



*40 Days of  
Following Jesus  
Part 1*

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH



# 40 Days of Following Jesus

Part 1

*Lent Devotional* from  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
2022

Written by  
Pastor Joe Meyer



## **Day One - March 2nd**

### ***“From Death to Life”***

#### **Read Genesis 3:19 & 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**

I was talking with one of our members before worship services the other day and they mentioned that they had heard about an amazing “death to life” story. The initially sad-story they told me was about a baby that was presumed “stillborn” as we say it, and about the medical staff that then went from their labor-and-delivery-mode into their comfort-and-compassion-phase with the family. However, not too long after they told the family the terrible news and were preparing for appropriate and respectful handling of the child’s remains, the baby began to cry and was amazingly found to be healthy and whole and quite alive! Can you imagine the miracle? Can you imagine experiencing that? Said according to the point of this devotion...can you imagine going from death to life? Well, actually...you can. One of our most wonderful, and yet also distinctly odd traditions this time of year, happens on this day, the day that we have come to call “Ash Wednesday”. We will gather for mid-week worship and along with all of the normal things we do like hymns, songs, readings, prayers, preaching and the Lord’s Supper, we also experience what is called “the imposition the ashes”. Admittedly, it does feel a little strange having someone, even your Pastor, “schmudging” ashes on your forehead in the shape of a cross! But alongside the oddity of the annual trek forward for the “ash-schmudging”, the worship assistant or Pastor also says something as they make the ash-cross on your forehead...they proclaim...*“Dust you are and to dust you shall return”*. What? Dust you are...and to dust you shall return? What does that mean? The phrase is actually from Genesis 3:19...*“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out*

*of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

*“Dust you are and to dust you shall return”* simply means that at some point in our existence on life’s timeline, we will all return to the dirt that the Lord made us from in the beginning. In other words, we start our yearly Lenten Journey collectively admitting “Yep, I’m part of a fallen and broken world and my fallen-ness and broken-ness leads to one and only one place...my death.” Having said that...why in the world would we have an annual worship service to remember that? After all, it’s somewhat dismal, disheartening and depressing...to say the very least..and in a world that has shown us just about nothing other than dismal, disheartening and depressing things lately...we could do with something uplifting instead! And to that end we have to recognize that it really would be dismal, disheartening and depressing if you didn’t know the truth of “The Good News” and...the fact...that in Christ, while we remain “dust” we’ve nonetheless gone from death to life! To be sure, we must remember the reality of our fallen-reality and embrace the hard truth of our sinfulness and its by-product...but we do so each worship service not just as children of a fallen creation, but as children of the glorious resurrection! We know the end of the Christ-story and that at the end of the Season of Lent we will collectively proclaim *“He is risen...He is risen indeed!”* And as we do, we do so knowing that the proclamation *“He is risen!”* means that in Him and through Him, *“We are risen”* too! (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 above). In fact, in the cemetery, at the interment following funerals, we put the casket in the ground and say *“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust...”*, but we add an important qualifier: *“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust...in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of all flesh!”* As we start our Lenten Journey this year, we do so remembering that we have gone from the death of our sin to the eternal life in Him!

**Day One - March 2nd Questions**

***“From Death to Life”***

**Read Genesis 3:19 & 1 Corinthians 15:20-22**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Two - March 3rd**

***“Leave...Everything?”***

**Read Luke 5:27-32**

Many people are what we might call “all-in” people. By that I mean, when they dedicate themselves to something they do so with every fiber of their being. There’s no half-way for these kinds of people, rather, it’s always 110%, pedal-to-the-metal, full-steam-ahead. They are often intense and focused and loyal to the cause...whatever the cause may be. We all know people like this and maybe, just maybe, you’re one of them! Admittedly though, not everyone is that kind of a person. And since variety makes the world go round, we embrace the “all-in” people and the people that are, well, just a little less concerned about being “all-in” too. We take everyone just where they are at. Having said that, regardless of your personality type, if you’re a Christian, you are de-facto an “all-in” woman or “all-in” man! There are no part-time or half-way Christians! Regardless of your personal way of doing things, your personal dedication-level to the “stuff” of your life, as a Christian, you are always 110%, all-in, intense, focused and loyal to Jesus Christ. Notice in our reading from Luke five that Matthew the former-tax-collector, tells us this about his conversion to Christ: *“And leaving everything...he rose and followed him”* (verse 28). He didn’t leave “some things”! He didn’t leave a “few things” or even “most things”...no, Matthew the tax-collector left “everything.” And “leaving everything” was kind of a big deal for Matthew! Some scholars think that the way tax-collection worked back then was the tax-collector himself paid the taxes in advance and then exacted the taxes from the people afterward...plus a healthy portion for himself. You can understand why it was that this system led to abuses! The tax-collectors were acting as a sub-contractor-business, not as an employee of Rome, and therefore they took more tax *from* the people than they actually paid



for the people. Let's put it this way, it was a lucrative business because it involved taxes and the common people would have felt threatened by the possible the wrath of the Roman government if they did not pay the "tax... plus". So Matthew was certainly "all-in" on his job...namely the "job" of extracting money and a lot of money, from a lot of people. And yet, though it was a lucrative endeavor, Matthew nonetheless got up, walked away and left "everything" to follow Jesus. Why did he do that? Why in the world would he do that? Well, there's really only one explanation. The reason Matthew left it all behind can be found in the power of Christ's words to Matthew. Christ's all-powerful, faith-creating words were, "*Follow me!*" and those words created faith and moved Matthew from his seat at the taxable, empowering him to leave it all behind and be "all-in" for Jesus. And so it is with us. Christ's all-powerful, faith-creating words have been spoken into your heart and brought you to faith and those self-same powerful words caused you to then "leave it all behind" and follow Jesus. Now I realize your call was a little different from Matthew's since your call was through God's Word and Baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not a face to face encounter with Jesus. And I realize that unlike Matthew, you're not likely a professional, full-time church-worker. Nonetheless, you know what I mean, don't you? You are all-in for Jesus because each day as you do what you do in your every day life, you are doing so as a follower of Jesus. You are "all-in" because Jesus called you into faith and out of love for your Savior you are following Him every day...living your life for Him every moment...until that day that you follow Him into heaven itself! As we step into our Lenten journey this year we're reminded that Jesus called us into an all-in journey with Himself every day!

**Day Two - March 3rd Questions**

***“Leave...Everything?”***

**Read Luke 5:27-32**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

**Day Three - March 4th**  
***“Calling All Sinners!”***  
***Re-Read Luke 5:27-32***

Ask any human resource person in any business anywhere about hiring practices, and they'll all tell you that they are on the look out for the best, the strongest and the most qualified candidates they can find. They pour over resumes and recommendations and toss out the vast majority of the workers in favor of finding and hiring only the best of the best. They consider questions like: *“Who is it that is going to make our company better?”* *“Who is going to bring something special to the table?”* Not one of them would be willing to say or even consider *“We'll take any old slob that comes our way...we'll work out the kinks...it'll be fine!”* Even in the environment we find ourselves in with a worker shortage, nevertheless companies are still seeking those workers that will be a blessing and not a curse. And of course that same sentiment is lived out in all of our lives and in every way. We look for the best possible person to marry. We look for the best possible person to be in our friend group. We look for the best people to surround ourselves with because we have high standards...strict standards...and we won't compromise! So when we look back at this story of the conversion and call of the tax-collector Matthew, we might be a little confused by Christ's seemingly low standards for calling someone into service. Jesus said it this way in our text for today: *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:31,32).”* The Lord Jesus seems to have, so to speak, slept through His “HR Best Practices” class when He went through University! After all, the Lord Jesus was calling Matthew into the “righteousness business” so it seems to me that you'd want only “righteous people” in your “righteousness business”...right Jesus? But no, that's not the way the Lord works. He was not

looking for people who were righteous, but people who knew that they were not, people who had a good handle on their unworthiness and unrighteousness alike. You see, the religious people of Jesus' day thought they were righteous *in and of themselves*, but they were in fact, quite the opposite. Jesus wasn't looking for those kinds of people, people who thought they had it all together and had everything nailed down neat, when in truth the opposite was the case. Jesus was looking for people who had a healthy grasp on their sinfulness and more importantly, a healthy grasp on their need to be made righteous by Christ. The tax-collector Matthew was quite aware of his status as a sinner, after all, everyone around him would have repeatedly reminded him that he was. More than that however, his conscience told him the same. He knew *who* he was. He knew *what* he was. He knew what he'd done and the depths to which he'd allowed himself to sink. As such, he would have been the perfect candidate to be called by Christ, more importantly, the perfect candidate for the Christian faith. Jesus doesn't call people who fail to recognize their need for His love, mercy and forgiveness...but He does call people who know that they fail. He does call people like you and me. Jesus calls sinners, repentant sinners mind you, who not only have a healthy grasp on their humanity and fallen-ness but also a healthy grasp on Christ's willingness to accept and forgive but also empower sinners to live for Him. Pay close attention to that beautiful Gospel today! Do you think you're too sinful for Jesus? Christ thinks differently. Do others remind you of your sinful past? Christ forgives and forgets your sinful past. Do you sometimes despair that you'll never be able to clean yourself up, make yourself presentable, make yourself acceptable to Jesus? Good...He wants you just the way you are! Don't misunderstand, He won't leave you the way you are... He called Matthew *away* from his life of sin...and He calls you to that too. But He calls you nonetheless...just as you are...following Him...hearing, believing, trusting His forgiveness and mercy every day. And, just like

Matthew, He calls you to tell others of the Lord's amazing HR practices... tell others of His amazing grace! He calls you to tell others that Jesus is "calling all sinners" and calling them to a new faith-life, lived in and through Him every day!

## **Questions**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Four - March 5th**

### ***“Paradox”***

#### **Read Romans 6:1-5**

Christianity is a faith and life that is genuinely what we would call a “paradox”. A paradox is defined this way: *“A seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.”* That’s a great definition not only of the word “paradox”, but of the Christian faith itself! You see, as a Christian, you, yourself, are a paradox! As a Christian, you are both a “sinner” and a “saint” all at the same time! To which our brains say *“A sinner cannot be a saint...and a saint cannot be a sinner!”* But the Bible says, *“Oh, no, actually all Christians are indeed sinners and saints!”* It’s a paradox. Paul gets at that truth in the first five verses of Romans chapter six. Paul reminds us here that we are indeed sinners and that, left unchecked, we will embrace our sin instead of pushing it away and finding our sin as repugnant as God does. He reminds us that we should not in any way, shape or form wrap our arms around our sin and keep it close but instead, living for our sin should be the furthest thing from our minds. In fact, the Apostle uses one of the strongest phrases of his day to respond to the idea that we could “go on sinning” once brought to faith when he says *“May it never be!”* In truth, in doing so, he is certainly acknowledging that our sin clings to us the whole of our lives and that we’ll struggle with it every day...look at the whole of Romans chapter seven for a further explanation of that very thing. But Paul also reminds us of the Gospel here, namely, that indeed Christ has taken care of our sin and, our sin was “taken care of” at the cross and His forgiveness given to us in our baptisms. Paul writes *“Do you not know that all of us who have been*



*baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3).* Your baptism into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit connected you to the death of Christ! And the death of Christ was a death for the forgiveness of your sins and the sins of the whole world! When you were baptized you went from sinner only, to sinner-saint in God’s eyes as you were connected to the death of Jesus! And yet, Paul also reminds us that Jesus didn’t just die for our sins, He also rose again for our justification. What that means for us is indeed a connection to the resurrection of all flesh on the last day (verse five), but it also means that in the same way Jesus rose from the dead, we too are to rise from the deadness of our sin and walk with Him...or as Paul says it, *“walk in newness of life.”* In other words, we are sinner-saints, but we are called to live not only in the continual cycle of sinning, repenting and being forgiven, but, by the Holy Spirit’s power, given in baptism, also consciously living for Jesus every day. You are a sinner...you know that all too well...but you are also a saint in and through Christ! In other words, we are called to live for Jesus and do so every single day until that day that He returns and the “paradox” of our Christian faith no longer exists!

**Day Four - March 5th Questions**

***“Paradox”***

**Read Romans 6:1-5**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

***Sunday Devotion—March 6th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Love” and our theme is driven from 1John 4:13-21 and Matthew 5:43-48. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

## **Day Five - March 7th**

### ***“He Died For All?”***

#### **Read Romans 6:5-11**

When we hear stories of people who have freely given their lives for others, it really is an amazing thing. Typically, we as human beings strive to preserve our lives at all costs, and so when someone willingly gives up their life for another, it's amazing to say the least. One such person is a Marine known as Corporal Kyle Carpenter. In Afghanistan on November 21st, 2010, Corporal Carpenter willingly threw himself on a grenade that would have otherwise killed both him and the other Marine he was attempting to shield from the blast. He saw the grenade...he knew the danger...and without hesitation he jumped on the explosive to shield his comrade anyway. Amazing bravery, yes? In my opinion, amazing to say the least! Corporal Carpenter had a total disregard for his own safety and his own life in favor of providing the path to safety and long-life for his fellow Marine! Indeed, truly incredible what our American heroes are willing to do, yes? And you know we could literally find thousands and thousands of stories like this one! We could find stories, both military and civilian mind you, of people willing to give their life for another. What we will never, ever find however, is a story of someone giving up their life for *everyone*. Saved a few people? Lots of stories. Saved a lot of people? Still lots of stories. But saved ALL people? There are no stories like that because no one can do that! So many qualifiers go into that statement, but we know full-well that no human being can give their life in the place of *all* human beings! Unless...unless...unless...that human being was also God almighty, Maker of heaven and earth! Paul writes this about our Lord Jesus in our text from Romans 6: *“For the death he*

died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God” Romans 6:10. Notice the import of that statement! The death Jesus died was a “*once for all*” death. His death was a “once” death, never to be repeated because it was one that only Jesus could accomplish. But His death was also a “once” death because when Christ died He did so “for all”. In other words, the death Christ died not only *cannot be repeated* because there is only one Christ and one day of atonement for sin ordained by God. But the death Christ died also *does not need to be repeated* because He atoned for the sin of every man, woman and child that had-ever or would-ever live, making salvation available to all! Jesus said “*It is finished*” on the cross and indeed it was! He atoned, otherwise said, “paid for” your sin! He atoned for my sin! He atoned for the sin of everyone who had-ever or would-ever be brought into this world! Complete and total payment was made at the cross! And yes, He atoned for the sin of all Christians, that’s true. But in fact, He atoned for the sins of all people of all time. The Apostle John writes it this way: “*He is the propitiation (payment) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” 1John 2:2. He is the “once for all” payment indeed! Don’t get me wrong, Corporal Carpenter was and is an amazing human being and hero...no question about it! We thank God for women and men like him! But we stop in this Lenten Season to remember Jesus, because He was indeed the only one who would, the only one who could, die for all!

*\*\* (Just a final note to let you know that unbelievably, Corporal Carpenter actually lived through the grenade blast...he was torn, broken, blinded, and had surgery after surgery...but he is nonetheless quite alive! Since he lived through his act of heroism he’s also earned the Medal of Honor for his wonderful selflessness on behalf of another... and rightly so...Amen?)*

**Day Five - March 7th Questions**

***“He Died For All?”***

**Read Romans 6:5-11**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## Day Six - March 8th

*“What Sin?”*

### Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

If you live long enough in this world you will be hurt by someone. Could be a little hurt...could be a big one...could be a combination of both over the course of your lifetime! But you will be hurt, or said differently, someone will hurt you by sinning against you. In fact, if I asked you about that subject, you could likely name the people that have hurt you and the sins they've committed. You could likely even name the date, time and place of said hurt as well...right? Since that's likely true for you, ask yourself this then: *Have you truly forgotten the sins that people have committed against you?* I don't mean forgetting when your brother stole your lollipop kind of thing, I mean have you forgotten the things that you'd really consider “sins against”? Probably not. You'd be a rare person who could forget what happened or what hurt, and most of all, what individual brought the happening & hurting. With that as our life experience, it should be amazing then that the Lord Jesus indeed forgives and yes, forgets our sin. Paul writes in our text *“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” 2Corinthians 5:19.* Perhaps it isn't amazing. We know what the Lord did for us in Jesus. We know the truth of 2Corinthians 5:21 which reads: *“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”* That beautiful verse reminds us that on the cross God poured out His wrath on the sin of mankind but did so on the Savior of mankind and not mankind itself! God poured His wrath on Jesus thereby making it possible for Him to “not count” or said differently, “to forget” our trespasses against us because He counted them against Jesus instead! The truth of the Gospel is overwhelming when you realize that God has chosen to forgive and forget the sins that you have committed against Him. He definitely knows every sin we commit; He definitely could remember them and recall them all, one by one...instance, situation, date and time even! But He instead, on account of Christ, chooses to let it all go and forgive and forget. And when you remind Him of what you



did back then...He'd look at you and say "What sin? I don't remember that sin at all!" Now, I could move on and have you say a hearty "Amen!" to the amazing grace of your amazing God...but there is something more here. Did you notice in 2Corinthians 5:19 above that the Lord not only reconciled you to Himself through Jesus...but... also gave you the ministry of reconciliation? And what is a ministry of reconciliation? Well, it's many things. But it's certainly all of us becoming people who forgive...and forget. It's becoming more and more Christ-like by the power of the Holy Spirit within. It's becoming Christ-like to the point where you are enabled to say to those who have harmed, hurt, harangued, or harassed you... "*What sin?*"

**Day Six - March 8th Questions**

***“What Sin?”***

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day 7 - March 9th**

***“You are Mine!”***

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14,15 & Isaiah 43:1**

“Mine!” If you’ve been around toddlers...you’ve heard that said both loud and often! “Mine!” It’s a reminder that toddlers are generally and yes, quite vociferously, focused on themselves and what they deem as “Mine!” They intend to keep everyone else out of their throne room as they rule their little “kingdom” on earth with the ever-present chant “Mine! Mine! Mine!” In fact, in the Disney flick “Finding Nemo”, one of the more famous scenes incorporated this exact toddler-chant. In the animated classic, a small flock of seagulls who wanted the crab that a pelican had ahold of, were chirping “Mine! Mine! Mine!” in unison. The lion-share of the laughter at that scene both in theaters and in homes comes from the parents who have raised or are raising toddlers and have heard them say those very words dozens of times! Bless their little seagull-like-hearts! But parents probably shouldn’t be laughing too loudly at that scene nor at their children..because in truth, this self-centered “Mine...Mine...Mine!” attitude actually depicts more than just toddlers...it depicts us all. Unfortunately our sinful human nature is a very toddler-like and very, very self-centered. Even as adults we want what we want and what we want is what benefits us and builds our own little “kingdom” on earth. As those who follow Jesus however, we are called to live differently. The Holy Spirit wrote through the Apostle Paul “...and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” 2Corinthians 5:15. As followers of Jesus we are called to live every day for Jesus, and through Jesus, and to the glory of Jesus and His kingdom as well. So who I am and what

I own and what I want falls under His control, His leadership, His Lordship. The Lord has laid claim to our lives...in fact, the Lord has essentially said about us “Mine! Mine! Mine!” Isaiah 43:1 reads in part “*Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name... you are mine!*” Those words said about Israel so long ago are words that are also true about you and me! In Baptism the Lord has laid claim to, and yet, taken control of our lives as well. We are His! We belong to Him! And as His property, we therefore live every single day for Jesus and not for ourselves. But what does it mean to be “His property” or to “live for Jesus” every day? Quite simply put...we live for the One who died and was raised by loving others in His name. Jesus doesn't need anything from us...but our “neighbor” does. We live for Jesus as we act like Jesus in this world by living lives filled with the compassion and grace and mercy and generosity towards our fellow human being. We live for Jesus as we submit to Him and His will, and He then brings His compassion, grace, mercy and generosity through us...in order that others may experience and know the amazing grace of God in Christ and also hear, as we have heard, “*You are mine!*” from the Lord Jesus Himself!

**Day Seven - March 9th Questions**

***“You are Mine!”***

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14,15 & Isaiah 43:1**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## Day Eight - March 10th

### *“The Infection”*

#### Read Romans 5:12-18

One of the more frightening movies that I saw as a young boy was a movie titled “Andromeda Strain”. Andromeda Strain was a movie adapted from the 1969 Michael Crichton book with the movie version coming out two years later in 1971...and yes, I was just ten years old at the time! Super scary movie for the 1970’s, that’s for sure...super scary for a ten year old boy, no question about it! Long story short: A satellite returning from space brings with it extraterrestrial microbes which would “infect” human beings and effectively coagulate all the blood in their bodies, killing them in horrible fashion and leaving their blood looking something like sand coming out of their veins! In the movie, the “Andromeda Strain” was a very virulent and adaptive “infection”, and therefore became a plague of sorts, infecting person after person, and honestly, scaring the daylights out of me! I knew it was just Hollywood and just a movie...but it seemed very real and therefore very, very frightening! Of course, little did my naive ten-year-old-self know that I’d actually go through something similar with a global pandemic and a viral-infection called “Covid”. All that said, in truth, I didn’t need to see Andromeda Strain and we didn’t need to go through a global pandemic to understand the truth of an infection affecting people on a global scale! If you’ve ever read carefully what Paul is writing in Romans five, you quickly realize the scope of the spiritual-infection in our world. I regularly get the question *“Look, I didn’t do what Adam and Eve did...so why am I being punished for their crimes against God?”* Great question actually...but the answer reminds us that when we think of our sin and its consequence, we need to do so in a different light. We need to see Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden and the ensuing effect it had on all humanity more as an “infection” which they brought into the Garden, brought into our world. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, their sin opened the door for the infection of original-sin to overtake our world. The infection of original-sin would therefore be passed through the blood-lines to anyone born into our world and would bring two things: *1) Original sin brings the desire or drive to sin.* We know that we



have sin flowing through our veins because we see evidence of it in our behavior. We don't need someone to teach us to sin because we already know how and we know how from birth...so, sadly, we just get better at sinning over the course of our life. 2) *Original sin brings the by-product or consequence of sin.* The Bible is clear "*The wages of sin is death*" Romans 6:23. Notice that this is where Paul goes with his argumentation in Romans five. In effect, Paul is asking the question "*How do you know you're a sinner?*" Is it because you did exactly what Adam and Eve did by disobeying God or sinning against Him in the exact same way Adam and Eve sinned? "*No!*" Paul would say. The sin in your life definitely gives evidence of the sin brought into our world by our original parents, but Paul reminds us that instead of looking at what we do or don't do, you can know without a doubt that you're a sinner because...you...will...die. If you die...you are a sinner. Every person dies...so every person is a sinner! Way worse than a scary movie or even a global pandemic...all of us will die and if we are not connected to Christ's death and resurrection by faith in Him, we will die for eternity. Paul helps us however by writing this in verse eighteen: "*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men*" Romans 5:18. Notice that though we have inherited sin and death and "condemnation" from the first Adam...we have inherited righteousness and eternal life and "justification" from the "Second Adam". The "Second Adam", the Lord Jesus Christ, brought a remedy to the infection of sin as He came into our world to bring not condemnation but redemption; not death, but life! In fact, let me remind you of the totality of the amazing words of Romans 6:23! Paul reminds us of this truth there: "*The wages of sin is death... but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!*" In a scary, broken, sin-infected world...Jesus is our hope, our peace, our redemption, our righteousness, and yes...our ultimate cure for "*The Infection*"!

**Day Eight - March 10th Questions**

***“The Infection”***

**Read Romans 5:12-18**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Nine - March 11th**

### ***“Justification for All?”***

#### ***Re-read Romans 5:12-18***

After many, many years of witnessing my faith, one of the greatest objections posed to me about Christianity is that Christianity posits an exclusivity over-against all other religions or even over-against no religion at all. In other words, the exclusive nature of our faith flat-out bugs people, especially when you say things like “Jesus is the one and only way to get into heaven.” We live in a pluralistic society, which is a good thing of course, but it has gone awry in that our pluralism has brought the mantra “*You do you!*” which is shorthand for “*I can do whatever I want and you can’t tell me I have to do it your way!*” On top of that, when we claim exclusivity they then also see God has mean and hateful because He won’t simply fling-wide-the-doors and let everyone into heaven without qualification. Of course, as a Christian we can never somehow hide the truth of Christianity. There is an exclusivity to our faith and we have to own it and proclaim it even. After all, Jesus did say “*I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me*” *John 14:6*. Jesus said that...I didn’t...if you don’t like it you’ll need to take it up with Him. And don’t forget, Jesus also said as it is recorded in *Matthew 22:14*, “*...many are called, but few are chosen.*” But in saying that and remembering Scripture passages like *John 14:6* and *Matthew 22:14* and standing firm on God’s Word, I also completely understand how people get the wrong impression of our faith...the wrong impression of our God as well! I completely understand why they’d think Him “mean and hateful”. But nothing could be further from the truth. Don’t get me wrong, you’re not getting into heaven by any means other than Jesus. If you do not have Jesus as your Savior and Lord you’re not

setting foot into heaven and will instead be separated from God for eternity. And yes, sad to say, while many people will be in heaven, far more people will not be. We cannot soft-sell the truth. We can't. We do however need to make sure that it is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." You see, you can call God "mean and hateful" if you'd like, but you wouldn't thereby be correct. There is far more evidence to the contrary, evidence that points to the goodness and mercy and loving-kindness of our God and Savior. I took you back to Romans five primarily for verse eighteen: *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men"* Romans 5:18. I want you to take note of what God did for us through Jesus! While He knows full-well that not everyone will be saved, He nonetheless provided the avenue through which all might be saved! Through Jesus both the spiritual-righteousness we need and the eternal-life we want have been made available to us...made available to all! What an amazing truth that the Lord not only died for all...see Day Five's devotion...but He also provided righteousness and life for all when He died. Our God is good. Our God is great. He is merciful, loving, gentle and kind and in the face of our sin and sinfulness, provided righteousness and justification...for all. That amazing truth is captured in 1John 4: *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the payment for our sins"* 1John 4:9,10. That's amazing grace. That's Christianity. That's our God. While we proclaim the exclusive nature of our faith without apology, we also make sure this truth is proclaimed even louder...namely...that in sending us Jesus, God also sent justification for all!

**Day Nine - March 11th Questions**

***“Justification for All?”***

***Re-read Romans 5:12-18***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Ten - March 12th**

### ***“Who Are You Following?”***

#### **Read Ephesians 2:1-10 & John 14:15-17**

An interesting phenomena of our human existence lies in the fact that we are all “followers”. I know some will disagree with that statement, but it’s true nonetheless, we are all followers of someone or some thing or both. Regardless of your upbringing, your family of origin, your politics, your role in your work, your role in your home, your personality type...regardless...all of us are followers to one degree or another. Even the strongest leaders among us are followers of some kind. You may not be easily swayed into following, but you know I could list dozens and dozens of ways in which we get in line and follow tightly once we find something or someone we believe in. And I bring it up today because we are, with absolute certainty, spiritually-speaking, followers of one of two things... either the Lord Jesus...or the *“prince of the power of the air”*, known as satan. Here enters our text from Ephesians two. Notice that Paul writes *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...”* Ephesians 2:1,2. Notice that prior to our conversion to Christ, prior to coming to faith in Jesus, we were followers of satan. I’m confident that people don’t think that way about our human existence. Even Christians would struggle to say that their non-Christian friends are “following satan”, and yet, the Bible is clear here, if we’re not following Christ, we’re de facto following satan. People are simply going through their lives ambivalent to the fact that apart from Jesus they are followers of “the evil one” as Jesus would call Him towards the end of the Lord’s Prayer



(Matthew 6:13). Conversely, if you're a Christian, you are automatically a follower of Jesus! There is no category or type of Christian that is not a follower! There's no middle ground, no sideline, no part-time faith, no opting out of following Jesus! Jesus said it this way: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* John 14:15. If you love Jesus, and that's the definition of a Christian, you will follow Him, you will "keep His commandments" or, as Paul writes it in verse ten of Ephesians two: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"* Ephesians 2:10. Now before you wonder if you're even a Christian as you look at your life compared to that high-bar set by the Lord Himself, let me remind you that Jesus actually causes you to follow Him...even if you stumble and fall along the way. Remember the rest of our John fourteen reading here: *"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"* John 14:16,17. Does Jesus expect you to follow Him and live your life for His glory? Yes. Will you have days where you're following your sinfulness, for the world, and yes even for satan himself? Yep. But does Jesus give you the ability to follow Him by the power of His in dwelling Holy Spirit? Thanks be to God...the answer is also "Yes!" So if I ask you the question *"Who are you following?"* you can answer, *"By the power of the Holy Spirit...I follow Jesus!"*

**Day Ten - March 12th Questions**

***“Who Are You Following?”***

**Read Ephesians 2:1-10 & John 14:15-17**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

***Sunday Devotion—March 13th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Prayer” and our theme is driven from...Philippians 4:4-9 and Matthew 6:5-13. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

**Day Eleven - March 14th**  
***“Making Dead People Live”***  
***Re-read Ephesians 2:1-10***

The impression that many people have of our Christian faith is that we believe becoming a Christian is all about going from being a “bad person” to becoming a “good person”. Now, before I go further let me remind you of what we just talked about in the last devotion, namely, following Jesus. Following Jesus does in fact mean living differently than the rest of the world every day. Following Jesus does mean that you reject sinful behavior...hating sin and loving God...and doing more so every day until that day you cross the finish-line into heaven and stop sinning altogether. To say that God isn't about making “bad people” into “good people” would not actually be accurate. He does do that and then uses bad-broken-people in this bad-broken-world to show other bad-broken-people what He is all about, namely, repairing our bad, broken, self-centered selves and instead causing us to live His *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22,23) towards others every day. Another way of looking at that is to remember that Jesus said *“I am the Light of the World”* in John 8:12 but He also said that we are the light of the world in Matthew 5:14. In other words, we are in fact to be a direct reflection of who Jesus is...His life, His light, His love...in this world! Indeed, by the power of the Holy Spirit within, the Lord does make “bad people...good.” But hang on a second...where does that start because Christianity is not just about change in behavior through the Holy Spirit. In fact, immediately saying that Christianity would be best defined as God making a “bad-person into good-person” is “putting the cart before the horse.” We have to start elsewhere

when we consider what God has ultimately done for us in Jesus. Paul writes these amazing and wonderful, wonderful words in Ephesians two: *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved”* Ephesians 2:4,5. It’s simplistic to say that God is about making bad-people good! God did a much more amazing miracle in your life! When you became a Christian He raised you from the dead! Your sin and sinfulness makes you spiritually dead in God’s sight. He wasn’t about to have you die in your sin and so, in and through the Risen Christ, He has made you alive and done so right now! He raised you from the deadness of your sin and gave you not only eternal life in heaven, but also gave you His life right now! You walk...alongside Him. You talk...with Him. You live your life...through Him. You live your life...for Him. But all that is true, badness to goodness, because He has first, caused you to go from dead to alive in Christ! The truth of our Christian faith is that our Lord is all about making dead people live!

**Day Eleven - March 14th Questions**

***“Making Dead People Live”***

***Re-read Ephesians 2:1-10***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

**Day Twelve - March 15th**  
***“Eternal Perspective”***  
***Re-read Ephesians 2:1-10***

Perspective is important. As we live our lives in this world, we're often hindered by a perspective on life that is too narrow, too small. We generally keep our heads down and simply go to work or school...come home and have dinner...relax with a book or TV...go to bed and...start it all over again. Heads down, one foot in front of the other, our perspective is narrow and small. All too often we're just surviving every day to make it to the next day...or even...to make it to the day we retire and get off the buzzing, monotonous treadmill of our daily lives. I fully realize that this is the un-alterable reality for most of us, but I also want to remind you that our perspective on life in this world is directed and dictated by the fact that we are Christians! As Christians, we're inheritors of everlasting never-ending life! We're not just a student or a worker-bee or an employer or retired...or, insert wherever you are. Our lives as Christians are so much bigger than that! We're Christians, and so as mentioned in previous devotions, that means we are indeed followers of Jesus and called to live for Him by living through Him every day! Our lives are lived on mission for Jesus and so in other words, our lives are lived to give honor and glory to Jesus while proving Him to be the Lord of our lives. But even that truth about our lives is a perspective that's too narrow, too small! We have to stop walking through life with our heads down and instead, pick them up, lift them up, and see what is genuinely true about who we are. Paul writes these amazing words in Ephesians 2: *“(God) raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might*



*show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” Ephesians 2:6,7.* God not only raised us up from the deadness of our sin...see the previous day’s devotion...but He has also seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus! This is what we call the “now...not yet”. You are fully and completely an inheritor of eternal life...now! Heaven is yours and eternal life in heaven is yours...and it is so right now! Even though heaven is “not yet”, it is nonetheless our “now” as well! Again, I realize that we have a human-reality that life brings our way, day after day after day. I realize that there’s very little you can do to change that. And yet, when your perspective changes, so does your attitude, your actions and for that matter, your very life. Rather than simply making it through life, you’re truly living your life! Paul wrote these great words in Colossians three *“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” Colossians 2:2-4.* When we “set our minds on things that are above and not on things that are on earth”, our perspective has changed radically and we stop simply existing, and instead, we are genuinely living for the one who lived and died and rose again for us! When we focus on our future reality...our present reality has more meaning! When we have an eternal perspective...we can not only love our life in Him right now but we can live in hope of our life in Him to come!

**Day Twelve - March 15th Questions**

***“Eternal Perspective”***

***Re-read Ephesians 2:1-10***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Thirteen - March 16th**

***“Exactly What We Need!”***

**Read Colossians 3:12-17**

In recent days there's been a lot of talk about the 5G switchover that many if not most of the cell carriers are bringing online. What I've been hearing over and over again, besides the concerns of 5G interfering with airplanes, is that 5G will give us our information-tech at a super fast pace. We'll be able to read, view, download, and upload internet information even quicker than we are already doing! But hearing that, I'd have to ask the question...do we really need all that to begin with and then...do we need it faster? I get it. I'm clergy and my life and my world is somewhat different from many people and my internet needs are therefore much simpler. For some it's a matter of doing business in a more excellent way. For some it's a matter of streaming content that they truly need even better. But aren't we already consumed enough by the rapid-fire information that this world is pumping our way via the internet? Aren't we already at the point where it is overload and in many ways becoming a hindrance to our lives rather than a help? Besides that...didn't we learn from the wierdeties/oddities brought on by the pandemic that slowing our lives down might be a good idea? To that end, perhaps we should pick up a book instead of logging on...perhaps we should also take our time reading that book rather than racing through more websites at a higher speed? C'mon...should we pick up a book and slow down? You know the answer is "Yes". And of course I can confidently say that because I'm actually suggesting we do what God's Word calls us to here in Colossians three. Paul writes this: *“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”*  
*Colossians 3:16.* Notice that the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write  
“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” How does that hap-  
pen? Well, there are so many things I can suggest like being faith-  
ful in worship, being faithful in study and devotion, being faithful to  
God’s Word period. But I want to suggest something super simple...  
as I said earlier...let’s quite simply put down the internet and all the  
other ten-mazillion distractions in our lives and instead, all-together,  
pick up a book and slow down! Or should I say, let’s all-together pick  
up THE Book and slow down...and indeed, immerse ourselves in the  
“living and active” Word of God! Remember, you are not a follower  
of this world or a follower of the prince of this world, satan. You’re  
not a follower of your life-style or family or career or future. You are  
wholly and solely a follower of Jesus Christ! You are not only look-  
ing to Him for salvation, the salvation that He alone can give, but also  
for leadership, guidance, assurance, hope as you live every day! You  
are looking to Him to guide your life as you interact with the things  
of this world including the internet. How does that happen however?  
You know the answer already. You know how it is Christ moves you  
to follow Him, live for Him, glorify Him and honor Him. Let me just  
quote Paul again “*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly*”...let’s  
slow down and read a book, God’s book! “*Let the Word of Christ*  
*dwell in you richly*”...now that’s exactly what we need!

**Day Thirteen - March 16th Questions**

***“Exactly What We Need!”***

**Read Colossians 3:12-17**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Fourteen - March 17th**

***“What are you putting on?”***

***Re-read Colossians 3:12-17***

Needless to say perhaps, we all put a lot of effort into choosing, assembling and putting together the clothing that we put on every day before we go out the door. We all put a lot of time and effort and certainly money into “looking nice”...“looking appropriate”... “looking professional”...you name your reason...we all have something that drives us to care. To be sure of course, each person prioritizes it differently. Some are all-in, shifting wardrobes as often as the seasons change. Some, are not quite that all-in on the things that they choose to wear and are simply more pragmatic about it. Amazingly however, even those of us that say we don’t care about that “external stuff”, still really do care what people think about what we put on when we walk out the door each day. I mention it because I’m actually one of those who is all-in on caring what people think about us and about what we put on. Oh, I’m not a clothes-hound, never have been, so I definitely fall into the “careless” rather than the “care-more” category about clothing. But I am nonetheless all-in on caring what people think, what people see, what people experience...by what we “put on”. I think you realize I’m not talking clothing now. I’m not talking about putting on clothing but putting on Christ-like attributes and attitudes and actions. Paul writes it this way in our text *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...” Colossians 3:12*. Notice the external attributes, attitudes and actions that Christians are called to be concerned about! Whether you’re a season-shifter when it comes to the clothing you put on or you’re wearing clothes from a



by-gone era and just making it work, as a Christian, all of us together are to be concerned about putting on the attitudes, attributes, and actions of the Lord Jesus described here. Of course the clothing imagery is so helpful here because we all know ourselves all too well! We all look in the mirror every day and therefore know who we really are! We know that our human-nature or our sin-nature produces the antithesis of this beautiful list of amazing “Christ-clothes” from Colossians three. *Compassionate hearts?* Often we’re thinking of ourselves more than others. *Kindness?* Sometimes we can be genuinely mean. *Humility? Meekness?* Sometimes we’re embarrassingly prideful. *Patience?* Well...do I really need to go there? Truth is, if we had to “produce” these things from within us, we simply couldn’t do it, at least not with any consistency. But Paul’s words here remind us that as a Christian you’ve been given this brand new wardrobe...a “Christ wardrobe”...one you don’t have to produce yourself! You’ve been given a “Christ wardrobe” and it’s a beautiful wardrobe at that! Your wardrobe includes compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience and even more! A wardrobe that our world will delight to see...it’s completely opposite of what they normally experience! A wardrobe that our world desperately needs to see...these attributes are so rare in our day and time, right? The wonderful truth of your Christian faith is that as a follower of Jesus, you have all of these attributes and even more in your “closet”...you quite simply have to put them on!

**Day Fourteen - March 17th Questions**

***“What are you putting on?”***

***Re-read Colossians 3:12-17***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Fifteen - March 18th**

### ***“Dying to Live”***

#### **Read Romans 12:1,2**

When you consider our world, and in particular, the United States of America, we are a people that will do whatever it takes to avoid dying. Now, I don't mean avoiding a hard and painful death, all of us should be in on that, and I get it. I also don't mean avoiding death so that our loved ones do not suffer, an equally important thing to strive for and hope for. I simply mean we do whatever we can to avoid what is quite frankly, inevitable. Death is coming your way...you can't change that...you can't even alter it's timing... but people try! We fight dying tooth and nail and we do so every day. We exercise, we eat right, we avoid things that are bad for our health...all in a effort to stop or at least slow the aging-dying process. Now, I bring it up because the opposite of this attitude of “self-preservation” is found in God's Word and therefore in the life of the Christian. Of course, it's not that we want to physically die... just like everyone else, we don't. For the very same reasons we're just like everyone else when it comes to exercising and dieting and avoiding vices! We want to protect our health and protect our loved ones from our health failing...just like everyone else. But every morning when Christians get out of bed, they are not like everyone else. Every morning when Christians get out of bed they are indeed “hoping to die” or said differently “dying to live” all day, every day. I think you realize I mean “hope to die” or “dying to live”... in a spiritual sense. Said a little more fully...every Christian hopes to die to themselves and instead live for God and glorify Him. Paul writes it this way in our text from the first verse of Romans 12: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present*

*your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” In this one, single verse, Paul gets at the life of the Christian because the life of the Christian is dying to self. Jesus would tell us that very thing in Matthew 16:24,25: *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’”*

Notice that the life of the Christian isn’t simple “denial of self” as if I can say “No!” to chocolate and be fulfilling Christ’s command to “deny myself”. No, Jesus is clear here...denying self is in fact dying to self, hence the “take up your cross” and “follow me”. In Jesus’ day and time “taking up the cross” meant one thing...dying. No one came back from a crucifixion...they took up the cross to die. And so it is with us. In our life lived in Christ and in our service to our Lord, we sacrifice ourselves, meaning setting aside our pride, our egos, our anger, our prejudice, our bad-habits, our distractions, our sins of all kinds. We sacrifice our very lives as we seek to follow Jesus and serve Him and His Kingdom instead of our own. In service to our Lord, we die to ourselves and live for Him instead! And in fact, “dying to live” is perhaps, in the truest sense, a phrase that describes Christianity. Every day, dying to self and living for Jesus. We are a “living-sacrifice” as we give up ourselves, our will, our very lives, in honor of the one who died...that I might live!

**Day Fifteen - March 18th Questions**

***“Dying to Live”***

**Read Romans 12:1,2**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

**Day Sixteen - March 19th**  
***“Beautiful Transformation”***  
***Re-read Romans 12:1,2***

When I was in grade school I was very blessed to have teachers who not only pushed us to be involved in the process of education but also gave us opportunity to be involved in the process as well. To that end I was asked by my fourth grade teacher if I'd like to serve in the kiln room helping to fire the pottery that came from all the little “artists” in our school. I willingly took on the job and served my fourth, fifth and sixth grade years. I have very fond memories of that three year's worth of volunteer-work to this day...amazing that I remember...I began kiln duties in 1971 after all! Since that wonderful time in my childhood however, I have always been enamored with the artistic expression found in pottery. By that I mean I have always been amazed as an artist takes a lump of clay...grey, slimy, life-less clay...and out of that lump makes something useful and wonderful and down right beautiful! When I consider what the Holy Spirit wrote in Romans 12:2 I cannot help but think of “potter and clay” imagery as it is so pervasive in Scripture and even in Romans itself. Romans 12:2 reads: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* When I think of what is written here, *“be transformed”*, my mind can almost see the hands of our Lord and Savior Jesus molding and shaping a piece of clay... you and me...into the useful and wonderful and beautiful piece of art that He wants us to be. Remembering from God's Word that we were *“dead in our trespasses and sins”* we can honestly say that the Master Potter took our “grey, slimy, life-less clay” and made



it into something that is useful for His purposes and for His glory as well! In fact, my mind goes to Ephesians 2:10 that reads *“For we are his workmanship...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* The word used for “workmanship” means “piece of artwork”! Isn’t that fantastic imagery! Read it that way: *“For we are His piece of artwork!”* Our Master Potter is indeed molding and shaping us into the vessels, into the artwork, that He wants us to be. Okay, so if that’s transformation, what does it mean to conform? When Paul wrote this verse from Romans 12 what then does *“Do not be conformed to this world”* look like? Using my potter and clay imagery, my mind goes to a lump of clay that is all by itself...a lump of “grey, slimy, life-less clay” with no one working it, no one forming it, no one caring for it at all. As it sits there all alone and day after day, it begins to dry and crack and harden until...the only thing you can do is pitch it in the bin for trash day. But that’s not us Christian. No Christian should be by themselves. No Christian should be a lump unto themselves. No Christian should be away from the hands of the Potter. Christians instead, willingly and obediently place themselves under the mighty, caring, creative hands of our Creator and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we do...we become beautifully transformed and become the artwork He desires us to be!

**Day Sixteen - March 19th Questions**

***“Beautiful Transformation”***

***Re-read Romans 12:1,2***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

***Sunday Devotion—March 20th—Sundays in Lent are celebrations of the Resurrection and as such are not included in the devotions for Lent. Our theme for this weekend is “Follow Me to Patience” and our theme is driven from Galatians 5:16-20; Matthew 5:38-42. Consider the theme and read ahead to further bless your worship experience!***

## **Day Seventeen - March 21st**

### ***“Running the Race”***

#### **Read Hebrews 12:1,2**

Not all of us are runners but we all understand the ins and outs or basic-concepts of distance running. We live in a world filled with people that take their health very seriously and therefore we know people who spend time maintaining their fitness by distance running...even if it might be on a treadmill from time to time. We see them on the roadways, in the gym, in our neighborhoods, running their daily routine. One thing you'll immediately notice about serious runners is that they run with very little physical-encumbrance whatsoever. In the Summer they wear very light shirts, shorts and shoes. They make every effort to make sure they aren't hindered by what they're wearing but can instead, run freely and fluidly. In fact, even in the winter when there are those that are brave enough to run out-of-doors even though it's frigid outside, nonetheless they have far less outer-wear than you'd expect them to, just so they can run effectively and efficiently. They wouldn't think of carrying a box filled with heavy weights when they run! They wouldn't dream of running with a large, heavily-loaded, back-pack! They would never submit to a binding of their ankles and knees with thick rope! They would instead, run as the writer to the Hebrews has put it in verse one: *“...let us also lay aside every weight... and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”*. If you want to run and run with endurance, then you have to set aside every weight...there's no option for doing differently. Encumbered runners don't get far! Encumbered runners burn out quick! Weigh down even the best of runners and they will suffer. But okay...this is Hebrews chapter twelve and a “spiritual race” we're talking about...so what is the

writer referring to here? The complete text gets at that quite simply: “...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”. Notice that the writer, writing by the Holy Spirit to Christian people, calls them nonetheless to “lay aside...every weight and sin that clings so close...”. I say that because even though you have been brought into “the race” by Christ...even though He baptized you and made you His own...nonetheless you will struggle with worldly “weight” and “sin which clings so close”. You will struggle with the things of this world and the sin of your heart. You will struggle and it will cause you to falter, stumble and fall as you run the race. And yet, by the Holy Spirit’s power you can and you will set aside the things of this world and run and run well! You will be enabled to offload the things that are holding you back from running effectively, and be moved to run away from the sins that are more like barbed wire around your legs than they are rope! The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that there are so many Christians that have gone before us to remind us of how it is done and how it is not done. But far more importantly, far more importantly, you have the power of the Holy Spirit to guide, direct and empower you as you continue “running the race”!

**Day Seventeen - March 21st Questions**

***“Running the Race”***

**Read Hebrews 12:1,2**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

**Day Eighteen - March 22nd**  
***“Founder AND Perfecter”***  
***Re-read Hebrews 12:1,2***

It’s intriguing how sometimes, just a few words can convey extremely deep and amazing truths. Think about how careful we are about saying those three words “I love you”. We don’t go on a first date with someone and blurt out “I love you!” at them because those three small words are packed with meaning and reserved for those we genuinely love. Just three words but three words packed with meaning. How about the opposite sentiment, still just three words, but now “I hate you!”? Same idea...just three words but three words with a very big meaning...in a completely opposite direction from the first example of course! Now, I bring it up because this concept is a very important concept for studying and understanding God’s Word. This concept is a very important reality when you’re studying God’s Word and doing your level best to understand how He works from His Word. Unfortunately, people all too often hustle over the words of Scripture and do so simply in an attempt to be diligent in getting through their Bible reading time. But we are always best served by God’s Word when we take a deep breath, slow down and read carefully. Our text (Hebrews 12:2) is one such instance of slowing down and reading the wording carefully, but more than that, being bowled over by meaning of these three words! Just three words: “Founder and Protector”. These words are spoken here of the Lord Jesus...in fact, this is that very famous we have forever been memorized as “Fix your eyes on Jesus...”. The writer calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus but then then he reminds us that this One, this Jesus we’re fixing our eyes on, is the “Founder and Perfecter” of our faith! Just three words about Jesus, but three words filled with meaning! He is the “Founder” of our faith in Him.



Remember that Ephesians 2:8,9 tells us that both the “grace” and the “faith” we have in Jesus are not something we produce in ourselves but are both, a “gift from God”. Jesus is the “Founder” of your faith in that He not only provided you with His grace at the cross, but also provided you with the faith to believe in His grace. Jesus is the “Founder” of your faith in that apart from Him you can do nothing (John 15:5)...including simply believing in Him for your salvation. What an amazing truth that God indeed causes us to be “born again” as Peter would write in 1Peter 1:3! But remember there’s an “and” in between the two words “Founder/Perfecter”! Jesus didn’t just start, author, or bring about your faith...He did do that...but He is also the “Perfecter” of your faith as well! Jesus walks with you, talks with you, but also moves you to live out the faith He’s given you as you live out your life for Him in this world! Paul reminded us in Galatians 2:20 *“I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me!”* Amazingly, Jesus doesn’t simply save your soul, He sanctifies your soul too. He doesn’t simply save you and then send you on your way to “behave” and “keep your nose clean”. No, He lives inside you as the “Perfecter” of your faith. There’s an “and” there...reminding us of Christ’s continuous work in our lives, saving us from sin and furthermore causing us to hate sin and love Him more every day, until that day we see Him face to face in heaven itself. Words are important. “Founder and Perfecter”...just three words...but three amazing words that remind us of our amazing God and His amazing grace for us!

**Day Eighteen - March 22nd Questions**

***“Founder AND Perfecter”***

***Re-read Hebrews 12:1,2***

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Nineteen - March 23rd**

### ***“A Lasting Legacy”***

#### **Read Philipians 1:19-26**

People often have a desire to leave behind what is commonly called “A lasting legacy”. What is meant by that phrase is that when they die they want people to remember them, but remember them for a very specific thing and for a very long time, hence “lasting legacy”. Here in Des Moines we recently had one such situation in the life of a man by the name of Allan Knudsen. Some of you may have even known or, known-about, Allan...I did not prior to his death. But watching the local evening news I found out about Allan’s impressive legacy, admittedly, even if Allan didn’t think of it that way. By all accounts Allan was a great human being, working with the Make-A-Wish foundation, as it was reported, to provide wish-granting to hundreds of terminally ill Iowa kids. He had a hand in getting the “Jolly Holiday Lights” in place out at Adventureland, Altoona. More than that, he took a personal interest in the kids he served and went way beyond what would be expected of a normal volunteer in any organization. Allan sounded like he was indeed a wonderful human being...and he has left behind an amazing legacy as proof of it! Now for us as Christians, we too want to leave behind a legacy. Of course, it could be something like working with Make-A-Wish, a worthy endeavor to be sure. But for us as Christians, it’s way bigger than that! As Christians our legacy actually has very little to do with us since our legacy is indeed a life-lived, but a live-lived honoring, glorifying, praising, and proclaiming the Lord Jesus and not ourselves. Paul writes this in our text: “...as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death” *Philipians 1:20*.

Notice that Paul wants to leave a legacy and even a lasting-legacy as he writes “...*by life or by death*”! Paul wants to leave a legacy in and through everything he does and says for the whole of his life and even into his own death. And remember, what Paul is writing is not just his own personal legacy but is in fact, the legacy of every Christian! Just like Paul, every Christian desires, “...*by life or by death*” to leave the exact same lasting-legacy of the Lord Jesus. What is that lasting-legacy? A thankful community forever remembering me? Nope. A laundry list of good deeds done that people will forever associate with me? Nope. No Christian...our lasting-legacy is a life-lived not for my own glory but for the glory of Jesus! Our lasting-legacy as Christians is to live and die in such a way as to tell the world of the love of God found only in Jesus, both in words and in deeds. Our lasting-legacy is an important one, but one which points away from myself and points to the one who loved me and gave Himself up for me! And isn't that what we want people to remember about us anyway? We want them to remember that we were who we were and we did what we did solely and wholly because of the amazing grace of our amazing God...in Christ! His lasting-legacy to us!

**Day Nineteen - March 23rd Questions**

***“A Lasting Legacy”***

**Read Philipians 1:19-26**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?

## **Day Twenty - March 24th**

### ***“Counter-intuitive”***

#### **Re-read Philippians 1:19-26**

Have you ever come across something that is written or said and thought to yourself *“Wait...that simply doesn't sound right!”* Something that when you read it or hear it that frankly sounds, as many say it today, “counter-intuitive”. Counter-intuitive is a great description which simply means *“Something that is contrary to intuition or to common-sense expectation (but often nevertheless true)”* (Taken from the Google dictionary). In other words, for something to be “counter-intuitive” means that it doesn't make sense but you realize that though you don't understand or even agree with it...it's often nevertheless true. Here enters one of the more famous “counter-intuitive” phrases or sentences ever penned! Paul writes words that go against the grain of our society and everything that we hold dear. Paul writes those famous words *“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain”* *Philippians 1:21*. We may understand that death is inevitable, but we know full-well that it's a product of the fall into sin and is thereby not a good thing! We know that there is a 100% surety of taxes...and death...but we don't normally associate death with positive thoughts, bliss or happiness. Death = gain? That's not been my experience with death. In my experience, death = pain! Pain for the family. Pain for the friends. Pain for the Lord who never intended for us to die even! Remember that the shortest verse in the Bible and yet one of the more amazingly meaningful verses is *“Jesus wept”* (*John 11:35*). Why did Jesus weep when He knew that Lazarus would rise from the dead? Because death is not a good thing...death is the product of sin! Indeed, death = pain...and Jesus felt its sting that day as He watched Mary, Martha and their friends suffer because of it. And yet, Paul



writes “death = gain”. So what gives here? How do we interpret this? We do so by remembering that admitting the inevitable defeat brought by our death doesn’t diminish the victory that our death brings too. We often say it this way *“Death is the portal to eternal life”*. Google dictionary was right, this counter-intuitive sentence *“For to me to live is Christ but to die is gain”* is *“nevertheless true”*! And it’s true because Jesus not only died on the cross for our sins but furthermore rose from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25)! Jesus died on the cross for...our...sins. Jesus rose from the dead for...our...justification. In other words, Jesus died and rose again so that death, while still painful and difficult, could nonetheless be positive and wonderful and yes, could also be “gain” as Paul writes it! Death is a product of sin but at the cross and the grave the Lord Jesus defeated death for us and so while our loved ones and friends will still hurt, we will not! John writes about heaven this way: *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”* Revelation 21:4. Obviously, when you read that description of heaven, while Paul’s famous sentence sounds counter-intuitive, it is nevertheless obviously quite true! Because I belong to Jesus I can confidently say... *“For to me to live is Christ and...to die is gain!”*

**Day Twenty - March 43th Questions**

***“Counter-intuitive”***

**Re-read Philippians 1:19-26**

How would you explain this concept or Bible passage to someone else?

What amazes you by these words or this truth?

What questions does this concept or Bible passage raise?

What will you do differently as a result of the truth of this passage of the Bible?



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