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:17-18; Revelation 20:15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-9, 9:24-27; Titus 3:7-8.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 4, 2015**

DAY EIGHT

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**2 Samuel 7:22**

*"For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears."*

**Dig In:**

The foundation of our faith is rooted in the Being of God. In order for us to live passionate, faithful, and obedient lives, we have to understand who it is we call Lord and what it is we believe with regards to God. For the first eight days we will unpack the core beliefs of our church. These beliefs are unbendable, meaning that they are non-negotiable. Some of you may have heard the saying that "we minor on the majors and major on the minors instead of majoring on the majors!" In other words, we focus on issues that are not the core beliefs of the church. So, in order for us all to understand what the *majors* are, the first eight days will present the core values of COV's beliefs – as said earlier, these are non-negotiable for change, bending or correction.

What we believe ABOUT ETERNAL SECURITY

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. If you have been genuinely saved, you cannot "lose" it. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and keeping power of God that gives us this security. Jesus said He would not lose any the Father gives Him (John 18:9) because He would never leave or forsake us. His faithfulness is what sustains our faith and through our continual deepening of faith by the leading of the Holy Spirit, our love and faith exude the eternal delight that comes from loving the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Once saved a man cannot be lost because he did nothing to earn his salvation and cannot do anything to keep it or lose it. It is totally in the hands of God and once saved a person becomes a child of God who is kept by the power of God unto salvation.

Take a look at 1 Peter 1:3-5:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*

Having no doubt about God's love for us and our security in His presence is that which should continue to propel us to Love Him with our whole heart, mind, body and soul, as well as to then, love the other!

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

We know that Satan does not want us to realize or have confidence in the eternal truth and reality of God's love. The truth is, the basis of assurance of salvation given in the New Testament is one's belief in Jesus Christ. It does not come from man nor is it something we earn – it is eternally and graciously given by God. However, even knowing this why is it that so many of us have doubt about God's love? What causes you to question God's love?

Listen to what Jude tells us, *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting;”*

Take some time to reflect on our security that is eternally embedded in and through the Holy and gracious love of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Amen Jesus!

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, seeking to appreciate your security of being in Christ through the Spirit for all eternity.

Proverbs 10:25; John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25, 10:10,14; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13; Jude 24-25.



**No Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 5, 2015**

DAY NINE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 119:10-11**

*With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!  
I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

**Dig In:**

For the past eight days we have looked at the eight essential doctrines that we believe as a church. There are many more important doctrines but we believe that we must all be on the same page concerning those eight. For the next 32 days we want to walk through God's story. We are going to take a look from beginning to end. In order for us to defend our faith and stand firm on who and what we believe, we need to know God's redemptive plan throughout the whole counsel of Scripture. This morning we are going to take a look at one of the most divisive topics when it comes to the Bible, creation. Through creation, God has provided the people and the place for His glory to reign.

The very first words of the Bible say, "*In the beginning, God created...(Genesis 1:1)*". That is all we need to read. God created! God spoke everything into existence. No Big Bang, no coincidence, no freak chance, but God. This will be debated and argued about until Jesus comes back but as followers of Christ we take God's Word for what it is. We can argue about whether it was a literal 6 days of creation or longer. That doesn't matter.

**Psalm 90:4**

*For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*

One day to the Lord is 1,000 years and 1,000 years to the Lord is a day. We see no reason to deny that one who is able to speak things into existence would not also be able to do so within the parameters of six days; nor do we deny the possibility that "days" *might* be taken as other than a literal 24-hour period. The actual time of Creation doesn't matter. What matters is that we acknowledge God as the Creator, the Architect and Father of all.

**So What?** (How are going to apply this to your life today?)

What is the importance of understanding the essence of creation? Having confidence in God as our Creator is what provides us the ability to have *no doubt* in our faith and its relationship to all facets of life.

For further study, read Genesis 1-3; Revelation 4.11.

**No Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 6, 2015**

DAY TEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 68:19-20**

*Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. Selah  
Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we took a look at Creation, all of creation. Today we are going to look at the crown jewel of God's creation. You may ask, "What was the highlight of God's creation?" The answer is simple! People! We are God's masterpiece. Look at what Paul wrote in the letter to the church in Ephesus.

**Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)**

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

You and I are God's masterpiece. Each one unique and special, handmade by God Take a look at what Psalmist wrote about how we were created by God.

**Psalm 139:13-16 (NIV)**

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

The picture that is painted in that passage of Scripture is profound. God knit us together. That takes precision, that takes care and focus. That is how God creates each one of us. This is important to understand. God knows each one of us. He thought of us first. Before your mom or you dad thought of you, God did. Let that sink in. You are God's idea. Exactly you! The good news is that God did not create us to be alone. Lets rewind back to beginning of Scripture.

**Genesis 2:18-22 (NIV)**

*The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God*

*caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. God created us to be in relationship. We are created to love and feel. God doesn't leave us on our own either. He has pursued us more than anyone ever will. God wants to have a relationship with you and not a religion. God cares nothing of religion but everything about relationship. Jesus didn't die on the cross for just your sin but for you. God is available to have a relationship with. He took the first step. He was the first to reach out. Where are you with your relationship with the Lord? Is it dry? Stale? Use these devotionals and these 40 days to renew and refresh your walk with the Lord. Seek Him and you will find Him, with arms wide open. Ready to listen your hurt and celebrate with your victories. He is there to mourn with you in loss and laugh with you in times of joy. God is ever-present and constantly pursuing us. Remember that today.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the Love of God given to us in Christ through the Spirit. God did not create us as robots but gives us the freedom to respond to His love by our loving Him. How can we respond this day to His divine love?

Pray that God will continue to open your heart to His love of *all* people so that you too might become a lover of people.

For further study, see: Hebrews 6:18-20; 1 John 4; John 3

**No Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 7, 2015**

DAY ELEVEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 119:114**

*You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word.*

**Dig In:**

Moving on from Creation we come to an event in the Bible that shaped the world, as we know it today. God, in His sovereign love, chose to allow His created beings, the freedom to invite sin into their existence, of which both took advantage, ushering in an insatiable appetite for autonomous rule and divine authority. In Genesis 3 we read about the fall of man.

**Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV)**

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

At that moment, sin entered the world. God created everything perfect. There was no sin, no pain, no sorrow, no shame and no tears. Adam and Eve lived in perfect unity and health. God didn't want to create us as robots but gave us a free will to choose. Adam and Eve had one directive. Don't eat from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. The enemy, Satan, the serpent, knew how to tempt Adam and Eve. He planted the idea that they could be, "just like God." Every since the Fall, sin has captured mankind and each one of us in our hearts says, "I want to be just like God." We may not verbalized or even acknowledge it but when we say no to the Lord, when we do things our way we are saying that we are the god of our lives not the Lord.

Evil was born that day in the world. We have reaped the effects from that decision ever since. As we will read in Genesis 3, after their eyes are opened to knowledge of good and evil they hide from God. Lets continue on in the story.

**Genesis 3:8-19 (NIV)**

*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

God lays out the consequences of sins. Pain, toil, work all entered the world as a result of the Fall. Thorns and thistles will now dominate the earth and we must work for our survival. Besides all of the hurt and struggle that entered the world, one thing much worse arrived. Death. Over the next couple days we will take a look at the effects of sin upon this world.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

How does sin *warp* our thinking and ability to love one another? How does the world try to deny the reality of sin? Even in light of the effects of sin, think of the confidence we have in our fight against sin and its effects...

For further study, read Genesis 3; Ezekiel 28; Isaiah 14; Zechariah 3; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 15:45-58.

**No Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 8, 2015**

DAY TWELVE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Proverbs 30:5**

*Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.*

**Dig In:**

"I can't believe in a Loving God that would send people to Hell!"

That is one of the most common statements I hear about why people don't believe in God. Some may believe in a god but not the Triune and Personal God of Scripture. Hell is a hard topic to deal with. None of us want to think about it but Scripture is clear about the doctrine of Hell. It is a real place where people go for all of eternity. Below is a list of verses that give some insight into hell.

**Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**

*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

**Luke 12:5 (ESV)**

*But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!*

**Matthew 8:11-12 (ESV)**

*I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

**Matthew 13:41-42 (ESV)**

*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

**Matthew 13:47-50 (ESV)**

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

What do you do with verses like that? Images like “fiery furnace”, “outer darkness” and “place of weeping and gnashing of teeth”. Hell is not describe as a place where all the partiers go and don’t have to follow the rules of God, as I have heard it described to me. Hell is real. Hell is not a place that we want to go or to ever desire to have anyone else go there. It is eternal separation from the one who created us; a place with constant sorrow, tears and agony for all of time, never to cease. Now that the idea of Hell is firmly cemented we have to deal with the issue of a Loving God sending people there.

### **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

*For the wages of sin is death...*

The cost of our sin is death. It is not talking of a physical death. I’m pretty sure that each of us sins (anything short of perfection) on a daily basis. Even though we all sin we are still alive today reading this devotion. What the Apostle Paul is speaking about is a Spiritual Death. He is speaking of Hell. All sin must be paid for. There is a cost. In basic terms, Hell is what everybody deserves. We deserve Hell regardless of race, religion, income or age. That is choice given to us if we want to pay for our own sins. Thankfully God gave us the ultimate choice. Choose the price I paid on the cross. Christ made the payment for all. We have to accept that payment. The idea of a Loving God sending people to Hell is not what Scripture communicates. Hell is our destination and the Lord showed his love by sending us to Heaven.

### **Romans 5:8 (NIV)**

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The truth is Adam and Eve made the decision for us long ago. The Fall brought upon sin and death. Hell is the punishment for unpaid sin, which is fair and just. It is what we deserve. However, the crucial word often missed in Romans 6:23 is the one directly after *death* –*but*. While we do deserve death, we are offered freedom from death—salvation—by the *free gift* of God, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

**The call placed on the life of Christ's own followers is to lay down our lives in order to gain eternal life and ultimately the life of our Savior. As such, we must first recognize that the basic Christian answer to this world is not condemnation, but love. The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved. The faith that one is LOVED BY GOD. That faith that one is loved by God although unworthy - or rather, irrespective of one's worth should propel us into loving the other by sharing the message of God's redeeming love.**

So, in light of Romans 6:23, one question we would like to leave you with today, What are you doing about everyone in your life that has not heard about what Christ has done for them?

Pray that today God will ordain a moment this week for you to share your faith and hope for tomorrow with someone in need of God’s saving and redeeming love.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them:

Proverbs 10:25; John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25, 10:10,14; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:13;  
Jude 24-25.



**No Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 9, 2015**

DAY THIRTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 5:24**

*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

**Dig In:**

“How can God allow suffering on Earth?”

This again, is another issue with the fall. Sin brought upon all the pain and suffering that we go through here on earth. Now many people have an issue with God. They ask, “How come God doesn’t end hunger or suffering?” That is a hard question to answer but we must search the Scripture to build our faith upon. We must know the character of God and His role for us as humans. Listen what Jesus said about our life on earth.

**John 16:33 (NIV)**

*...In this world you will have trouble...*

Jesus makes it very clear. We are going to have trouble in this World. We are not guaranteed an easy road. Cancer will strike, accidents will happen, people will starve and everyone will die. The fall is the sole reason we have suffering. Many think that God is idle. He is sitting back and not doing anything about it. That is not true. God is using people to change the world. God calls all of His followers, His children, to be like Christ. Look at Jesus’ attitude.

**Mark 6:34 (NIV)**

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

Jesus had compassion on them. When the man with the shriveled hand came to Jesus, He healed him. People with leprosy he cleansed. He fed the 5,000. Why? Because Jesus had compassion on the crowds. He cares for everyone and He calls us to do the same. Christians Missionaries span the globe helping the sick, feeding the hungry and caring for the unwanted. God is not sitting back. God is moving in countries around the world. Followers of Christ have dug wells around the world in order for people to have clean drinking water. We have delivered thousands of mosquito nets to prevent malaria in third world countries. People are moving. This summer we are sending a team to Albania. They will deliver toys and clothes to children that may have 3 or 4 items of clothing total. The team will put on a Vacation Bible School and teach kids the Love of Christ through soccer, songs and service!

Now, just because there is suffering or pain does not necessarily give credence to the reality of God, yet the Biblical reality is that as we get closer to Christ's return things will get worse. Scripture calls them the Birthpains of Christ returns. Floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, disease, famine and drought will ravage the world. The question we must face is, "Are we ready?" Are you ready to be the hands and feet of Christ? To selfless give your time and your treasure in order to save a few?

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

So many question the reality of God based on the reality of suffering. However, what about all the prosperity, joy, laughter, etc. Is there a special formula that can measure whether or not there is more sorrow than joy? More suffering than jubilation? And what if there did exist such an equation, how much joy or suffering would there have to be in order to win the debate about God's existence?

Fyodor Dostoevsky once wrote that "If there is no God, everything is permitted." Can you even imagine what life would be like if God did not exist? In the end though, it all comes down to faith. Do you really believe what the Bible reveals to us about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit? Do you really believe what the Holy Spirit reveals to you about Christ and His reconciliatory love?

Pray through and meditate on John 16 and Mark 6. Ask God to make you more compassionate for the downtrodden, sick, and hungry and more mindful of the suffering of others in this world.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 10, 2015**

DAY FOURTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**James 1:22-23**

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.*

**Dig In:**

As we have seen over the past three days, the Fall created some significant problems! We have this issue of sin that needs to be dealt with. Moving on from the Fall, we see God's plan for redemption. We find the need for atonement. I know that is a big, churchy word but let me help you understand what atonement is. Atonement is basically the payment for our sin that reconciles us to God. We find the establishment of atonement in the Old Testament. The book of Leviticus is mainly the book of Jewish law and sacrifice. In Leviticus 16 we read about the Day of Atonement. There were many Jewish holidays and almost all of them were celebrations. The Day of Atonement was not a celebration. It was a time of mourning and confession of sin. The High Priest would take two goats. One goat we would kill and sprinkle the blood across the altar as payment for the sin of the nation. The other goat was called the scapegoat. The priest would lay his hands upon the goat's head and confess the sins upon the goat. After doing this he would let the goat free into the wilderness.

The Day of Atonement was to remind us that there must be a payment for our sin. Sin isn't free. There is a cost. Every year the High Priest would enter the Holy Place where God's Spirit dwelt and he would make the sacrifice for the sins of the nation. I know some of you are asking why does there need to be a sacrifice? It doesn't make sense. Someone or something must pay for the sin you have committed. The animal literally takes your place. Your sin falls upon the animal being sacrificed to the Lord. Look at what Leviticus 17 says.

**Leviticus 17:11 (NIV)**

*For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

It is the blood that atones for the sin. Before Christ this was the only way to pay for one's sins. This is what makes what Jesus did for us on Good Friday almost 2,000 years ago so significant. He flipped the system upside down. No longer would we need to find a perfect animal and sacrifice for our sins. Jesus, the Lamb of God, became the sacrifice for us. Once and for all it was paid for. Jesus' last words on the cross, "It is Finished." Jesus finished His work, He finished His purpose, and Jesus finished the old way of doing things and reconciled all of us to God by His

blood! How amazing a love is that. Words cannot describe the thanks needed for God's atonement!

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The burning question of life is given to us in the gospel of Matthew 16:13-16:

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

How does or how should this question affect society?

How does or how should this question affect you as an individual?

For further study: Matthew 22:37-46; Isaiah 53; Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 11, 2015**

DAY FIFTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**1 Kings 8:61**

*"Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments"*

**Dig In:**

God's atoning actions, as discussed yesterday, ultimately play out through the reality of His covenant with us. The first covenant was made with Adam and the most significant is the New Covenant between Christ and His church. These two covenants stress the unity of God's plan of salvation for God's people. A covenant is an agreement between two parties. The Hebrew word *berith*, "covenant," occurs over 280 times in the Old Testament. (The English word covenant means "a coming together"). Covenants can include treaties, alliances, agreements, compacts, pledges, mutual agreements, promises, and undertakings on behalf of another.

The plan of God respecting the salvation of men was of the nature of a covenant, and was formed in eternity. Paul says that it was hidden for ages in the divine mind; that it was before the foundation of the world. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before His advent; and that He came into the world in execution of a commission which He had received from the Father. The parallel so distinctly drawn between Adam and Christ is also proof of the point in question. As Adam was the head and representative of his posterity, so Christ is the head and representative of His people. And as God entered into covenant with Adam so He entered into covenant with Christ. This, in Romans 5:12-21, is set forth as the fundamental idea of all God's dealings with men, both in their fall and in their redemption.

All of the covenants between God and Man in the Bible are really based on our Creator's unmerited favor and loving-kindness towards His fallen and sinful creatures.

Although man's expected response to God's grace may be stated differently in one covenant as compared to another, God always meets man on the basis of grace. Man's proper response is always to come from the heart-resulting in repentance, cleansing, a renewed spirit and worship as stated beautifully in Psalm 51.

**Psalm 51:1-19**

*TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN NATHAN THE PROPHET WENT TO HIM, AFTER HE HAD GONE IN TO BATHSHEBA. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your*

*words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Knowing that God has determined to be in a relationship with His creation should awaken us to the fact of His unending and all-pursuing love.

How might we respond to God's covenantal love as David did? What difference does it make that God chose to be in relationship with us?

For further study, and to better understand God's faithfulness to all His covenants the following Psalms are especially instructive: 25, 50, 89, and 132.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 12, 2015**

DAY SIXTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 119:74**

*Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.*

**Dig In:**

A covenant is a promise and institution established by God. As we read yesterday, God established the 1<sup>st</sup> covenant with the nation of Israel. God created another covenant that we still abide by to this day. God created the covenant of marriage.

**Genesis 2:24 (NIV)**

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

Paul later writes in the New Testament about the principles of marriage.

**1 Corinthians 7:1-16 (ESV)**

*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not*

*enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

Ultimately God creates marriage for one man and one woman to be wed together. The covenant of marriage is under attack today. Most no longer see it as a holy union in the sight of God but rather a legal binding that can be broken with a simple law process. The truth is that God hates divorce. There are circumstances in Scripture which allow divorce but the heart of God is to seek reconciliation not divorce. Whether you are a student and single, married, divorced or widowed this is a truth that we must have no doubt about. As time grows closer to Christ's return marriage will come under even harsher attack than it already is! We must stand firm and understand what God's plan for marriage is.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The importance of marriage is seen in the youth of our nation. Marriage holds such importance for God that it is used analogously to give us an indication of His love for the Church as we (the Church) are consistently referred to as the Bride of Christ. Paul even goes so far as to use the marriage of Christ and the Church to illuminate the way in which a husband is expected to treat his wife.

Yet as mentioned earlier, one does not need to be married in order to appreciate and value the Biblical foundation of marriage. Think of people in your life, or maybe even yourself, that can testify to the damaging effects of a destroyed marriage. Now think of those who can testify to the beauty and profundity of a Christ-centered Biblical marriage. If married, ask God to help you in becoming a better, more Christ-like spouse. If single, ask God to help you find ways of upholding the integrity of Biblical relationships.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them, asking God to increase your love of the other so to be a more Biblical partner in all your relationships.

Romans 1; Galatians 4; Ephesians 5.



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 13, 2015**

DAY SEVENTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 1:1-4**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked at marriage and its creation by God. Unfortunately marriage is now under attack. One of the hot button political issues today is Homosexual marriage. This issue has given the church a black eye because of how we have handled this issue. The truth is that homosexuality is a sin. There are no ifs ands or buts about it! The unfortunate thing that has happen is our view of that particular sin. We hear about politicians that cheat and steal but don't bat an eye. We read about athletes who kill innocent by standers while drunk driving and don't raise a red flag. But when someone in the church comes out they are homosexual the torches and pitchforks come out. The truth is that any sin is sin to God, no matter how severe that sin is in our eyes. Homosexuality is no different than a husband cheating on his wife or a boss that is skimming of the top in an extortion scheme. It is all sin. It is all missing the mark and less than perfection.

So as believers how do we handle this issue. Do we ostracize homosexual individuals? Treat them as outcasts and modern day lepers? By no means! Look at how Jesus handles a leper.

**Matthew 8:1-3 (NIV)**

*When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.*

When you read this in passing you read a story about Jesus healing a leper. No big deal, right? Wrong! Lepers were the outcast. No would come near or even talk to a leper. They were shunned from their town and abandoned because of their disease. Notice what Jesus' response is. He not only heals the leper but He touches him. At the time, it was an unthinkable act. Jesus reached out and touched the leper forever changing his life!

As believers we must willing to reach out and touch those whom we see as unlovable, unattractive and unworthy. Ask God to burden your heart. Ask Him to give you His eyes and His heart so that you may see and feel the way He does. Homosexuality is not something we go out

into the streets and protest, proclaiming their damnation to hell for their sin. What they need (just like everyone else needs) is the never ending, eternal love of Christ. That's it.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

It sounds very *Christian* to call each other to love homosexuals, but what does this mean? It means that you see the person and not their sexuality. We hope you look at each of us as men of God, not as heterosexual males, one being 6 foot something and the other 5 foot something, one being soft and cuddly, the other being artistically decorated. The point is, who we are is determined by Christ, not the world. This does not deny that some of our actions and thoughts are sinful, but they do not define us, Christ does.

Ask God to awaken you to any discrimination that you hold onto. Pray that the Lord would make you a lover of *all* people, just as He is.

For further thought, read through some of the given scripture references, thinking through them and praying through them.

Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4; Psalm 23; John 3:16-17, 17; Romans 8; Galatians 2

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 14, 2015**

DAY EIGHTEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Romans 10:13-15**

*For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

**Dig In:**

So often the question is raised, "what if someone does not hear the gospel message, can they still be saved?" This seems to be a logical question in response to Romans 10:17 which states that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Thus, according to verse 17, faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing by the word of Christ. But, what then are we to make of verse 20? Romans 10: 20 *Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."* Does this verse raise the possibility that Isaiah was *found* not because of a human action, but through the work and act of the Holy Spirit?

With this question in mind, I highlight the verses from Romans chapter 2:

**Romans 2.13-16**

*for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

The essential aspect of justification and possibly faith, is not one of hearing, but doing. Thus, verses 14-16 could indicate that while not having/hearing the Law (Word of God/Christ) the Gentiles still acted in a manner as if they did have the Law for in fact, Paul says that the Law is indeed written in their hearts. What then of the writing on the hearts? Where might this have come from? The point here, is that the Law, or Word of Christ can come through other means than the spoken word—a greater power that transcends the spoken word of man is the revelation of Christ in and through the Holy Spirit. God's ways are not ours, and while we might not fully understand the power of God, we should have no doubt that He is able to accomplish His will. As Matthew reminds us, "with God all things are possible." (19:26).

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Take this moment to pray for someone you know who is not a follower of Christ. Pray that the Spirit might move in their hearts so to create the desire to want to know Christ.

Now, pray for God to present a place, time, and opportunity for you to have a discussion about faith with this person. Pray then, for the confidence and boldness to invite your friend to church.

For further study read through the following Scripture:  
John 20:21-22; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 9; Jude 1

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 15, 2015**

DAY NINETEEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Ephesians 6:16-17**

*In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday our discussion centered on the reality and truth of God's law being written, engraved, or dare I say, *tattooed* on our hearts! Today we want to further our understanding of living from and through God's truth. One aspect of this truth that we participate in as believers, is the Kingdom of God.

As to the Kingdom of God—what is the central focus of this Kingdom? Better yet, who? Jesus Christ. As many might remember, Jesus comes from the Davidic lineage. What is even more, is that we are not simple subjects of this Kingdom. Look at Galatians 4:

So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

The kingdom of God is the rule of God that finds its fulfillment on earth in the rule of Messiah as the Man who achieves dominion over the earth, bringing it into subjection, and then presents it to the Father as complete. The first advent initiated or inaugurated the kingdom as the King manifested himself, paid the sacrifice for man's sinful alienation, conquered death for man, and ascended to the right hand of the Father as the King, awaiting (Psa. 110:1) the time for all things to be put under his feet (Hebrews 2; 1 Cor. 15:22-28).

Believers today, therefore, are citizens and children of the Kingdom and the Apostles preached the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:31; Col. 1:13). And, the Kingdom, though inaugurated, is not fully experienced. Simply put, those who are believers experience the spiritual benefits of being citizens of the Kingdom now, but the universal experience of the Kingdom, including assured

healing of the body and universal knowledge of God awaits the future. (Cf. Matt. 6:16; Mark 14:25; Luke 10:11; Acts 1:3, 19:8, 20:25, 28:31; Heb. 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 1:6, 11:15.)

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

God's plan for His Kingdom spans across the entirety of time. Think of the importance we place on longevity when choosing companies, investments, doctors, etc. Yet so many doubt the validity of God's Kingdom, which again, spans the length of time. Why?

Take some time to reflect on the reality and truth of God's desire for us to participate in the continuation and expansion of His Kingdom!

Mt. 12.28; Mk. 4.11; Lk. 4.43; Jn. 3.5; Ro. 14.17.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 16, 2015**

DAY TWENTY

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Proverbs 16:20**

*Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.*

**Dig In:**

Throughout the Old Testament we find foreshadowing of God's redemptive plan. Christ can be seen throughout the each book. I want to highlight just a few of them to help you grasp that God has had this whole thing planned out since creation.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NIV)**

*"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

God revealed His plan to the prophet Jeremiah. God is going to replace the Old Covenant with a new one. One built upon the blood of His Son, Jesus. Read what the Prophet Isaiah wrote.

**Isaiah 53:1-12 (NIV)**

*Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who*

*can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Throughout the whole counsel of Scripture God had revealed His plan for us. God is in the business of saving lives. He planned the cross long before that fateful Friday.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Through creation and fall, Kingdom and prophecy, Birth, Death and Resurrection God has a plan. His plan was and is to redeem His people. What does that tell you about the Lord?

So much of our time is spent worrying. Instead of worrying today, contemplate upon the hugeness of God! He is in control!

Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 22; Psalm 110:1



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 17, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-ONE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Luke 2:9-12**

*And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

**Dig In:**

The talk of the Kingdom of God centers itself in the action of God. In Christ's incarnational performance, God actively participates in our being, life, and activity and therefore obviously our participation in His. But in order to understand the significance of Christ's incarnation – that is, God becoming flesh, we have to stop and use our imaginations.

The foreshadowing of Christ crescendos in the prophetic utterances of Isaiah as he announces the coming of the King. Now, let us just imagine what it would have been like to be a resident of the city of Jerusalem some 700 years before the birth of the Messiah. No doubt you would have been terrified by the imminent threat of destruction posed by the mighty Assyrian army that was mobilizing against your city.

Yet, just when things looked bleakest, a man named Isaiah made an outrageous prophecy. Not the sort of prophecy we hear from modern-day soothsayers -- a prophecy like, "a beautiful woman will come into your life" -- but a meticulously detailed prophecy that literally put his prophetic credentials on the line.

Isaiah not only predicted that the city would be saved, but in painstaking detail he predicted events through which God would cause Sennacherib, the invading Assyrian king, to return from whence he came. Astonishingly, Isaiah's prophecy came to pass with total precision.

No doubt you would have been impressed and delighted with Isaiah and his prediction. It would not have taken long, however, before long your support would have turned to skepticism. You see, this same Isaiah who predicted that Jerusalem would miraculously be spared from the Assyrians went on to prophesy that she would miserably succumb to the Babylonians.

And your skepticism would soon turn to cynicism the day you heard about Isaiah's most preposterous pronouncement of all. To your utter astonishment, Isaiah claimed that a virgin (of all things) would one day give birth to a son, and went on to refer to this son as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (**Isa. 7:14; 9:6**).

Today, one no longer needs to wonder whether Isaiah lost his marbles some 27 centuries ago. History bears eloquent testimony to the fact that Isaiah's prophecies have been fulfilled with painstaking accuracy. Not only did Jerusalem fall to the Babylonians precisely as predicted, but Jesus Christ – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—cloaked Himself in human flesh and came to live among us (**John 1:1, 14, 18**).

One thing we need to always keep in mind, the incarnation points directly to the cross, resurrection and ascension of Christ. There is no Christmas without Easter and vice-versa. Furthermore, the incarnation, cross, resurrection and ascension are not merely to be observed, analysed or discussed, they are the life events of Christ that call for a response from the ones He came to save.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

God's act and incarnational performance call for a response from the entirety of the creation, as no one is outside of God's performance. How is it that we can positively respond to God's incarnational performance in Christ?

Think of the ways in which we can *incarnate* the Biblical story? How can we enact the Biblical principles continually spoken of throughout the Bible?

God's love for humanity runs so deep that He willingly came and dwelt among us. Not only that, He came to earth so that He might be nailed to a tree in order that you and I might have eternal life. Take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Genesis 3; Isaiah 11, 40, 53; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Malachi 4; Matthew 1, 4; Luke 1-2; John 1:1-2, 18, 14:9-11, 17; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2; Hebrews 1:8-12, 5;

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 18, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-TWO

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**1 Kings 8:61**

*"Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments"*

**Dig In:**

As we follow up on the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ we start to face yet another hot button issue in the Christian world. Universalism. Gary Larson had a *Far Side* cartoon that showed a fellow with wings sitting alone on a heavenly cloud, looking bored, and thinking, "*Wish I had brought a magazine.*" Or perhaps you've heard it said by unbelievers that hell will be OK because their friends will be there. These are some examples of the misconceptions of heaven and hell prevalent in our culture. Even Christians are not immune to thinking poorly on these matters.

Just this week a widely known and popular "Christian" author came out with a book that refutes many of the key doctrines of faith. This author, Rob Bell, tries to challenge the fact that God would not send people to Hell and that all people will ultimately be saved. Rather than risk sentimentalizing the gospel with a barbless universalism, might it be wiser to call people to repentance, warning them of the eternal rewards and consequences of following Jesus—as Jesus did? Bell holds to the idea that Hell is empty and Heaven is full! He tries to extrapolate this doctrine from 1 Timothy.

**1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)**

*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

What Bell misses is that the Lord DESIRES all men to be saved, not that all men WILL be saved. There is a huge difference. Universalism's basic precept is that all men will be saved no matter what religion they hold to. Here is where the hard passages in Scripture put that lie to death. The next three Scriptures undoubtedly refute Universalism's claims of salvation for all.

**John 14:6 (ESV)**

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

**Acts 4:11-12 (ESV)**

*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

### **1 Timothy 2:5-6 (ESV)**

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...*

All these verses speak to one truth. There is only one God and there is only one way to Him, Christ. That is it. Unfortunately there are many people who are led astray that would say they believe that Jesus is the only way. But. That is a big but! But they will hold to the idea that for some, Buddha is someone's Jesus. For others Jesus is Muhammad, or Joseph Smith, or Confucius. The truth is that Jesus is Jesus. There is no one else besides Him.

A study of all other religions on earth would show you this truth. Christianity is the only faith-based salvation. All other religions hold onto a works based salvation. You have to earn your way to Heaven. If we could earn our way to Heaven then there would be no need for Christ. His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension and His return would all be meaningless. We would have a heaven full of people bragging about how they earned their salvation instead of Heaven full of people who worship and honor the Lord for the grace and mercy given to us through Christ! I urge all of you to remember, do not be deceived. This teaching will only spread and continue to influence those who don't want to lay their lives down for the sake of Christ. I challenge all of you to back up what you are hearing through the lens of Scripture. There are many eloquent speakers who can tweak the truth to how they *want* it be perceived. Let us today be as the Bereans of yesterday, lest we fall prey to the teachings that only contain *half* of the truth!

### **Acts 17:11 (NIV)**

*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

### **So What? (What will you do with what you read today?)**

The reality is, our hope should be that all will realize who Jesus is and accept His offer, His invitation of salvation. Why not dare to hope that all are saved? Because we are enveloped in God's all-consuming love, we have an obligation to hope for the salvation of all. As Christ's body, we are empowered and commanded to live out a love that hopes for everything (1 Cor. 13:7).

How can the hope of the Church empower and enliven a world consumed in the darkness of sin?

How will you live out the hope of tomorrow in your words and deeds today?

Take some time to reflect on God's hope and love for His creature as you read through some of the following scripture.

Exodus 20:5, 34:14; Jeremiah 31:3; Joel 2:28-31; Malachi 1:2; Matthew 11:28-30, 24:14, 28:19-20; John 13:34, 14:9; Acts 2:17-21

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 19, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-THREE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Romans 5:6-10**

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked into the idea of universalism and the notion that “many roads lead to heaven.” Christianity does not espouse such a belief and this is made explicitly clear through the words and deeds of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Today, our focus is on the Mission/Destiny of Christ.

Pastor Mike has been discussing the reality that Gifts + Burden + Call = Destiny. So what then, if we are to imitate, to follow Christ and His mission, are we to imitate? What does the life of Christ tell us about His destiny, about His mission? Today’s discussion will seek to unpack the mission and destiny of Christ so that we might better understand what it means to be a player in God’s drama.

It is crucial to recognize the mission of our Savior because our mission/destiny, is the recognition of our identity and our participation *in* Christ and upon His stage. If, as the Bible claims, God, “*who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), how then does this impact our words and deeds.

The truth is, an unredeemed world breaks the heart of our all-loving, and compassionate God. God’s burden, gift, calling and ultimately, His destiny is manifested beautifully and tragically on the cross. This is to say, to see the world/humanity, reconciled to our Creator should constantly burden our heart so that we, like our Savior, passionately seek and pursue the “other” in hopes of them realizing their salvation in Christ through the Spirit. Look at what Jesus stated as His purpose in the gospel of Luke.

**Luke 19:10 (ESV)**

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

Jesus' reality, His condition which is ours, is realised and embodied in the flesh. Notice that He who was the Son of God was like God and He did not count it His 'prize' to be like God, to be God, but He emptied Himself in order to fulfill the lives of all who call on Him as their Lord and Savior. This act of Christ, His performance of reconciliation and redemption is done in the place of all and for the sake of all. In our place and for our sake, instead of committing fresh sin, Jesus returned to the place from which we had fallen into sin, the place which belongs to the creature in relation to God.

A renewing of the church's heart (mind) is needed so to transform the proclamation of today into the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in order that, *'The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor,'* (Luke 7.22). The ministry of Christ, His mission/destiny and His being for us so that we might be for God, is the fulfilled covenant, the accomplished reconciliation, the ministry of Jesus Christ.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Read the poem by D.A. Carson and reflect on it:

### **The Prologue**

Before there was a universe,  
Before a star or planet,  
When time had still not yet begun –  
I scarcely understand it –  
Th' eternal Word was with his God,  
God's very Self-Expression;  
Th' eternal Word was God himself –  
And God had planned redemption.  
The Word became our flesh and blood –  
The stuff of his creation –  
The Word was God, the Word was flesh,  
Astounding incarnation!  
But when he came to visit us,  
We did not recognize him.  
Although we owed him everything  
We haughtily despised him.  
In days gone by God showed himself  
In grace and truth to Moses;  
But in the Word of God made flesh  
Their climax he discloses.  
For grace and truth in fullness came  
And showed the Father's glory  
When Jesus donned our flesh and died:  
This is the gospel story.  
All who delighted in his name,  
All those who did receive him,  
All who by grace were born of God,  
All who in truth believed him –  
To them he gave a stunning right:  
Becoming God's dear children!

Here will I stay in grateful trust;  
Here will I fix my vision.  
Before there was a universe,  
Before a star or planet,  
When time had still not yet begun –  
I scarcely understand it –  
Th' eternal Word was with his God,  
God's very Self-Expression;  
Th' eternal Word was God himself –  
And God had planned redemption.

God's love for humanity runs so deep that He willingly came and dwelt among us. The burden of His heart is the reconciliation of humanity. How might you be an ambassador for Christ, committed to the word and deed of reconciliation?

Take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Isaiah 53; Psalm 8; Romans 5, 6, 8:24-39; 2 Corinthians 5; Revelation 19.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 20, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Ephesians 2:8-10**

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked into the Mission/Destiny of Christ. Today we want to unpack the mission and role of the Church in the continued movement and action of God. Our mission/destiny, is the recognition of our identity and our participation *in* Christ and upon His stage. What breaks our heart should be the same that breaks the heart of God – a world that does not comprehend the Light, (see John 1:1-5). The burden of our Savior’s heart should be the burden of our hearts. This is to say, to see the world/humanity, reconciled to our Creator should constantly burden our heart so that we, like our Savior, passionately seek and pursue the “other” in hopes of them realizing their salvation in Christ through the Spirit.

Swiss theologian Karl Barth writes of the Church, that “the Church is a summoning forth of God’s people, the community of persons of faith, created through Christ on the foundation of the Covenant between God and humanity, awakened by the Holy Spirit.” A significant reality of the Church’s life and mission, is found in our participation in the mission of Christ. This destiny/mission, is realized in and through our lives as we are called to share God’s revelatory message of an invitation and reconciliation while awaiting the return of our King. In this action of God, His revelation, invitation and reconciliation, we, the Body of Christ (the Church) witness and share in the glory of God through the performance of Christ in the Spirit, for it is the Spirit who not only guides our endeavors, but provides the gifts needed to fulfill our calling.

The church is a missional community. As God’s people, our destiny is to participate in the co-missional life of our God, and to proclaim the Gospel of God’s kingdom in word and deed. *Missio Ecclesia* (the mission of the Church) is the active participation in God’s co-missional life, the building of the kingdom here on earth, and the proclamation of this Gospel (the life of Jesus Christ).

The church is a witness, and more than a witness. As author and theologian Lesslie Newbigin writes, “It is not sufficient for the Church to point to itself and say, ‘Here is the Body of the Messiah.’ It must point beyond itself to Him who is sole Judge and Savior, both of the Church and of the world. And yet the Church is not *merely* the witness to Christ; it is also the Body of Christ. It is not merely the reporter of divine acts of redemption; it is also itself the bearer of God’s redeeming grace, itself part of the story of redemption which is the burden of its message” (*The Household of God*, 103).



**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The only purpose of the gospel is to reconcile people to God and to each other. A gospel that does not reconcile is not a Christian gospel at all. Yet so often we do not really believe that the proof of our discipleship is in our Love—that we love the Lord our God so that we might love one another (see John 13:35).

One of the greatest manifestations of our living out the destiny/mission of the Church is seen in how we make space for the ‘other’ so to live with each other day by day. Do we give life to others or do we drain life from others through our negativity? In our relationships, do we leave people feeling a little better or a little worse? Are we in the habit of offering to others what they need most for their lives—encouragement, listening, unconditional love?

How might the Church begin moving towards ways that embody the “missional mind” in culture today, in San Ramon?

God’s love for us is so overwhelming that if we let it, it will gush forth like a fountain from our lives into the lives of others. Pray that today, the Lord will provide you with the opportunity to be a lover of the “other.” Ask the Lord to divinely appoint a time today that you get to share the Love of Christ with someone in your life.

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Psalms 40, 96, 98; Acts 13:1-2; Romans 12:1-5, 15:18-19; Ephesians 2:4-10, 4:11-16; Colossians 2:9-10; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 1, 2, 12:7-13.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 21, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Philippians 2:1-4**

*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we began looking at the Church and our role/mission. For the next four days or so, we want to dive into crucial areas of Church life, and further explore what it means to be the Body of Christ. Remember, our mission/destiny, is the recognition of our identity and our participation in Christ and upon His stage. Today our discussion focuses on the unity of the Church.

As God's temple, the Church is intended to participate in and reflect the oneness of the Triune community, in heart, mind, possessions and purpose (Acts 2:42, 4:32-35, Phi 2:2). Participating in the unity and communion of the Blessed Trinity, the Church is *one*, as surely as there is only one God; the Church is the body of Christ on earth—of that there can only be one. The unity of the Church is a foundational element; an issue taken up by the early Church Fathers. Second century theologian Irenaeus stated: "Where the Church is, there is also the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church" (J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.192).

In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul wrote:

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Members of Christ's body become members of one another. As such, they are designed to reflect the unity of fellowship that exists within the Trinity. The Church is exhorted to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, esteeming each other and their interests as more important than their own, having one mind, and loving one another fervently with a pure heart. The one purpose, the one building that God is building in this world, is a house over which His Son, Jesus Christ, will reign. And if that is what God is doing, if that is His great purpose, then our purpose in life must echo that, must reflect it, must emulate it. And this is what the Apostle Paul is saying when he urges us on to the pursuit of spiritual unity in a local congregation. He wants us to have the same mindset: the mindset of Christ. He wants us to have the same kind of love for one another that Christ has had for us. We were unloving and we sinned against Christ, and Christ loved us still; so surely when we are unloving towards one another and we sin against one

another, we will love one another as Christ loved us when we were unloving and sinned against Him.

And we will have the same purpose. We will long to see Christ exalted above everything, and all things under His headship, and His Lordship displayed over the whole church, which is united in Him. The Apostle Paul is telling us that we ought to be thinking constantly about the whole body, and about this unity that God has wrought, not just about our individual selves. This enables us to cultivate a self-denying, self-giving mind of Christ, and foster Christ-like mutual love, and to make peacemaking and peacekeeping in the congregation top priority.

In understanding our unity, we must be aware of the disunity desired by Satan. In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis sheds light on the darkness that creeps in through the cracks in our armor – darkness that breeds destruction and division within the Church. The Church might glean immeasurable instruction from the words of the senior devil in his instructions to the junior devil—for through these instructions, C.S. Lewis makes us aware of the disunity so desired by Satan. Just listen to the words of Screwtape (senior devil) to his dear Wormwood (junior devil) regarding the Church:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection of the new building estate., When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he goes to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbors who he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like 'the Body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew. . . . Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 12)

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The unity of the Church is a witness to the world of God's love and sending forth of His Son Jesus Christ. As 1 John 3 states, "*This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.*"

The message of the Church is a message of love, it is a message that is manifested in our love for our Lord so that we might fully love one another. It is in our love and unity with and for one another that the world will know we are followers of Christ. In what ways can you help build the unity of the Church?

Think of ways in which Church unity is destroyed. Let us take this time to ask the Lord for forgiveness for any time that we have brought disunity to the Body of Christ.

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Matthew 16:16-18, Acts 2:42-47, John 17, Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 1:20-23, 4:3-10, Philippians 2:2-5, Colossians 3:14-15; Jude 1.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 22, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-SIX

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Romans 10:11-15**

*For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"*

**Dig In:**

The gospel is both word and deed, or to be better understood as the word-deed. The gospel must not be a mere exposé of words anymore than a simple charity as a kind of welfare activity, but instead must be the breath and action of the Church through the Holy Spirit. The gospel is made alive in Christ and through the Spirit as the Spirit is the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial (church) community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in His Son. In light of this, today's discussion seeks to move deeper in understanding what it means to be the evangelizing Church; our discussion today focuses on evangelism.

As followers of Christ, we are called to *follow* our leader. Listen to what Paul writes to the Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

*Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

We, the Body of Christ, are called to continue the work began by Christ – His work of reconciliation has been committed to us, for as His ambassadors we are expected to carry on the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry is the root, the solid ground of our evangelism.

First things first, then, the ministry of reconciliation – evangelism – is grounded in the mindset and understanding of the Church being missional. That is, the mission to spread the gospel of Christ is not to be left in the hands of a faithful few. We are all called to missions. Each one of us is a missionary. Thus, it can be stated then, that the missional church believes in "the priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter. 2: 9) and empowers each one of us to fulfill our God given call to evangelize. That is, to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. Theologian Martin Luther wrote that as a Christian, we are free, and in this freedom, we should "empty ourselves, taking the form of a servant, and in every way act towards our neighbor as we see that God through Christ has acted and is acting towards us... each should become to other a sort of Christ, so that we may be mutually Christs, and that the same Christ may be in all of us; that is, that we may be truly Christians." Being Christ to the world, this my brothers and sisters, is evangelism

Indeed, we, the body of Christ—the Beloved Community—the Church, shall only be that which we were intended to be if we allow the Spirit to consume us with the Love of Christ. And in this love, the truth of evangelism is realized through the essence of loving our neighbor and our enemy. For to love the "other" is to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and this action of the Church will be, and is the tidal-wave of love that drenches this world for the sake of Christ. Yet loving your neighbor can only become a reality if one first loves the Lord your God with 'all' your Heart. So the issue at hand is one of the heart...what is it that we strive to fill our heart with, or better yet, what do we find our heart treasuring? For scripture clearly reminds us that where our treasure is there too shall be our heart.

As the great Dr. Martin Luther King stated concerning the parable of the Good Samaritan:

And finally another man came and helped the injured man on the ground. He is known as the Good Samaritan. Jesus says in substance that this is a great man. He was great because he could project the "I" into the "thou." He was great because he could surround the length of life with the breadth of life . . . . So often the nations of the world are concerned about the length of their own life, perpetuating their nationalistic concerns, and their economic ends. May it not be that the problem in the world today is that individuals as well as nations have been overly concerned with the length of their individual lives and concerns, devoid of the breadth? But there is still something to remind us that we are interdependent, that we are all somehow caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. Therefore whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a million dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than thirty years, I can never be totally healthy. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. (Martin Luther King Jr. *The Measure of a Man*, 44-46)

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

At some point in one's faith, the question as to what the gospel is must be raised; in other words, what is the gospel of the Kingdom, and how does the church proclaim it?

Do we concern ourselves with the well-being of others? Evangelism is the willingness to share life, it is the *ought* of me caring for the *ought* of you. Most often, we evangelize without ever

opening our mouths. As Francis of Assisi once quipped, "Preach the gospel; if necessary, use words." This by no means excuses us from evangelizing in word as well, it simply illumines the fact that our lives, our faith, must be lived out in *both* word and deed. How can you preach the gospel today in both word and deed?

We do not need multiple degrees or years of training in order to evangelize. We do not even need to go door to door to be an evangelist; we simply need to share our life. Think of ways in which you can share your faith with your friends, family, and anyone else you might come into contact with. Now ask God to provide you with the opportunity over the next few days to grow in your confidence and faith so to be able to share your faith story with people in our life, for this is what evangelism is.

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Leviticus 19:2; Psalms 19; Matthew 22:37-38; John 3:16-21, 14:6; Romans 6:23, 10:14-15; Philippians 2, 4; 2 Corinthians 5; James 2; 1 John 5:12-13; Revelation 3:20.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 23, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 14:12**

*"And greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father."*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked into the reality of living out our faith which is done through evangelism. Today, our focus is on Prayer. Evangelism, Church life, unity, etc. will only be glorious, effective and rooted in love if prayer is that which undergirds our words and deeds. Prayer is conversation with God. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Brother Lawrence wrote that "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it."

Listen to what Oswald Chambers wrote about prayer:

Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer *is* the greater work. We think of prayer as a common-sense exercise of our higher powers in order to prepare us for God's work. In the teaching of Jesus Christ prayer is the working of the miracle of Redemption in me which produces the miracle of Redemption in others by the power of God. Whichever way God engineers circumstances, the duty is to pray. Never allow the thought - "I am of no use where I am;" because you certainly can be of no use where you are not. Wherever God has dumped you down in circumstances pray, cry out to Him all the time. "Whatsoever ye ask in My name, that will I do." We have to labour along the line of God's direction, and He says *pray*. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

There is nothing thrilling about a labouring man's work, but it is the labouring man who makes the conceptions of the genius possible; and it is the labouring saint who makes the conceptions of his Master possible. You labour at prayer and results happen all the time from His standpoint. What an astonishment it will be to find, when the veil is lifted, the souls that have been reaped by you, simply because you had been in the habit of taking your orders from Jesus Christ.

Jesus teaches us to pray through his giving to us the "Lord's Prayer," (Matthew 6:5-13) which serves as an example for our prayers. Prayer opens our lives to receive the Goodness of life from God, for help in meeting the needs of our everyday lives. No one can imagine the help available through prayer unless they have experienced it themselves.

We need to pray, we are commanded to pray. The church, the world, our friends, family, and enemies need us to pray, for through our prayers we come to realize, recognize, and understand



the heart of our King, Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ. Our brother David prayed knowing the blessed nature of prayer and the earnestness of our Father in heaven to hear our prayers.

**Psalm 18:1-3**

*And he said, "I love You, O LORD, my strength." The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, And I am saved from my enemies.*

Today, we must pray just as David did, with confidence that our Father through His Son, by the Holy Spirit, not only hears our prayers, but continues to present to us His faithfulness through the answering of our prayers.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Prayer, it is our life force. In His hands we rest. Why not use this moment to prayerfully thank your Savior. To commune with your risen Lord, King, Mediator, Friend and faithful Messiah.

Take this time to read and reflect. And then, maybe you write out your own prayer to Jesus.

His Hands

into this vast array of beauty and mystery  
we look upon the waves of wonder that span throughout history  
in our hearts the natural desire is undoubtedly to love  
for truly written within His Hands rest our dreams of that which is above  
a gift from heaven these feelings we cherish and adore  
and in the moment the mind wanders we must never forget life's enchanted galore

pictures and words strive to paint these feelings so apparent and true  
humble phrases sewn together in an attempt to share and comfort these days with you  
to God we lift our voices as this world we see imperfect in its presented show  
but reminders are daily given that all is in His plan- that you are in His Hands

for in our eyes these days they dance about  
blessings from heaven – eternal images of true joy no doubt  
yet even through our restricted ideas we tend to try to bind our time  
but we all know that life offers endless questions Christ left unexplained in our minds  
bringing us to the ultimate conclusion concerning this here our life  
tis better to live by faith and not by sight

it is no wonder that Jesus Himself called us to have the faith of a child  
as there is no doubt in a child's mind's eye who is loved with the insane love of God above  
let this day be the one in which from our love for Jesus we give voice to our own heart's plea  
the prayers lifted up in request, fear, joy, anxiety, sorrow, wonder and inquiry  
let them all be in remembrance of the joyous laughter that paints life's glory  
let them all be in remembrance of the hopes and thoughts built upon our dreams  
let them all be in remembrance of life's greatest blessing  
the tears that Jesus Christ shed, the prayers he bled for you and me  
as they pierced His Hands so that He could give His life at Calvary

Christ is our life. Christ lives in us in such a radical reality that His life of prayer on earth, and of intercession in heaven, is breathed into us in just such measure as our surrender and our faith allow and accept it. Nothing but intense, crazy, and radical believing prayer can meet the intense spirit of worldliness, which is ever-so-present and complained of everywhere.

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Numbers 14:17-18; Psalm 25, 116; Habakkuk 3:2; Hosea 6:1-2; Matthew 7:7-11, 18:18-20, 21:13, 26:36-42; Mark 1:35, 14:34-38; Luke 11:2-4, 11:5-13, 19:46, 22:40-46; John 14:13-14; Romans 12:12-13; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; James 5; Hebrews 10:23.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 24, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Philippians 2:4-8**

*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked into the strengthening of our faith living through an active and radical life of prayer. Today, our focus is on Giving. Giving is something that people often cringe at, yet is one thing that when done, satisfies. Just watch the show *Secret Millionaire* – it will move you. However, talk of giving is not a popular message in today's consumeristic, self-centered mindset. The last spiritual discipline that people usually submit to is giving. It is hard to let go of what we believe we have earned. Hopefully we can gain some insight to biblical giving.

Now we know some of you have immediately jumped to conclusions and assume this devotional is about your money. Well it is and it isn't. Giving is more than just your treasures. Giving includes our time and our talents. The truth is, the Church never asks you for your time, talents, or tithing—God does. The Church simply reminds us of the need to give back to the Lord and Creator of all.

Tithing may have begun in the Old Testament, but its spirit, truth, and practice continue today. God's Word underscores it as ours to believe, rejoice in, worship with, and be rewarded by! Tithing was never meant to be an onerous weight that one must give a tithe of what one earns. Rather, the tithe was a liberating act of joyful worship (e.g. Deut 12:12; cf. the "cheerful giver" of 2 Cor. 9:7).

Besides our giving back to God, we are called to give to one another as it is part of the inter-relatedness of our being. That is, created in the image of a relational God, giving and loving on one another is a fulfillment of our relational being, as believe or not, we *need* each other. Now, we are all familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. In fact many states have a "Good Samaritan" law, which legally protects those who step out and help someone in times of danger.

**Luke 10:25-37 (ESV)**

*And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."*

*And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."*

So how does this parable relate to our giving? Go back and as you re-read the parable, take notice of the priest and the Levite. Both were regarded as the religious elite. The holiest of Jews yet they were too busy and too uncompassionate to stop and help the ailing man. It is a non-believer, a Samaritan who was thought of as the scourge of Israel by the Jewish community, that stops his journey and cares for the injured and helpless man. Everyday there is an opportunity to give your time to help someone in need. Every church is filled with people who need someone, anyone, to stop and help them up. They may not be in the same condition as the man in the story but they may be financially beaten. They may be emotionally beaten. They may be all alone and hoping for someone to notice them and for someone to stop and reach out to them. Every week there are students and children that attend our church who come from broken and abusive homes. They are here seeking someone, anyone to love them. Will you sacrifice your time to serve?

The Church's destiny, and thus, every one of her members, is to love the Lord our God, and to love our neighbor – there is no better way to embody, to incarnate the life of Jesus than to give wholly of ourselves. We, the Church, can only be a light in the darkness if the concerns of the 'other' are manifested in the life of the Church. As the great Dr. Martin Luther King stated concerning the parable of the Good Samaritan:

And finally another man came and helped the injured man on the ground. He is known as the Good Samaritan. Jesus says in substance that this is a great man. He was great because he could project the 'I' into the 'thou.' He was great because he could surround the length of life with the breadth of life . . . . May it not be that the problem in the world today is that individuals as well as nations have been overly concerned with the length of their individual lives and concerns, devoid of the breadth? But there is still something to remind us that we are interdependent, that we are all somehow caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. Therefore whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I have a million dollars. As long as diseases are rampant and millions of people in this world cannot expect to live more than thirty years, I can never be totally healthy. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. *The Measure of a Man* (Fortress Press: Mn, 2001), 44-46.

One of the greatest forms of *giving* is in our service towards the “other.” We give through a multitude of means—through our intercessory prayers, our financial offerings, our time, our talents, etc. Followers of Christ are bound to Christ through the Spirit, and from this relational reality, enjoy the empowerment to be just as our Master is – that is, as Christ tells us, “*but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant 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*” (Mark 10:43-45). 16<sup>th</sup> century priest, professor and Reformer Martin Luther boldly reminds, ‘A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all and subject to every one.’<sup>2</sup>

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Christ is our life. When you hold back from giving, you are withholding from Jesus. As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Leviticus 27:30-34; Numbers 18:21-27; Deuteronomy 14:22-29; Isaiah 1:23; Nehemiah 10:39; Matthew 23; Acts 4:31-35, 5; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8, 9; James 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty*, trans. By W.A. Lambert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 2.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 25, 2015**

DAY TWENTY-NINE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 138:2**

*I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*

**Dig In:**

Again, we want the fact that as the Body of Christ, our mission/destiny, is the recognition of our identity and our participation *in* Christ and His reconciliatory performance, to be engrained in our heart's thoughts. In moving forward in understanding what it means to be the Church, our discussion today focuses on worship. Christian worship is of extreme importance for Christian faith and for Christian life – and therefore also for public life and civil society.

The Greek word for Worship - **PROSKUNE**, *w proskuneo*.. It means to do reverence to. This meaning harkens back to the Hebrew word used in Exodus and throughout the Old Testament to draw upon the disposition of one's Heart. Worship is our response to God. It is the fullness of who we are and what we give back to our Lord and Savior. Worship is the focus of the Heart in response to the Love of God poured out within the Heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5.5). We worship through song, prayer, reading Scripture, listening to a sermon or teaching, fellowshiping with fellow brothers and sisters—the point to be understood is that our lives should be a continual praise offering.

The body of Christ is a community of praise. Charles Wesley's hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," expresses the essence of our worship:

Changed from glory into glory, // Till in heaven we take our  
place, // Till we cast our crowns before thee, // *Lost in  
wonder, love and praise.*

The saints in glory worship God not for the benefits they receive. They are enamored with God as the object of true delight, not with themselves or with their pleasures. Thus, they cast their crowns before God simply because of who God is. Our worship is not based on a duty or works-based mentality. Rather, it is the beloved ones' response to the captivating grandeur of God's glorious love. This orientation is free from narcissism, for the saints are not even conscious of themselves—"lost in wonder, love and praise."

Christian worship is so fundamentally important for the way we believe and the way we live. In a variety of complex ways, the basic patterns and activities of Christian worship obviously impact on the way Christians believe – think, speak, understand, trust, orientate themselves – and

thereby on the way they live. Worship is perhaps the primary place where many of us learn to see with Christian eyes – or not.

We must find our identity in praising and worshipping God. This includes Thanksgiving. We need to be thankful because we are a community that has received boundless kindness & amazing grace, and it is primarily the worship service where we listen to and hear God's Word which helps us to see properly.

Our gratitude for God should spill over into care for one another, for our neighbors, and for the world because we recognize what a gift of grace we've been given.

The Christian Church betrays society when it is no longer the Church and when it no longer worships as the Church. The Christian Church betrays society when it merely becomes a mirror image, a reflection, of everyday life, of reality outside the place of worship, no longer informing social life from the "strangely different" perspective of the gospel.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Christian worship, Christian prayer – impacts on our identity, our collective and our individual identities, it shapes and forms the church, communities of character, and as part of that, believers, people of Christian character, who then, jointly, discern and decide, discuss and determine, weigh and opt, choose and act. How might you allow your life to be consistently determined, shaped and molded by and through your worship?

Are we truly worshipping, today – in continuity with the apostolic church, in faithfulness to the basic patterns of Christian worship, in congruence with our faith in the Triune God? Are we really worshipping together –do we indeed continuously learn from one another, do we share with one another, do we welcome one another, do we indeed practice the one baptism, the one table, the living presence of the one Lord? Does our worship indeed help us, liberate us, empower us, call us, challenge us to see differently – to see one another, our fellow human beings, the world, creation, human history, ourselves, with new eyes, in new perspectives, according to new priorities, with the eyes and the mind of the Spirit of the Triune God? And do we then indeed confess what we learn to see in our worship together with our everyday words and with our everyday actions, today, with our talk and with our walk? Or do we perhaps confess one way – yet live another?

Read and reflect on the poem. And then, maybe give back to our Bridegroom through your own offering of thanks, praise, and worship.

### **Bridegroom's Song**

My sweet princess  
My beautiful bride

How My heart has been enamored with your beauty  
How My love has eternally been set upon you

From the depths of My Being comes the beauty of your creation  
From the intrinsic communion of love shared in eternity  
Stems the essence of your eternal path

Never shall you be without the presence of My Love

Forever in the Father's Hands shall you remain  
Always shall you hear the whisper of My joy  
Forever from the Spirit shall you find loves refrain

The dynamic echo of My heavenly relationship  
Shall forever drench your heart with the purity from above  
For I your Bridegroom paint upon your heart the signature of eternal love

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 26:12-13; 2 Chronicles 7:5-6; Psalm 22, 51, 69, 86, 95, 99, 132, 150;  
Daniel 2:46, 3:5-28; Matthew 4:10; John 4:20-24; Acts 2; Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 4;  
Philippians 3:3; Revelation 5:9-13, 22.



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 26, 2015**

DAY THIRTY

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Hebrews 2:10-13**

*For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we looked at worship, or better yet, our response to God's overwhelming, crazy, and radical love. Today we seek to explore the life of Christ, specifically His willingness to suffer on our behalf, thereby identifying with us, all the while, conquering death and gifting us with eternal life. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis said, "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us." Who do we say Jesus is?

In Christ God is manifested as He is, and man, as he ought to be. Our fallen race lost the knowledge of man as utterly as they lost the knowledge of God. Humanity in Christ is fulfilled (1 Cor. 15.45,47), as the second "man" or "last Adam," "the Son of man" (a title used in New Testament only by Himself of Himself, except in Stephen's dying speech, Acts 7.56; from Dan. 7.13; marking at once His humiliation as man's representative Head, and His consequent glorification in the same nature: Mt. 20.28; 26.64) not only represents humanity, but suffers on our behalf so to redeem our created imago Dei.

The Apostles' Creed states that Christ, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." At the hour of His suffering, perishing, and descent into the realm of death, there is demonstrated for the first time, through His obedience, the deepest power of God's crazy, radical love, a power which really changes and heals *everything*. Jesus takes upon Himself, the entire *burden of the world's guilt*—that is, the radical remoteness (separation) caused by us sinners—suffers it through in Himself and thus, brings God's merciful love even to precisely those who are (in a theological sense) *dead*, namely, those who have banished themselves from God and shut themselves up in their self-isolation and loneliness.

Regarding Christ's identifying with our humanity, and its significance, 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian and Archbishop of Constantinople Gregory of Nazianzus wrote that 'the unassumed is unhealed, but what is united with God is saved'.

Here is what the apostle Peter writes of Christ and His assuming flesh (incarnation) so to remove the stain of sin:

### **1 Peter 2.21-22**

*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth*

Through His suffering, and identity with humanity, death, as a manifestation of sinful remoteness from God, is finally overcome forever, indeed, even more; in the form of the loving, obedient self-surrender of Jesus, death's actual meaning in the context of creation reveals itself, namely, its being a radical image of original life, which is nothing other than that living process of reciprocal self-surrender between Father, Son, and Spirit. Into this reconciliation between life and death—so we may hope—our own death, no matter how paltry, will also be taken up and overcome.

In becoming man, Christ temporarily gave up His heavenly throne so He might dwell amongst His very own creation. The ultimate reality stems from the fact that while He was man, and **while He was tempted, just as we are, He remained sinless**. Thus we are exhorted to take on the person of Jesus Christ, to become engulfed in the heavenly as well as humanly character of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Jesus' identity with humanity is made perfect upon His return to the starting point of His mission, that is, to the Father. This very return carries with it the promise that the whole of created reality will also be granted participation—on the universal plane—in His life.

### **So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

As followers of Christ, we are called to partake in His suffering, and most importantly, in His love for the world. Even the sufferings of our times will reveal, in the end, their meaning that was hidden in God's love. As Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, "if we are given to suffer, deeper shafts are sunk in us than we thought we could contain, depths destined to become, in the life everlasting, reservoirs of greater happiness, wells still more productive. Wells that flow forth themselves, grace, for in the life everlasting, all is grace." As followers of Christ we must continually recognize and remind ourselves, that our first grace was the grace we received from Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Have we stopped today to thank God for His willingness to suffer and identify with us?

Often, in the midst of confusion, struggle, of great pain, on the heels of mistreatment, the Lord appears in His Word, providing peace through His Spirit. He whispers, "I've got everything under control. You're right where you are supposed to be. Just as you have served me faithfully *here*, you are going to be My witness *there*." How can we allow for God to grow us through the trials and tribulations of life?

The transcendence of knowledge ultimately consummates in our recognition as to the mystery of Jesus Christ – a mystery that at first seems to be beyond our finite mind yet in reality simply

reminds us of the eternal fact that God is Love and God is faithful. We find stability in life through what God has said – through what He does. All of this should gently remind us of a statement made by one of the ancient Jewish prophets, which supports the reliability, the reality, and the love of God and His Word. Instead of me explaining any further, let us embark upon the words from the seasoned hand of Isaiah:

**Isaiah 43:1-3**

*"But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! <sup>2</sup> "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. <sup>3</sup> "For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior"*

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Isaiah 53; John 8:31-32, 16:33; Acts 23; Romans 8:16-18; 2 Corinthians 4; Galatians 2; James 4.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 27, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-ONE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**1 Corinthians 1:18**

*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.*

**Dig In:**

Throughout these past 30 days, we have devoted our hearts' thoughts to Who God is, the three persons of God, important doctrines and beliefs of the Church, who the Church is, who we are, the role of the Church, the presence of God, and salvation, to name a few. Today, we want to discuss further the reality of our worth—that is, how much we are loved by the God of all creation. Most of us have read or heard a thousand times how much God loves us, but the question is, do we *really* believe it? Do we really understand our worth?

Worth is what often times represents the foundation of excellence many people stand upon when walking through the journey of life. Through the eyes of society, worth is defined by Mr. Webster's dictionary as something or someone, "having a value specified." Through the eyes of God, worth is defined by God the Son, Jesus Christ. Yesterday we spoke of Christ's willingness and desire to identify with and suffer for humanity. But how many of us take this truth for granted?

The most important thing for a Christian to understand is that self-worth cannot be defined by the world. When one places their faith in Christ, instantly, the worth of that person is elevated to the stature of a son, a daughter—a child of God. What this means is that life takes on a new depth by having been made new through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is only through Christ that we gain our worth.

Society seems fit to place the definition of worth in a dependent relationship with the situation. In one situation, worth might be defined through the accumulation of wealth. In another situation, worth might be defined through the stature of power. And yet in another situation, worth might be defined by looks. In other words, so often, worldly worth is defined by those in power in the given situations. It is not as if everyone has a chance to find a high amount of worth in society, because it is an arbitrary definition made by imperfect beings. So those who define worth in any given situation might be likened to those throwing down banana peels just waiting for the next person to slip and fall, thus, damaging their "worth."

The reality of this life is that only through one person can we ever come to recognize the ultimate truth for any given situation. In John 14:6, Jesus tells us, *"I am the truth, the way, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me."* And then in chapter 15 of John's gospel, Jesus tells us

that *"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."* Our worth is defined not by the words prescribed or used in society, but by the actions, the words, and the life of Jesus Christ. God gives us worth through the power of His own Son. Jesus is the only way to have true worth.

Here is what Paul writes of Christ and not only His identifying with us, but His giving us worth:

### **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

As followers of Christ, we are called to participate in the work of Christ. Are you willing to first, recognize and accept your worth? And secondly, actively participate in Jesus' "word of reconciliation?"

As we step through the door of Christianity (Christ is the door), we need to have a very clear picture of what we are worth to God. God gave His Son for us. Through this public demonstration on the cross, the question of our worth is settled. Have you ever expressed your worth with those who have not yet recognized their own worth? Ask God right now to provide this opportunity before Easter so that you might then invite this person to celebrate with you on Easter.

Finally, we must realize that we are involved in a love that would never allow us to dwell in shame. If God loves us this much (as much as His Son) while we were against Him, how much more does He love us now that we have trusted Him? God knows we are fearful and suspicious people. Knowing this, He does not leave us alone in our spiritual journey; He gives us the Holy Spirit and the blessed communion of the Church. Make a point to seek out the ways the Holy Spirit is calling you to become more involved in your own spiritual journey (praying, reading, etc) and ways in which you can participate more intentionally with the church.

As you reflect on our worth, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Genesis 1, 32; Psalm 23:6, 71, 139; Isaiah 53; Matthew 6:25-26; John 3; Hebrews 2; 1 John 3:1; Romans 5:1-8; Revelation 19.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 28, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-TWO

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**John 15:4-5**

*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.*

**Dig In:**

Yesterday we talked about our worth to God and His love for us. Today, the discussion moves forward in His love so to realize that *in Christ* we can do all things, but apart from Christ, we can do nothing. Think of the work done and life lived by the Apostle Paul. Paul radically rocked the Roman world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and because of his faithful obedience and understanding of his *in Christness*, we today are able to continue *rockin the free world!* Here is what Paul says of his life according to Christ:

**Philippians 3:7-8**

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

If we have clear instruction from God through The Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures, we need to conform our will to that guidance, instruction, and leading. Through the matching of our will with God's will, the unthinkable is possible; salvation comes to the least likely in our eyes. Through our *gaining* of Christ, that is, our obedience to Him, empires, societal power structures, and ultimately this world, are rocked by the gentle call of the Master, "Follow me."

Yet even with this aforementioned knowledge, and Christ's admonition that "apart from Him we can do nothing," so many of us are like the prodigal son—we simply want our inheritance without any standards or parameters to live by. And like the prodigal son, it often times takes hitting *rock bottom* for us to return back to our Father, thereby coming to realize just how much we are worth to Him and just how much He loves us.

**Luke 15:14-16**

*After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.*

As we journey with the Prodigal son, we see him go from being discontent with his home, to entering an instant gratification stage of “give it to me now—“which led to a rebellious stage of “I can do it all on my own.” Today we continue to see the consequences of the son’s poor choices. While our Father in Heaven has given us the freedom to make choices on our own, He has not given us the option to choose the consequences of those choices.

Just think about it, the son going to this distant land, trying to impress people and buy friends with his money. We can see him buying rounds of drinks in the bar, buying the latest designer sandals and robes, buying sexual and other illicit favors. But it was short-lived. He thought, as many of us today think, that money was the answer to all his needs. On top of his money running out, the country went into a famine, or in modern terms a recession. Where were his newfound friends now? Can you see the son going up to some of his bar buddies and saying, “hey, remember me? Can you get me a job at your tent shop?” “Remember all the things I bought you guys?” But apparently his friends evaporated as quickly as his money.

Jesus tells us the son began to hurt, but ultimately, he was still in a state of denial. His denial was lying to himself about his true condition. Often our denial leads us to self-destructive behavior. We may turn to alcohol, drugs, pornography, and/or become immersed in our work to escape the pains of slipping out of denial. The Prodigal Son was lying to himself about the consequences of his own actions. Although he was hurting, he still thought he was in control. He still was not thinking of his home, and thinking he could live life *apart from Christ*. So he took the lowest job and probably the only job he could find, thinking that this, too, was just a temporary situation that he could overcome on his own.

Finally his hurting overcame his delusion and turned his thoughts back to his home. His hurting made him realize that he had needs that he alone could not fulfill—needs that could only be filled by someone greater than he.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> verse of Luke 15 the son is brought to his senses and he says that “All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day and here I am starving to death.”

What a wonderful verse. When he finally hit “rock bottom,” he came to his senses. He came out of his denial and became keenly aware of his predicament. How many of us need to come out of denial – come out of lying to ourselves about our situation and come to our senses? When do we finally say, “enough is enough of this way I am living? Enough is enough of this running from what I know God wants from me.” When do we yield to God’s plan and His love for us? When do we acknowledge that apart from Him we are living out of control? Are you yet sick and tired of being sick and tired of your actions?

The son remembered how well his father treated his farmhands. The same farmhands that probably seemed menial to the son when he was living with his father now seemed very wealthy. The father treated them with respect and love. Their needs were met.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

There is so much to learn from this parable. Today we have seen the son begin to be in want. This want leads to him to reflect on his life, which in turn leads him out of denial. What part or parts of your life are you in denial about and need to reflect on? Maybe it is your job. Perhaps it is your keeping up with the Jones’ lifestyle of living beyond your means. Is it your relationship with your classmates at school or your teachers? How about your relationship with your parents and other family members? Are you trying to live apart from God? Still running from what you know God is calling you to do? Still denying your own shortcomings and sins?

Now is the time to stop and meditate on what Jesus is calling you to do with all He has gifted you with. Will you today, stand and acknowledge that life is realized in its fullness only when we recognize that *apart from Christ* we can do nothing?

Today, we need to bask in the glory of our Savior. We need to ask the Spirit to lead us deeper into Christ so to fully realize the power of being *in* Christ.

Let's get moving from the denial of our worth through the attempts to "make things happen" on our own, to the Spirit led reflection of our call to act in and for Jesus Christ today.

Father- Thank You once again for Your Word. While some call the Bible irrelevant for today, You keep opening our hearts' thoughts to your teaching. Help us to slow down and take time to reflect on our choices and actions. Help us also, to see where we are lacking and where we need to make some hard choices to change. Keep nudging us to become more like your Son Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.

As you reflect on how we, the body of Christ, are called to *live* Christ through the Spirit, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Job 11:16-18; Psalm 9:9-10; Romans 8:1-9, 15; 1 Corinthians 1, 4:10-21; Ephesians 1, 2:5-22; Philippians 2, 3; Colossians 3; Hebrews 10:22-23, 13:21-25; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; 1 Peter 3:15-22; Revelation 12:10.



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 29, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-THREE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Colossians 3:16-17**

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

**Dig In:**

Today is Palm Sunday. Churches are celebrating it across the world. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Passion or Holy week. Palm Sunday marked the beginning of Christ's last week. It was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that was written about the coming Messiah.

**Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)**

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Now look at the account of Palm Sunday in the gospel of John.

**John 12:12-19 (ESV)**

*The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."*

Many of us miss the importance of Palm Sunday. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds praised him! They shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" They cheered His presence. They held a parade for Jesus. It was a celebration. Jesus had come to town. Hosanna is a cry of praise and salvation. The people were literally shouting, "Save us! King!" It is something that we can identify with as followers of Christ. We worship the Lord for the salvation given to us by His grace and mercy.

Unfortunately this parade for Jesus was short lived. On Palm Sunday the crowds praised Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and by Friday they were hurling insults and screaming, "Crucify, Crucify." How quickly did they turn their back to Jesus? The people that cried, "Hosanna our King", turned their shouts to, "Kill Him!" We all fall into the same temptation. On Sunday we sing and praise God but live like hell Monday through Saturday. We celebrate on Sunday yet live like the ones yelling, "Crucify!" during the week.

The writer of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of this week when he writes:

**Hebrews 10:18-25 (NIV)**

*And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

This is the week that Christ gave it all in order to redeem us. Let us never forget that. It is easy to worship on Sunday when we are surrounded with our church family. It is easy to sing His praises when we are not alone. The Apostle Paul wrote some very wise words for us in 1 Corinthians.

**1 Corinthians 10:12 (ESV)**

*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

It is the times when we are in the world, the times when we are alone that are the easiest to turn our back to Jesus. So this week, let us remember these words, "Take Heed!" Let us take heed of the desire to turn away from the hope we have in Christ for the false hope of the world.

Take time to re-read Hebrews 10 and reflect on the hope we have in Christ, the one in whom we have hope. Pray that during this last week the Spirit will continue to open your heart to the ways in which your life and your actions represent those who were shouting "Crucify Him!" Ask Jesus to awaken your soul to ways in which you might "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith."

As you reflect on Jesus' actions during the last week of His life on earth, take some time to meditate on His love for us as you read through some of the following scripture.

Genesis 3; Psalm 118; Isaiah 45:21-25, 52:13-53:12; Matthew 21:1-11, 26:36-75; Philippians 2:5-11.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 30, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-FOUR

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Luke 12:31-34**

*But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Dig In:**

The Christian life is a paradox. Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said of Jesus, "Genuine Christian Faith is faith in the incarnation of God in human form, something that appears to human reason to be the absolute paradox. Such a paradox is the absurd, and faith in the highest sense actually requires that its object be absurd." And the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, "*For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*" (1 Cor. 1:18).

Jesus Himself has plenty to say about our faith. In Matthew, Jesus says that "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" **Matthew 10:39 (ESV)**.

Whoever loses their life for Christ will find it! I don't think Jesus could have been more confusing. This gets to the idea of dying to yourself. The unfortunate trend with many churches is the idea of easy salvation. Say a prayer and you will be saved. Now there is nothing wrong with leading someone through a prayer of salvation but it is more than words. Look at what Romans 10:9 says.

**Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

How many people have confessed with their mouth yet never believed in their heart. Salvation is an issue of the heart! Jesus died and rose to bring us into a relationship with God. He desires to renew us! In fact the Old Testament spoke of this thousands of years before Christ came.

**Ezekiel 11:19 (NIV)**

*I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.*

This new heart that God puts within us happens at our surrender to Him. A cheesy way of remembering this, "Let go and let God!" The problem we all have is letting go. We hold onto

everything. We hold on to our pride, our hurt, our sin and our lives. I'm a type A personality. Not being in control drives me nuts! I cannot be in a car if someone else is driving. I can't put my life in another person's hands. In the same way it can be very hard for me to let go and let God. I have had to learn the hard way. Listen to what Peter wrote about pride.

### **1 Peter 5:5-7 (NIV)**

*"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

I have heard it said this way, "Be Humble or Be Humbled!" Ultimately all of us will struggle with this in some way or another. We have areas that we want to hold onto. God is asking us to lay it all down at the foot of cross. Jesus said it clearly to His disciples.

### **Luke 9:23-26 (NIV)**

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

Again, the ultimate paradox. Die to yourself. Jesus is not talking about a physical death. Jesus is talking about who we are. He is talking about our pride and self-reliance. If we can lay that down, submit everything to Christ then we will have life. Life as Jesus said it, in the full, an abundant life! What areas of your life have you yet to submit to the Lord?

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

As God calls each Christian to "die to self" and promises "new life", the flesh protests: "What if it doesn't work? What if I'm left empty-handed? What if God isn't faithful?" But we have the gripping example of Jesus' faith--when He let the life drain out of Him on the cross--with the attitude, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And about that much easier thing His Spirit is convicting you to give up now, this same Jesus says from the cross: "Follow me!"

Let today be the day that your prayers offered to God are those that seek His will—prayers that recognize in both word and deed the need to "die to self" so that you might begin living for our Savior!

As you reflect on how we are called to "die to self," call out to the Spirit of God to lead you in this process. Take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Job 19:25; Psalm 4, 8, 51:17; Mark 11:22-24; John 11:25-26, 12:24-25; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 6; Philippians 3:8; Hebrews 12:1-3.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**March 31, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-FIVE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Psalm 40:5-8**

O LORD my God, you have done many miracles for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list. If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them. You take no delight in sacrifices or offerings. Now that you have made me listen, I finally understand-- you don't require burnt offerings or sin offerings. Then I said, "Look, I have come. And this has been written about me in your scroll: I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your law is written on my heart."

**Dig In:**

Today we will look at the night before Good Friday. On this night Jesus ate with His disciples one last time; a time in which He expressed His deep love for His disciples while also being betrayed by one of His closest friends. The evening began with the Passover meal. Jesus and all of His disciples were in the upper room an unnamed man. There, Jesus ate with His disciples for the last time. It was the last time He would commune with His closest friends. For the last three years these men have been by His side, learning and serving. During dinner, Jesus takes time for one last message to His disciples. Jesus takes the bread and the wine from the table and begins to teach them of the New Covenant. Jesus establishes communion for the first time, and in so doing, exposes each of us to the truth that God's Being for us is manifested through His eternal will of fellowship as expressed through His covenantal relationship with humanity.

**Luke 22:14-20 (ESV)**

*And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

Each time we take communion we are remembering what Christ did for us. The bread represents His body, which was beaten and bruised, whipped and nailed, broken for us. Likewise, the cup represents the blood that was shed for us. Communion is our reminder of the ultimate sacrifice. It is a reminder of Isaiah 53 and Christ's performance of redemption. It is a reminder of our covenantal relationship with God and one another. As theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes, "The history of the world is a dialogue between creation and covenant, kingdom of the world and kingdom of God, Church and culture."

Christ's establishment of the Eucharist (communion) is the call not only for us to remember His actions, but to anticipate His coming in glory. Our anticipation, however, is not passive; our anticipation is manifested through our own Eucharistic (self-giving, self-sacrificial) actions. Humanity is freely invited to participate in Christ's self-sacrificial (Eucharistic) performance, as it is Christ's self-sacrificial act is the foundation of the Church's Eucharistic celebration, and thus, its faithful performance. Every Eucharistic sacrifice on the part of the Church always proceeds on the basis of a communion with Christ that he has already initiated and has the effect of creating a new and ever deeper communion. Such a deepening of our communion with Christ—the reality of being in Christ—manifests itself as the Church primarily joins in and assimilates herself to the work of Christ; she is thus privileged to act, taking the place reserved for her by Christ, who suffers the action of others. It is from the performance of Christ that the Church, and thus humanity, witnesses the ultimate giving of self; a giving that re-humanises the human, so that each one of us might be able to faithfully participate in God's self-giving act through our own acts of self-giving.

**Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)**

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

After eating the Passover dinner, Jesus takes His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. There we find Jesus preparing for Good Friday. It is in the Garden that Jesus is betrayed, arrested and abandoned. It is in the Garden that Jesus begins the journey of suffering for the redemption of the world. The garden begins the full manifestation of Christ's reconciliatory performance; a performance symbolized through our continual remembrance of His death and resurrection.

Christ's Eucharistic act (His being pierced for our transgressions) is that which overcomes the chasm created through sin, while never overwhelming His fellow actors. Humanity is incorporated, not forced, into Christ's performance. The Eucharistic aspect of His performance is that which is to be shared in by the Church of Christ. It is an act that does not simply seek to be spoken of but acted out both by God and by humanity. It is highly significant that the God who has reconciled the world to himself has entrusted the Apostles, and in a wider sense the Church of Christ, with 'the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor 5:18), 'the message of reconciliation' (5:19), so that we can 'work with him' (2 Cor 6:1) in the world in implementing this reconciliation. And this incorporation into God's reconciliatory act is meant to further enliven our own actions through the sharing of Christ's performance, that is, the reality of being self-sacrificial and for the sake of the "other." The aim of our union with Christ through our continual participation in His New Covenant meal (communion) is to spread the peace of Christ (bought on the Cross) among humanity, to all individual groups, it is a peace that can only be shared by each person entering into the heart of Christ, that is, into his selflessness and his readiness to affirm others and forgive them—which can only come through self-sacrifice and a plunging into the breach on their behalf.

**So What? (What will you do with what you read today?)**

Communion is not meant to be a rote response or action—it is meant to stir our hearts, to tweak with our systems and programs of comfort, and to radically reorient the ways of our thinking.

For this last week of the devotions, let us begin each time of reflection by thanking God – in the name of His Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit – for this day. And then give

the day over to His glory, asking Him for the power and presence of His Holy Spirit so that all you do might be done to Glorify His Name! Give Him thanks and praise for the joys, trials, and teachings you have gained over these last 30+ days and the growth you will experience this last week!

It is our sincerest belief that when we **commit** our Spirits into the Hands of our Savior, our lives will transcend that which is imaginable so to truly shine within this darkened world. Let us today, as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ surrender ourselves to His Name, to His Body – Let us this day become Bond-Servants to Jesus Christ and set this world on fire through our daily devotion to the passion of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Exodus 34:29; Psalm 69; Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:15; John 10:14-18; Acts 2:22-24; Romans 8:31-39; 1 Corinthians 11:20-32; Hebrews 9:13-22; 1 Peter 2:19-23;

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**April 1, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-SIX

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Philippians 2:12-16**

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*

**Dig In:**

Jesus lived with purpose. Jesus lived to accomplish something. He didn't come to do great works, to heal people and to teach people. Christ came to do something Great! Christ came to accomplish something. There are many verses in Scripture that speak to Christ's purpose. One of them is found in Luke.

**Luke 19:10 (ESV)**

*"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

This is why Christ came and this is why we remember what happened on Good Friday. Some people ask the question, "Why did He have to die to save us?" and that is a good question. The answer is our sin. Our sin has a cost. Theologically, Christ's overcoming of sin for humanity is called *recapitulation*. Just as all men were somehow present in Adam, so they are or can be, present in the 2nd Adam, the man from heaven. Just as they were involved in the former's sin, so they can participate in the latter's death and ultimate triumph over sin, the forces of evil, and death itself

The Apostle Paul says in Romans:

**Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

*For the wages of sin is death*

The punishment for sin is spiritual death. Eternal life away from God, eternity separated from His presence. Our sin, our debt, needed to be paid. So God humbled himself and took that punishment for us. God didn't just take any punishment; he took the worst form of punishment ever invented by man, the Cross.

Theologian St. Augustine writes that Christ is "the one true mediator, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace, remaining one with Him to Whom He made the offering, making one in Himself



those for whom He offered it, Himself one as offered and sacrifice offered.” Augustine uses 1 Timothy 2.5 as support for his statement.

Even before Jesus went to the cross, he experienced incredible pain and bruises. Because after six trials and staying up all night and lack of sleep it says that they gave Him to the Roman soldiers who just wanted to make fun of Him. They put a robe on Him and they crowned Him with a crown of thorns which stuck into His head, into His brain. Then it says they began to beat Him and slap Him. They hit Him in the face. The Bible says that they even began to pluck his beard. Just out of sheer torture. They did this and said, “Who hit you, Jesus?” And somebody slapped Jesus on the face. “Who slapped You? If You’re God, tell us who we are?” Jesus could have given their names, their father's names, their grandfather's names. He could have traced their family tree back to Adam. But He remained silent because He was taking the suffering of the world upon Himself.

The paradox of our faith is in full representation on the Cross. That is, the fullness of our faith is found through the Cross which should directly take us back to the incarnation so to press us forward through the passion of our Savior. Thus, while the Christian must reproduce Christ’s humility, it is the objective humility showing itself in the incarnation and passion which first makes our reconciliation possible. The imitation of Christ by us is itself the effect in our hearts of the divine grace released by the sacrifice on the cross.

The Bible says He was mocked and He was scorned. He was taken and scourged. Scourging was far worse than whipping. They would bend a man over a post so that he couldn’t kneel down but he couldn’t stand up either. And you know how that hurts your back when you’re in that half way position. They would tie your hands, strip you down to the waist, then two men called lecturers would hold these whips that had a cat-of-nine-tails in it, nine long strands of leather. In each of these strands of leather they’d tie two things – sharp bone that would cut the skin and bits of led in order to bruise the skin. They would whip and when they did it would not only cut the back open but it would bruise it at the same time.

This act of Christ, His performance of reconciliation and redemption accomplished through the beatings, scourging and hanging on the cross, is done in the place of all and for the sake of all. In our place and for our sake, instead of committing fresh sin, Jesus returned to the place from which we had fallen into sin, the place which belongs to the creature in relation to God.

In so doing, in His own person, He reversed the fall in their place and for their sake. He acted justly in that He did not refuse to do what they would not do. The one great sinner, with all the consequences that this involves, penitently acknowledges that He is the one lost sheep, the one lost coin, the lost son (Lk.15.3ff), and therefore that as the Judge He is the One who is judged. In this way He was obedient to God. For this reason He, Jesus of Nazareth-among the many who in Jordan received the baptism of John for the future forgiveness of sins-was the One in whom God was well pleased as His beloved Son, the One upon whom John saw the Spirit descend from heaven, Himself the One who, proclaimed by John, was to come as the bringer of forgiveness.

Jesus went through this all for you and for me. As we read earlier, right before Jesus took His last breath he said, “It is finished”.

The cost of our sin, Finished!

Our distance from God, Finished!

Spiritual Death, Finished!

The debt, Paid.

It was finished almost two thousands years ago and this week we remember the sacrifice.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Pray. Thank God for the reality that the Judge became the judged so that we might be reconciled to our Creator through His love. Seek this day never to take for granted the cross of Jesus Christ.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**April 2, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Romans 6:5-7**

*For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.*

**Dig In:**

Easter comes and goes without impact for many who attend church more out of tradition (and to please family members) than anything else. Some remain unbelieving unless overwhelmed by evidence, like the Apostle Thomas in the painting at right. Others continue to ask, are there good, solid reasons to believe the rather outlandish claims that Christ became human so to lay down His life willingly and was then miraculously raised from the dead? There had better be!



Many have noted that Christianity stands or falls on the merits of the resurrection of Christ. If true, then Christ's claims to deity and the eternal hope portrayed in the Bible are issues to be dealt with seriously. If not, nothing important would be lost in the investigation. Many have sought to disprove it, only to believe.

Jesus claimed to be God, stating that He and the Father are one (John 10.30). Jesus also claimed that He was the only way to God: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14.6) So why are these statements important or even connected to His resurrection?

What we need to ask, is can we accept as true what Jesus [God the Son], claimed? The most conclusive evidence establishing the deity of Christ is the historically verifiable resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote that Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1.4). If the resurrection of Christ is true, then it is possible and, indeed, logical to believe all His claims and miracles including His assertion of the complete validity of the Old Testament. They would be what one would expect from God.

The claim being made today is that the resurrection demonstrates the truth of Christianity—it gives us *No Doubt* in why we believe what we believe. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian faith rests on the act of God in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, said that his entire ministry would be worthless if the resurrection had not taken place. Look at what Paul says:

### **1 Corinthians 15:12-17**

*Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.*

If Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, then Paul's message is true, faith has meaning, and we can be freed from our sins. Not even the most skeptical can deny the historical attestation of the faith of the early Christians in the Resurrection of Christ. This simple fact is of importance if we accept as genuine the numerous predictions of Jesus concerning his death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; 17:9, 22,23; 20:18, 19; 26:2; etc.).

Furthermore, it should be obvious that the early Christians were completely convinced of the Resurrection. If this were not so, they had everything to lose and nothing to gain. By preaching the Resurrection of Christ they further antagonized the Jewish authorities and in effect accused them of slaying the Messiah (Acts 2:23,24, 36; 3:14, 15, 4:10; etc.).

Finally, if Jesus was raised from the dead, then what He said about himself must have been true. When the religious leaders of His day asked for some proof of His authority, Jesus told them that the only proof they would be given would be His resurrection from the dead (John 2.18 19; Matt. 12.38 40). When He was raised from the dead, that proof was provided. What was proven through Jesus' resurrection? Here are some of the things that Jesus said about Himself, all of which were affirmed by His resurrection from the dead:

*I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst (John 6.35).*

*I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8.12).*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM [a claim to be God himself] (John 8.58).*

*I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (John 10.9).*

*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10.11).*

*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies (John 11.25).*

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me (John 14.6).*

If these statements are true, then anything that contradicts them cannot also be true. In other words, if it is true that Jesus is God, then anyone who says Jesus is not God must be wrong. If it is true that Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him and that He is the only way to the Father, then anyone who says that there are other ways to salvation must be wrong. What this means is that the statements quoted above demonstrate the uniqueness of Jesus, but they also demonstrate the uniqueness of Christianity. If what Jesus said about Himself is true, then Christianity is true, and any contradictory religious belief must be false.

That's not a very popular message in today's pluralistic culture, but the fact is that there are genuine differences between worldviews. Only one can really be correct. If Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead, there's little need for further debate. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

How do we know that what Jesus said about Himself is true? We know by His resurrection, which is representative and definitive proof for all that He did and said. He is *the* Way and *the* Truth and *the* Life, and He is calling you to "Come and Follow Me." Reflect on this unique and distinct truth as you read through the following Scriptures.

Matthew 16:21, 17, 20:18-19; John 11:25, 19:33-34; Acts 2:22-24; Romans 14:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 1 Peter 1, 3:8-22.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**April 3, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Acts 1:7-11**

*He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."*

**Dig In:**

Today we move from the truth of the resurrection to the ascension of Christ. This action – Christ's ascension – is further evidence of His divinity, and fulfilment of promises. The effect of the belief in Jesus' ascension on the early Christian belief in the wider context of the Church can hardly be overestimated. It was the kind of assurance, contemporary and concrete, that the most ardent though speculative convictions of Pharisees or other non-Christian Jews could not have equalled.

The followers of a religious group do not preserve traditions of their leaders forsaking their master and behaving in a cowardly and despairing fashion unless these traditions happen to be true. The fact that the Gospel was boldly and successfully preached by these same followers is attested not only by the New Testament record, but by the historical fact of the growth of the Christian Church. It is indeed one of the few New Testament facts for which we have independent evidence outside the Christians' own traditions.

The Roman historian Tacitus (Annals XV. 44) states that "a most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment (by the crucifixion of Jesus) again broke out." What is being argued is that only the appearance of the risen Christ and His ascension, can satisfactorily explain how Jesus' sceptical brother James (John 7:5) became a leader in the early Church (I Cor. 15:7; Acts 15), how despondent Peter became a fearless preacher at Pentecost, and how a fanatical persecutor of Christians became Paul, the greatest missionary of the Gospel.

In his book *The Christian Character*, Stephen Neill, who died in 1984 and served as missionary to India 1920-40, wrote that, "It was on the last night of His life, when His enemies were all around Him, that He spoke to His disciples of the joy that no man taketh away. Read again the story of His Passion: Jesus is seen throughout as calm, quiet, and confident. His last

word is, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." Someone may say, "Yes, but He knew that He was going to rise from the dead." But have we not the same promise for ourselves?"

The ascension of the Savior is a very important event which accomplished some wonderful and awesome things in the plan of God. On Easter we commemorate the resurrection and ascension of Christ, arguably two of the greatest and most transformative events in the history of humanity. Christ's life existed from all eternity and continues into the eternal future. The ascension is the connecting link, the link between the past ministry of Christ and His future ministry. The ascension is not only a great FACT of the New Testament, but a greater FACTOR in the life of Christ and Christians, and no complete view of Jesus Christ is possible unless the ascension and its consequences are included.

When you think of Christ, how do you think of Him? As the babe lying in the manger? Do you think of Him in terms of His ministry on earth and His mighty words and works? Or perhaps you think of Him as the one who died and rose again. There are many ways we may (and should) think about Jesus Christ and that we do so is tremendously important to the issues of life and how we not only respond to Christ, but live out our faith.

In view of the Easter season and in view of the moral decay of our nation, we would like to invite you to think especially of Jesus Christ as one who ascended into heaven. We want to be able to answer our Lord's very provocative question, "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where He was before?" In other words, what does the ascension mean to us? What differences should it make in our belief and behavior?

We need to answer this question because it is tremendously important (1) to the impact of Christ on our daily lives, (2) to our courage and the enjoyment of our salvation in Christ, and (3) for our effectiveness in the mission of the Great Commission to which Christ has called each of us.

The ascension, as one of the important truths of the Bible, occupies a large portion in the Word of God. The ascension completes the resurrection. Without the resurrection Christ's death would be meaningless as far as the great issues of life are concerned. And without the ascension, the resurrection would also be incomplete and meaningless. We would have a resurrected person, but not one who was now at God's right hand in the place of authority.

Look at the progression and movement of God's action: First there is Christ's descent to earth—the incarnation; this is followed by Christ's death and resurrection as the God-Man Savior; finally, there is Christ's ascent into heaven as the God-Man Savior and King of His people.

It is important to remember that the New Testament was written by men who were thoroughly convinced that Jesus was at the right hand of the Father, and that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit they were in union with this ascended Lord and were, by His commission and through His ascended authority and power, left here to continue the work which He began.

If we are to endure and carry on in this world, running the race God has laid out before us, we need to see Jesus Christ. We must fix our gaze on Him, but how are we to do that?

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Christ's ascension affirms Jesus as the God-Man (John 6:62). In John 6 we have the great discourse on Christ as the Bread of Life. Because of His unique person, He is able to give eternal life. This is true because He is not mere man, but the God-Man, the one who came down from heaven. This was difficult to grasp and some grumbled over it. So what did the Lord do? He spoke of His ascension as proof of His origin. The ascension, like the resurrection, would prove His divine origin and that He had been sent of God to solve man's sin problem.

Because of what the ascension means, it demands a response from us to God's Being-in-Act in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Failing to assimilate the truth of Christ as the Bread of Life, as the source of our spiritual nourishment and life through feeding on Him by faith and study, the Lord challenged His audience (and challenges us) with these words: "What then if you should behold the Son of Man ascending where He was before?"

It is our sincerest belief that when we **commit** our Spirits into the Hands of our Savior, our lives will become that which they were intended to be. The faithfulness of this promise rests within the reality and truths of Christ's resurrection and ascension. Let us today surrender ourselves to the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus so to set this world on fire through our daily devotion to the passion of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 6; Psalm 47:5, 103, 110; Matthew 22:41-44; John 6, 14, 16; Acts 2; 2 Corinthians 5; Ephesians 4; Hebrews 4.



**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**April 4, 2015**

DAY THIRTY-NINE

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Colossians 3:16-17 (NIV)**

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

**Dig In:**

Not for nothing but before beginning, we just wanted to make a brief mention that today is William Shakespeare's birthday. Okay, on with our devotion. Today's discussion centers on Christ and His second coming. It is the whole mission of the church to speak the gospel. However, as many might attest, today in the Church, when explaining the Gospel, the Ascension and Second Coming of Christ are often omitted, or left unspoken. We explain the life of Christ being sinless, His death upon the Cross, His resurrection and nothing more. The entirety of the Gospel is completed with His Ascension and His eventually Second Coming. Jesus' return is one of the main sources of hope they as believers hold on to. Today we must remember that all hope yearns for happiness or, at a deeper level, for salvation or the fulfillment of human wholeness; and as a result it experiences the abyss of the "not yet." The "not yet" is the theological understanding that through the truth of Christ's return, all will be perfected and brought to its intended form of creation.

There is no way or reason to attempt to get into the when and where of Christ's return. As Jesus says, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42). The reality of Christ's return is foundational in our hope and our living in faith. Through humanity's incorporation into God's actions, hope is gained from tomorrow's glory transforming today's reality. Christian hope insists on living as if it were not thus, living in the light not of the way things are, but of the way things will be in God's future

The truth and hope for today is embedded in the reality of Christ's return. Again, instead of getting caught up in the minor things, let us focus on the major truth of the return of our King. Thomas Aquinas said that for the Church, there needs to be "in the essentials unity, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things charity." The point is that the where and when of Christ's return falls in the non-essential, whereas His return is an essential for belief and faith. While Scripture is clear that no one will know the hour of His return it does give us some insight on how He will return.

**Acts 1:6-11 (ESV)**

*So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be*

*my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

Jesus will come just as He left!

The book of Matthew is broken down into five pillars. Each pillar was a sermon by Christ. The book transitions from narrative to sermon back to narrative 5 times. The fifth of Jesus sermons is known as the Olivet Discourse. In this last sermon of Matthew, Jesus explains the end times and His glorious return.

### **Matthew 24:29-31 (ESV)**

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Jesus warns not to be fooled by “false” christs. Many will come and claim to be Jesus. They speak with eloquence and do many great things but they will not be Christ. Jesus is clear about His return. We live in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is one of the most beautiful places on earth to live. We have great weather here. In fact, we rarely have severe weather. Lightning may strike once or twice during a storm but that is about it. During my travels to the tropical rainforests of South America, I witnessed real lightning. Every 30 seconds and bolt would light up the sky. When the lightning would strike, it wouldn't be a single bolt that flashes quickly to ground. Each bolt would begin on side of the horizon and stretch across the entire sky. It was something to behold and clearly had my in awe of God's creation. I share this because Jesus explained His return in those terms.

### **Matthew 24:27 (ESV)**

*For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.*

The truth is that Jesus will return. As we discussed earlier, the when and where are not the focal point; what matters is that we are prepared for His return. Jesus further explained this truth in His Olivet Discourse.

### **Matthew 24:36-44 (ESV)**

*“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would*

*not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

The return of the King is truth. It offers us the hope needed to transform life today. Our lives of faith need to exhibit tomorrow's hope lived out today. In Christ and through the Spirit, we really can change the world. Will you live out tomorrow's hope today?

As you reflect on how we are called to live out the hope of Christ, call out to the Spirit of God to lead you in this process. Take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Matthew 16:27, 24, 26:64; Mark 8:36-38, 13; Luke 21:25-28; Acts 3:19-21; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:4; Titus 2; 2 Peter 3; Revelation 19:16, 22.

**NO Doubt**  
**40 Days of Passion**  
**April 5, 2015**

DAY FORTY

**Focus Up:**

Each morning challenge yourself to meet with God. Each day is called a devotional because we are literally devoting our time, our day and our lives to Him each morning. Spend some time praying and ask the Lord to speak to your heart through your time in the Word. Here is a great Scripture that you can pray through.

**Hebrews 4:12-16**

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

**Dig In:**

Now that you have faithfully made it through 40 days of Passion, we want to give you some encouragement to keep going. Now we know some of you are thinking we are crazy. Keep fasting? Keep giving up what you gave up for 40 days? No, we are not talking about continuing your fast but what we are talking about is continuing to seek the Lord everyday of your life. Get into His Word everyday. Daily fall to your knees and spend time in prayer with your Father in Heaven. Find ways to serve in your church. Continue to be generous and give to those who are need. Don't let this 40 day challenge just be for 40 days. We pray that through this journey you have developed habits and spiritual disciplines to help you continue to grow. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NIV)**

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Outwardly, our bodies, we are wasting away. That means that everyday we are one day closer to our last here on earth but there is good news. The Lord will renew you day by day on the inside. God will refresh your heart everyday! All you need to do is continue meeting with Him. If we fail to grow in our relationship with Jesus, things will continue to appear as Solomon noticed: "I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land." (Ecclesiastes 10.7)

Life is too important to let it pass by while letting those around us define the principles of how we should live; in retrospect, that is, always looking backwards on our action, is not how Jesus thought nor commanded us to live. The definitions being given today are creating chaos as they

are backwards. (The slaves are the ones riding). Yet for one to comprehend the life one is called to live, one must understand the life of Him who created.

Thus, in order to gain understanding, we must read scripture. The Bible offers the answers for our lives, our minds, our hearts, and our souls. Scripture is all-powerful, all knowing, and all encompassing. We hope that through this devotional you have been able to see, to experience, to realize the necessity of feeding on the Lord, both in Word and in Deed. For truly we must all remember that it is the Blood of Jesus that sets us free. So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8.31 – 32).

One of the greatest statements in the New Testament is, "fix our eyes". Paul uses that phrase in the verse above. Everyday we fix our eyes upon the Lord!

### **Hebrews 3:1 (NIV)**

*Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*

### **Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Paul further strengthens his idea of "fixing our gaze" through the idea of living a life worthy of our Lord. Look at Colossians 1:22- "But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight without blemish and free from accusation."

The main idea- to be above reproach, (accusation) and live a life worthy of God. The follower of Christ is not to be a part of the brainless herd. Instead, Christ calls His followers to be leaders of society through their service towards the 'other.' *Life in Christ through the Holy Spirit* presents the follower of Christ with the *Way* to live. That is, *being in Christ* presents us with the right or perverse action of free human beings, such a presentation—a performance—of the reality of the world's stage that will no doubt challenge our personal and social sense of "ought" through its positive or negative models. Jesus did not simply speak of hearing the message ΕΙ=ΠΕΝ ΔΕ. ΑΥΤΩ/ Ο` VIHSOU/Λ POREU,OU ΚΑΙ. ΣΥ. ΠΟΙ,ΕΙ Ο` ΜΟΙ,ΩΨΑ (Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.' – Lk 10.37). Jesus insisted –the verbs here are in the imperative (POREU,OU AND ΠΟΙ,ΕΙ)—that His followers *go* and *do* likewise thereby drawing upon the intimacy of one's faith and their actions. That their response to His words was and is manifested in *performance* – Ο[ΤΙ] QE,ΑΤΡΟΝ ΕΥΓΕΝΗ,QHΜΕΝ ΤΩ/ ΚΟ,SMW/ (spectacle unto the world – 1 Cor 4.9).

At the end of the day, all of us are equipped to be world-changers for Christ. We have all the tools and gifts to do it. Look at what Peter wrote.

### **2 Peter 1:3 (NIV)**

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

**So What?** (What will you do with what you read today?)

Our lives need to be saturated in and by the Word of God. We cannot follow the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus if we are not following His word. Let this day be the day you commit to the Lord to be in His word daily. Ask the Spirit to open your heart to the wisdom of the Lord and what He desires to speak into your life through His word.

As you reflect on God's wisdom and guidance for your life, take some time to reflect on this reality as you read through some of the following scripture.

Exodus 13; Deuteronomy 6; Proverbs 1, 2, 3, 8; Ecclesiastes 1, 12; Ephesians 4; Colossians 1; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 3; 4:1.