

questions
for the MODERN • DAY
skept[!]c
d e v o t i o n a l s



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Lent Breakthrough Prayer

Lord God, lift my gaze away from myself to see you
and to see the needs in the world around me.
Move me from apathy and stubbornness to obedience;
breakthrough any barriers so I can be wide open
to your possibilities for my life, our community,
and your world. Fill me with your Holy Spirit
so I act with courage and conviction
on your call in my life and for our church.
It is the powerful name of Jesus Christ
our Lord I pray, Amen.

*Many thanks to our writers who made this devotional possible and to our proofreader, Breanna Brothers. Devotions are also available online at legacyumc.org/connect/devos or daily on our facebook page LegacyUMC.
If you are interested in joining the team, please contact Amanda at Amanda@legacyumc.org.*

Day 1 - Read Mark 1: 1-13

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus by calling people to repentance. This call to repentance remains the same today within our hearts. When we heed the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit and humbly repent, this clears the way for Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit to be present in our lives now.

“... Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD’S coming! Clear the road for him!’” (Mark 1:2-3 NLT).

Can you think of a time when you let go of some sin you had been harboring, and after confessing with an honest heart, you felt the freeing presence of God? Is there anything you are hanging on to now?

Staying humbly aware of our own sins allows God to keep us perfect in Him.

Colette Leingang

Day 2 – Read Mark 1:14-28

“Immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went away to follow Him.” (Mark 1:20 NASB)

John Wesley’s notes on this verse say, “Happy they who follow Christ at the first call!” I have to admit, I was not always open to that call, including in my relationships. Sometimes, it took hearing aids to get the message!

The word “consequences” comes to mind. There were too many times in my life when I found a man an overwhelming attraction and rushed headlong into a relationship. Their charm, good looks, wealth, sense of humor, (fill in the blank), left me breathless and not the least concerned about what lay ahead because, “we could handle it together.” The problem was that I never asked Christ to “Lead me.” I just asked, “Please, give me.” It wasn’t until I found myself a single mom that the outcome of my decisions opened my ears (and eyes) to the fact that only through God was I able to handle all life sent me.

I discovered that time spent in Bible study, prayer, faith sharing, and God’s quiet embrace finally turned up the volume on my hearing aids. I was increasingly aware of the path that God had always planned for me. I was open to His promptings and guidance. What a blessing! Life is happier, simpler, and abundant now.

Do your hearing aids need batteries? I would encourage you to pray, fast, dive into God’s word, join a Bible study, etc., and turn up the volume on the message the good Lord is sending your way right now – Right Now - RIGHT NOW!

Patty VerDouw

Day 3 - Read Mark 1: 29-39

We tend to be a very busy people. We exercise, go to work, run around getting our kids to school and different activities. We almost have to have our schedule completely packed to feel like we are keeping up with everyone else. If you listen to some successful leaders though, you would be amazed at their schedules. Bill Gates once thought the only way to do things was to have every minute of his schedule packed. Warren Buffett taught him the importance of giving yourself time to think. Mr. Buffett's weekly calendar will regularly only have 3 or 4 things on it. Richard Branson believes that being intentional about taking time away from your to-do list helps you to think and feel.

These are not revelations that these successful people came up with themselves. Jesus was doing this 2,000 years ago. Jesus had many people fighting for his attention and time. He could have easily filled every minute of His day talking with and helping those around Him. However, He knew the importance of taking time for Himself. We see it in today's verses, but we can also find it throughout the Gospels. Jesus would frequently go off by Himself to a solitary place. This was His time to think and to talk with God. He was also setting an example for His disciples and for us. Whether you're a business person or not, we all need to take time to gather our thoughts, visit with God, and recharge before getting back to our busy schedules. My prayer for you is that you can learn from Jesus and carve out time each day just for you.

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 4 – Read Mark 1: 40 – 45

God asks a lot from his people. When I read that Jesus told the leper to “Say nothing to anyone” after he was healed, my first thought was -- well, that’s never going to happen. I cannot keep a secret. I tell all of my friends – don’t tell me secrets, please! I try, but often I fail. Personally, I would have blasted my healing out on Facebook, texted all of my friends and relatives, and possibly put an ad in the Tribune. Who can keep news like that to themselves? Just take a moment to think. Leprosy isn’t all that prevalent in this age, but if Jesus had touched me and removed all wrinkles and age spots -- I wouldn’t have been able to keep that quiet, either.

Following the leper’s big reveal, Jesus has to live the life of a celebrity – hiding from people, no longer able to move about freely. That was an unfortunate byproduct of a public, splashy, no nonsense miracle. I wonder if, even though the celebrity was unwelcome, the knowledge of His divinity was a secret that had to come out. It was time for people to begin to think of Him as the Son of God. By performing this miracle, Jesus is aligning himself with His Father’s house. He was letting people begin to think that He was the Son of God they had been waiting for.

God does ask a lot of his people. Keeping secrets will never be one of my virtues.

Diane Dyk

Day 5 – Read Mark 2:1-12

As I sit here, imagining what this scene must have looked like I find myself mulling over the places of each character and their roles in this story.

Jesus is in a house and speaking to a large crowd of people. He is speaking truth into their lives in a way that they had not encountered before, and it enraptured them. **Are we enraptured with the truth of Christ even yet today?**

As the friends of this man were trying to get in, the crowd, hearing the Gospel from the very mouth of Christ, was apparently unmoved by the needs of the man on the stretcher. **Do we notice the needs of those around us as we gather to “do church?”**

Finally, the most powerful part of this story for me came in Jesus’s interaction with the religious leaders. When I considered his response to those who rebuked him for reaching out to this man with the gift of forgiveness, I realized perhaps for the first time, that this wasn’t a “gotcha” moment. He was not trying to “shove it” to the religious leaders. Rather, it may have been an olive branch to those of us who struggle with faith. Some of us have a continuous mental dialog of doubt and uncertainty. People like me who don’t want to be taken in by the newest false teacher, approach anything new and exciting with skepticism. Rather than responding in anger, Jesus chose to offer proof of his message. Through this act of grace and compassion, the entire community is brought closer to the Father: the person whose needs were all encompassing, the four hopeful men who made a huge effort for their friend, and also the skeptical, lifelong religious people like myself who needed just a little extra help with their faith.

Willow Hall, in collaboration with Amanda Rue

Day 6 – Read Mark 2:13-17

“He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.” (Mark 2:13-14 ESV)

I wonder what I would do if Jesus, a man who I had never seen before, came up to me and said, “Follow me.” Would I be like Levi, and drop everything without any consideration of family or work obligations? To trust a stranger so completely? Sure, I claim to follow Jesus now without never having seen his face, but He also didn’t ask me to give up my livelihood or my family to do it.

At least not yet.

Truth is, I don’t identify with Levi or the other disciples as much as the many others in the gospels who declined Jesus’s offer. Had I lived back then, and if I were the same person then as I am now, I would weigh the pros and cons of following Him, and in the end the worldly cons might outweigh the spiritual pros.

For now, the worldly cons are not as scary as in Jesus’s time or in other parts of the world. I live in a country where following Jesus isn’t a life or death decision. I don’t have to sacrifice anything to do it—other than some pride now and then (and that’s hard enough, thank you very much).

I hope if that ever changes, and Jesus asks me to follow Him without hesitation or qualification—and knowing the consequences could be dire—I will be like Levi: a sinner who understands the spiritual pros far, far outweigh anything this world can offer.

Andra Marquardt

Day 7 – Read Mark 2:18-28

“And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27 ESV).

It's easy to get caught up in the letter of the law. I sometimes think that I need to do all the things, to abide by all the laws. After all, we have the Ten Commandments, not the Ten Suggestions. As a land surveyor, I am supposed to know all the rules and regulations of the state, and various counties and municipalities with regard to property. I love math which has set, concrete rules that can't be violated without consequences. As such, I understand the importance of following the law in my spiritual life as well as my physical life. When I fail (inevitably), I mentally flagellate myself for not doing better. For not being better.

But am I missing the point?

The Pharisees did. By making sure they and everyone else followed the letter of the law, they forgot the spirit of the law.

Exodus 20:8-10a says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” (ESV)

The point of the Sabbath is to keep it holy. Not working is supposed to be an expression of that holiness. One can keep the Sabbath holy while still doing what's necessary, just as the disciples did. They worked alongside Jesus, God in the flesh. What could be more holy than that?

The same goes for the rest of us. We must be ever mindful to avoid the trap of focusing on the letter of the law. It often ends up at the expense of both the intent and spirit of the law, and we lose sight of God's grace.

Andra Marquardt

Day 8 – Read Mark 3:1-12

“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.” (Mark 3:1 NLT)

This is from the portion of Jesus's story where the Pharisees are trying to catch Him doing something terrible, like doing good on the Sabbath. While teaching the Pharisees a lesson, Jesus goes on to heal this man's hand. What I love about this story is that Jesus did not ask this man first if he believed Jesus to be the Messiah, or who he believed Jesus was. His faith, or even lack of, wasn't discussed. Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath because it was right.

In many of the stories we have of Jesus, He healed people first and they believed second. Sometimes as Christians, we wait for people to walk through the church doors before we take care of them or show them Jesus' love. However, for some, they need to be loved first in order to believe second. If you see some good that needs to be done, even on the Sabbath, Jesus modeled what to do -- love others, whether they are fellow believers or not.

Bethany Whitworth

Day 9 – Read Mark 3:13-19

- 1) What did it mean to be called by Jesus in Bible times?
- 2) What does it mean to be called by Jesus now?
- 3) What does it mean to “go into the world” to share the good news under the authority and power of Jesus (see also Matthew 28:16-20)? What might similar work in our own strength look like?
- 4) Who is in your “world?”
Pray: Heavenly Father, I pray for _____ (fill in the blank with the name of someone who comes to mind) today. I pray that he/she would grow in the grace and knowledge of you, for your glory. Use me to point him/her to the cross and to your word. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

Amanda Rue

Day 10 – Read Mark 3:20-35

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (Mark 3:24-25 ESV).

Although these verses illustrate the illogic of Satan acting against himself and how a house or kingdom divided cannot stand, it's a wise caution for us as individuals as well.

The world constantly pulls us in one direction while God seeks to pull us in another. Sin versus righteousness. Yet how often do we want a little of both? Surely God won't begrudge me a little taste of this sin over here as long as I practice some righteousness over there, will he?

Sometimes I am like a dog who chases a ball and sees a squirrel. I freeze, torn. Should I keep my eyes on the ball or go after the squirrel? I am double-minded, uncertain.

James warns against being double-minded: “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”(1:8) And, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy with God.” (4:4). Revelation 3:15-18 further warns against being double-minded: “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

To pause can be good when tempted by the squirrel (the world), however. As long as we don't pause too long. That moment can remind us that the ball (God) is safer. Unlike the squirrel, it doesn't bite or scratch, and there's no potential for rabies.

God's ways may not always be as exciting, but they are eternally safer.

Andra Marquardt

Day 11 – Read Mark 4:1-25

Growing up as a farm kid, I always loved the parables where Jesus spoke of growing crops or raising livestock as he did here in Mark 4. I could understand these parables and Jesus didn't seem 2,000 years away on the shores of Galilee. Even if you have only grown vegetables or a lawn, the meaning of this story seems rather straightforward. We might wonder like Jesus did out loud in verse thirteen though. Don't these disciples get anything?

Our Bibles clearly explain the parable of seed falling on different soil types. In fact, the red typeface indicates Christ explained directly to the disciples it depicted how some received the Word of God.

Easy for us to judge them, yet should we probe a bit deeper?

I tend to think of this scripture as a daily guide, not just a growing season or the life of an individual. In fact, we can apply it to even portions of our week or day. Since we have received the good Word of our Savior, what will we do with it today? Will we allow it to temper our rock-hard hearts? Will we share the message despite our timid personality? Will we work as though the seed (the Word/our God) was blown away Monday through Saturday and go looking for it again next Sunday?

Before we think this parable was placed in our Bibles only to reason the hatred and sin of unbelievers, I suggest we place it at the heart of our daily walk. What kind of soil will you be today?

Kenton Carlson

Day 12 - Read Mark 4: 26-41

As we read this iconic scripture at the end of Chapter 4, what portion stands out to you?

At different times in my life I hear many different messages. I hope that today you are not questioning why Jesus is sleeping while you are in a serious storm, but most of us have been there. Maybe you wonder why Jesus didn't know a storm was coming. Have you been thinking he should have been your weatherman before taking a life journey that seems doomed by stormy weather? Are you the one waking Jesus or are you bailing water with neglect to even waking him?

Are you in a place where you have just seen Jesus calm the storm? Are you standing in awe? Are you surprised? Have you asked him to do so? The Word is here so you can know He is always in the boat with you.

I hope that you know He can calm any storm in your life. Call out to Him. You won't have to shake Him from slumber, but you may need to rattle your faith. Are you willing to accept His answer and trust Him as though He was sleeping while you were tackling the world without Him?

Kenton Carlson

Day 13 - Read Mark 5:1-20

“My name is Legion, because there are many of us (evil spirits) inside this man.” Mark 5:9 (NLT)

In today's scripture, Jesus comes across a man possessed by many evil spirits. As Jesus approaches this man, the evil spirits requested to be allowed to enter a large herd of pigs (about 2,000) which then plunged down a steep hillside and drowned in a lake.

As I read today's scripture, I have more questions than answers:

This man lived among burial caves. What did he eat to survive?

He cut himself with sharp stones. Why didn't he bleed to death?

Why were there so many evil spirits inside this man? Wouldn't one have been enough?

Why did the evil spirits have to enter the whole herd of pigs? If they were inside one man, couldn't they have just entered one pig?

Who did the evil spirits think they were to negotiate with Jesus to be allowed to enter the herd of pigs instead of being destroyed?

Did someone own the herd of pigs?

What about the pigs themselves? They were innocently going about their day and then drowned in a lake.

What about the man? What was his life like after the demons were gone?

What are we to learn from this story? Do each of us have many evil spirits inside of us such as selfishness, greed, hatred, envy, lust, etc.? In verse seven, the demon screamed at Jesus, “Why are you interfering with me?” Do we feel that God is interfering with us? Do we want to live our lives without interference by God?

Pray and ask God to live inside of you and to remove anything that hinders your relationship with Him.

Bruce Walth

Day 14 – Read Mark 5:21-43

What does this passage remind you of in your own life?

How can you take this lesson of true belief and apply it to your life in the next few days?

Have you ever seen God work in large ways like he did with this woman? Think of that experience and how it made you feel.

Payton Bergman

Day 15 - Read Mark 6: 1-13

My wife and I talk often about whether we are following God's path or our own path and how we are teaching our daughters about God's plan for their lives. The other day, she made a statement that has resonated with me. She said she knows Jesus is in the vehicle with us on our journey through life. In fact, she believes He's sitting in the passenger seat, guiding us. Her comment or question was, "How do we make a change to let Jesus take over the driving?" It's a very good question that I didn't really have an answer for nor was I sure that I wanted to give up the driving. I like guidance from other people, but I think most times I take that guidance as more of a suggestion. I'm still going to make my own decisions.

In today's verses, we see the disciples following Jesus's directions as they head out in pairs to preach the Gospel. He tells them to take nothing but the clothes they are wearing and a staff on their journey. I have a good idea what my response would have been. I would have been all in favor of going and doing what Jesus asked, but before I left, I would definitely have packed a bag of things just in case. I would have thought that I'm still doing what He wanted by spreading the Gospel, but in reality, I would have missed the more important lesson of relying on the Lord for all my needs.

As we go through our days, let us work to turn control over to God of everything from our careers to our family to our finances. If He's telling us to forgive those around us or make a career change or give more at Church, let us not take those as suggestions.

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 16 – Read Mark 6:14-29

As a kid, a common comeback to a friend's boast was "Don't let your mouth write a check your body can't cash". With maturity such boasts and comebacks should be rare, but pride, lust, and an unbridled tongue can get us in trouble, even as adults.

Caught up in a "party" atmosphere Herod wanted to show his power and influence to the young woman who had just performed a "pleasing" dance. In front of his guests, Herod's mouth wrote a check he immediately regretted. "Ask me for anything you want and I'll give it to you", he promised.

After conferring with her mother, who had been humiliated by John the Baptist for living in a sinful relationship with Herod, the young beauty asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

Having made his promise in front of his top officials and commanders, Herod's pride did not allow him to deny her request, and immediately "he was greatly distressed".

We avoid the sin of pride and its damaging effects by understanding we are nothing and have nothing but by the grace of God. We remain humbled before others by demonstrating thankfulness and gratitude. It's hard to be prideful when in service to others.

Gary Adkisson

Day 17 - Read Mark 6:30-44

“How many loaves do you have?” He asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five – and two fish.” Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to His disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.” (Mark 6:38-44 NLT)

Have you ever hosted a party or gathering, and as people showed up, you started to wonder if you had planned enough food for everyone? Have you ever been about 5,000 people short? I know I worry if I’m in this situation, and it looks like I am anywhere close to running out of food, I start to get a little stressed out. To add context, this is the time when many people are starting to follow Jesus, to find out more about Him, hear His teachings, and see His miracles. I’m sure the disciples were VERY concerned that the people would stop following and listening if their basic needs were not met.

But I LOVE this story. It shows us that those who believe in Jesus, and follow Him, will be taken care of. However, there is a piece of the story that I often miss when I read this passage. There is a clear foreshadowing to the last supper. If you look at the loaves and fishes as food to feed our bodies, there is no way to feed the 12 disciples themselves, much less the 5,000 followers that came to hear His word. But if it is spiritual nutrition, when the bread is broken, there is enough to feed thousands. In fact, it will overflow and there will be nutrition for many to come. God provides! If you believe in Him, and trust in Him, He will provide for all your needs. This includes the needs of today, as well as a place in heaven, so your needs will be met for eternity.

Remember, there is no limit to what God can provide. Trust in Him, and at the most dire times, He will send you the resources to meet your needs.

Aaron Van Ningen

Day 18 – Read Mark 6:45-56

“Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and to go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them” (Mark 6:45-48 NASB).

Curiously, the fourth watch of the night is between 3:00 - 6:00 am, yet it says, “When it was evening.” Evening is from sunset to bedtime. So, did Christ wait from evening until the fourth watch to observe them straining against the wind as he prayed? Why did he wait to assist them?

Secondly, the words, “and He intended to pass by them.” Did he need the disciples to call out to Him to help? Did he have a different destination than the boat?

For me, the lesson is patience. Don’t we want answers and guidance during the first watch? Isn’t it difficult to WAIT for help? How many of us seek prayerful guidance only in the fourth watch?

The Bible repeatedly tell us, Jesus prayed. Maybe, we’re not supposed to get early answers without prayer. Prayer is the linchpin that propels us to the other shore. We don’t need to walk on water because we know Jesus can. We don’t need to strain against the oars, because we know Christ is rowing with us. We also know when we call out to Him, He gets in the boat with us saying, “Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.”

Patty VerDouw

Day 19 – Read Mark 7: 1-23

The other day I was driving past a local church and their sign read, “Don’t believe everything you think.” I don’t always notice what their sign says, but I noticed that one, because that is one of my favorite quotes. It means that not everything you think is going to be the truth. We all have thoughts and beliefs that are guided by those around us and by things we read. Since others tend to guide some of those beliefs, there is a good chance that some of what we believe is not true. Were you taught in school that bats are blind? I specifically remember my teacher telling me that, because I remember trying to come up with a plan based on that information to catch a bat that was in our garage. In reality, while bats do use echolocation at night, many of them can see better than we can. That is probably why turning on bright lights didn’t help at all to catch that bat.

The Pharisees observed many traditions that were created by humans. They had grown to believe that they fully understood the scriptures and that all the rules they had put in place were for the good of all of God’s people. They couldn’t understand why Jesus would allow His disciples to eat food with defiled hands. Jesus tries to explain that it’s not what goes into someone’s body that defiles it. Jesus said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles them.”

I don’t plan to automatically change my beliefs, but I would hope that if Jesus came along to tell me my thinking was wrong, I would be open to the possibility that what I think may not be the truth.

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 20 – Read Mark 7:24-37

Jesus is looking for time alone when He meets a woman whose daughter is possessed with an evil spirit. She pleads with Jesus to drive out the demon. Jesus's initial response seems like a "No," but the woman persists, and Jesus rewards her persistence and faith by healing her daughter.

Has life ever stopped you cold? Challenged your faith? Were you able to pray with persistence for God's guidance and help?

Life confronts us with heartache, illness, upheaval, betrayal, and regrets. It's so easy to sink into despair and challenge God's love and presence in our lives. Our God is a compassionate and loving God and His non-answer to our pleading and prayers should never lead to excuses for not looking for answers through faithful persistent prayer.

"Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers." ("Unanswered Prayers," Garth Brooks)

Pray with me: Father, there are times that I am so angry with you because of things that happen in my life. Help me to remember that you are a loving compassionate God and you always are listening to my pleas. You have my back and I only need to listen closer for your answer. Help me to rely on your answer to my prayers and not mine. Help me to be faithful and persistent in my prayer. Help me to pray expectantly and with patience.

Lori Campbell

Day 21 – Read Mark 8: 1-26

“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?” (Mark 8: 17-21 NLT)

I’m starting to wonder if the disciples are just very poor at planning. Yet again, they are faced with a large crowd, and this time they only brought one loaf of bread. But unlike before, we do not hear an account of a new miracle. We hear of his past miracles, feeding 9000 people with 12 loaves of bread, and collecting 19 baskets of leftovers (that is some pretty amazing work, when you think about it). This story, however, is about trust.

How many times in your life have you been worried? How many times have you wondered if God was still watching out for you? Have you lost your faith? Have you seen the miracles He has performed within your life? I have! I have questioned God, and I have doubted God. I never see them at the time, but when I look back, there are many times that I can also see the guiding hand of God shaping my life and decisions to bring me to where I am today. If I had a stronger faith, I would have been saved a lot of worry.

And yet, I still question God. I still wonder why things happen the way they do. Eventually my questions of today will fade, and I will see the plan that came together while I was worrying. And at that time, I will hear him say, “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?”

When the stress of life starts to wear on you, remember that Jesus is walking this journey with you. He is here to provide for your needs and will help you through your struggles. I will continue to work on my faith, ever believing the promise of the Bible that my place in heaven is guaranteed.

Aaron Van Ningen

Day 22 – Read Mark 8:27-9:1

“But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’ (Mark 8:33 ESV)

I often wonder what Jesus felt at that moment. Knowing his life would soon end, was Satan tempting him to stay? Was the rebuke as much for himself as for Peter?

Curiosity aside, when God does something that goes contrary to everything I want or think I need, I argue with him. I beg Him to change His mind. Intellectually, I know God will always do what’s best, and that I will never, ever win an argument with Him. Still, I continue to try. He doesn’t rebuke me as harshly as Jesus did Peter, but I wonder if perhaps He should.

Or, maybe it’s not God who needs to rebuke me, but me who needs to rebuke myself and Satan for muddling my heart and my mind with the things of man to the point I can’t focus on the things of God.

It’s easy to do. We are finite creatures on this earth. We have our daily struggles and distractions that to focus on God’s long, eternal view can be near impossible. We lose sight of our trust and faith—whether it’s due to our worries, our doubts, or our pride. Perhaps it’s a combination of all three. We have to remember that even when we get lost, God never does, and He never loses sight of us or what he wants to accomplish through us.

When we feel lost, we have to remember and speak Jesus’ own words: “Get behind me Satan, for my mind will not be set on the things of man, but on the things of God.”

Andra Marquardt

Day 23 – Read Mark 9:2-29

“But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us! And Jesus said to him, “If You can?” All things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe, help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:22-24 NASB)

John Wesley notes that when the father asks, “help my unbelief,” he is really saying, “although my faith is so small that it might rather be termed unbelief, help me.”

In 1978, I purchased a 66 Olds Toronado, with 268,000 miles, for \$800. It was a bucket of rust, to the point that the driver’s door handle came off in my hand one day as I tried to open the door. It came equipped with all the bells and whistles, went like the wind, had a fabulous sound system, and was affectionately called Shep (because you needed to say “Whoa Shep!” at every stop). Periodically, without warning, the points of the ignition switch would close, and there was absolutely no starting that car. The car would just turn over and over.

One afternoon, I was at Mary College to pick up my sister and go into town for a family activity. I tried repeatedly to start Shep to no avail. Finally, in desperation, I said, “Let’s pray.” There we were, sitting in the parking lot, holding hands, heads down, asking for God’s intercession. After a hearty, “AMEN,” I turned the key and the engine roared to life! Shock and awe ensued!

It is so easy to lose sight of God’s great power to do ALL things – even the small, everyday things. The lesson for both of us was to pray, have faith, trust God, and to be watchful that the points of our ignition aren’t closed.

Patty VerDouw

Day 24 - Read Mark 9:30-50

“For everyone will be tested with fire” (Mark 9:49 NLT).

Fire destroys. One day my siblings and I burned the buildings on the farm where I grew up. Within a few hours, every building was destroyed and there was nothing left.

But, fire also purifies. Most people who are married wear a gold ring on their finger. Gold contains impurities such as zinc, copper, silver and iron. Gold is refined to remove the impurities. Crude gold is melted by heating it with fire and then treated with chloride to remove the impurities and the result is 99.5% pure gold.

Jesus says everyone will be tested with fire. The intent is not to destroy, but to purify. Every day we are exposed to things that can cause impurities (sin) in our soul. Lucifer (Satan) tempts us each day in so many ways. As we watch television, we are exposed to violence, hate, lust, envy, selfishness, etc. Lucifer tempts our thoughts, tempts us at work and outside of work. Lucifer does not want us to have a relationship with God and works on us every day to take our focus away from God.

Our refining process is done through prayer. By turning to God, we are turning away from the temptations of the day. Each day we must ask God to remove the impurities in our soul. We ask for strength to face and resist the temptations we will be exposed to tomorrow.

As Christians, our only hope to survive being tested by fire is found in our Savior. Jesus knew we were going to be tested and that we would sin. He took every one of our sins to the cross and, through His death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven.

Bruce Walth

Day 25 – Read Mark 10: 1-16

The enemies of Jesus were once again trying to trick him. When it came to following the letter of the law, there were none better than the Pharisees. However, in the New Testament stories, they never did seem to comprehend the heart of the law. The letter of the law says that you just follow the rules and fill out the paperwork and viola – you are divorced. The heart of the law says – God made you to stay together, you accepted the challenge, so you should really try to honor God’s handiwork. I understand this is not always easy and not always possible, but God’s union belongs to God, tearing it apart in order to marry someone else is not.

It comes as no surprise to me that Jesus comes out on the side of marriage and children. He did create these bonds for us so that we would not be lonely. I think marriage and children are God’s way of gifting us with love. After all, He calls us His children. We can bask in the love of God because we are His children and He wants nothing to get between Him and His children. Best of all – He loves all children. I have no doubt that the children who came to Him in this story were dirty and smelly. Guess what – He didn’t care. God’s example is that children are here to be loved, no matter who or what is interrupted.

Almost as an afterthought, His next point is that we are to accept God’s kingdom with the same simplicity as a child. I don’t have to have great intellect. I don’t have to study theology. I don’t have to prepare, or wash, wear fancy clothes, or know anything else. All I have to know is that God loves me, I am part of His kingdom, and no one is allowed to come between me and God. When I understand that one point, I can feel Jesus lay His hands of blessing on me.

Diane Dyk

Day 26 – Read Mark 10:17-31

On a scale of 0 to 10, how much is Jesus involved in your life? Why did you choose the number that you did? If asked the same question, the man in this story may have chosen a number close to 10. After all, he kept all the Commandments, knew Jesus, and held him in reverence. Still, something was missing.

Deciding to do something about it, he sought out the One who could help him. Our passage implies that he was urgent to speak with Jesus. Running up to Jesus, he humbly knelt down and asked what he had to do to get eternal life. What we soon discover is that this young man is wealthy, most likely lacking nothing materially. But somehow, he still feels a void, that something is missing, and he hopes to find an answer in Jesus. However, the answer he received was not what he expected or wanted to hear, and sadly, he chose to leave.

What keeps you from being "all in" with Jesus? Remember, Jesus didn't walk away from the young man. The young man left. God loves you and desires for you to come to him just as you are. He continually invites you to have a fully committed, nothing held back relationship with Him.

Pray: Thank you, Lord, for the blessings in our lives. Please forgive us when we have desired these good things more than you. Help us to understand what surrender truly means and to have the courage to keep you at the center of our lives.

Amanda Rue, in collaboration with Jennifer Norgaard

Day 27 – Read Mark 10:32-52

In today's verses, we read about James and John requesting to sit at Jesus' right and left in His glory. Mark says that the other disciples were indignant with the brothers when they found out what they asked. Do you think they were mad with James and John for thinking they deserved to sit next to Jesus? Or were they upset because they didn't think to ask first? When I first started my career, my boss gave me a great piece of advice. He knew I needed training, but he also knew that he wasn't going to always have time to identify training opportunities for me. He said that if I see any training that I would be interested in and I felt would benefit me, I should come to him and ask if I can go. He said that there will be times he will say "No," but that doesn't mean I should stop looking for opportunities. Maybe he regretted telling me that, because I think I brought something to him every few weeks, but he never said to stop.

Jesus had said something similar to the disciples at a different time, when He said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) Maybe James and John remembered that and didn't think it would hurt anything to ask Jesus to sit next to Him. Maybe they had finally become comfortable enough around Jesus that they were able to tell Him exactly what was on their minds.

Is it hard for you to ask friends, family or coworkers for things? Or even let them know exactly what you are thinking? Do you hesitate, because you're not sure how they will respond? Are you someone that others are comfortable enough with that they can come to you for help or advice? I was lucky to have such a great boss that recognized that unless he said something right away, I may never get all the training I needed, because I would have been hesitant to ask to go to training opportunities. Let's strive to be like Jesus, and make others feel comfortable enough to tell us what is on their minds.

Jeremy Skoglund

Day 28: Read Mark 11:1-11

A missionary couple I know was recently at a “what now” point. They were unsure what God had in store next. Were they on the right path? Were they doing the right thing? Voices of doubt were calling their steps into question.

That night as I consumed some daily bread (scripture), the words of Mark 11:3 jumped off the page. “If anyone asks, ‘What you are doing?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it and will return it soon’” (Mark 11:3, NLT). That was it! The Lord needed them! My missionary friends knew God had told them to go. The only reason needed when their actions were called into question was that the Lord had sent them.

Sometimes when we follow God our actions don’t make practical sense. Still, if we trust God, he will move mountains and make ways we could not fathom on our own.

Colette Leingang

Day 29 – Read Mark 11:12-33

As you read the middle portion of chapter 11 what emotion would you use to describe Jesus?

This is one of my favorite scriptures. I have referenced Jesus's actions when some have questioned whether the one who said turn the other cheek ever angered. In Bible study class discussions some have wondered how the Prince of Peace could justify such ruckus actions. No doubt this isn't the only time such passion is exhibited in the New Testament (consider the fig tree passage of Matthew 21) not to mention the Old.

Why do I consider this a favorite text? While we shouldn't compare ourselves to Christ seeing his Father's house corrupted, I believe it gives us example for passionate actions for the Kingdom. Violence? **No.** Certainly Jesus could have struck the corruptors dead or mute. He could have sent them over a cliff faster than the possessed swine. Instead, he simple turned over the tables and cleared them from the temple but when mention of Old Testament prophesy was fulfilled the guilty were scared.

When are we passionate about our faith? Do we take bold actions to protect God's Kingdom and its followers? I suggest we interrupt the teller of a foul joke. We step in between a bully and the offended. We testify at the legislature or speak up elsewhere. Are you ready defend your Father in heaven with action today?

Kenton Carlson

Day 30 – Read Mark 12:1-34

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 28-34 NLT)

There are times when I read the Bible, and it seems like an encrypted code – I struggle to find the meaning hidden between the lines of text. This is NOT one of those passages.

If you want to honor God, and thank Him for all He has given you, you simply need to love Him. We show our love in many ways, but one of the most prominent is showing our love for those around us. Really, these are the same thing. We are all created in the image of God – God loves all people, and if you truly love God, you will show that love by extending it to those around you.

There are many ways we can do this, and I am proud to say that I attend a church that encourages everyone to find their own way. We can share our gifts of music on the worship team, pass along the message to the next generation with children’s ministry, connect with others at a class or life group, participate in an outreach group, or help people meet their basic needs through the “One Thing,” and the list goes on. These are some of the things that I think make our church a great church. But the question at hand is not how you make a great church – it is how you show God’s love.

I agree that all of these things show your love for people and for God (and if you are not, I encourage you to find a way to serve in the church), but I have seen people be affected by seeing God’s love in much less formalized ways. I have seen a soul change when a lonely person received a smile. I have seen sadness turn to joy when a mistake has been forgiven. I have seen a broken heart healed when a family member received a hug after a loved one’s passing.

We all have times that we feel hurt or broken – there are many around us feeling that way at this very moment. If you find that person, you will be amazed at how little effort it can take to show them the love God has for all of us.

Aaron Van Ningen

Day 31 – Read Mark 12:35-44

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44 NLT)

In the United States, and North Dakota in particular, we are very proud of being self-made, independent people (how else could you survive a -35 degree winter with a 65 mph wind). In fact, that is the backbone of America. We built our country on the backs of hard-working men and women, who pushed through the struggles of life, and literally built the world's strongest economy, best military, and ensured our citizens the most freedoms of anywhere in the world.

There is nothing wrong with hard work. The problem comes when we think that we do it all on our own. I like to think I am a “self-made man.” I worked hard to get where I am. I work hard at my job. I... I... I... I'm sure God gets really tired of hearing me say that. It would be more accurate if I said that, “I – was blessed with an amazing family. I – have been blessed with many gifts, with which God has trusted. I – would do my best to improve the world. I – am thankful for what God has given me. He – is the reason for all that I have been given in my life!”

It seems that the more we have, the more we forget why we have it. Maybe when we have more needs, it is easier to see God fill those needs – I'm not sure. The widow in the story remembers her blessings. She remembers what God has given her and gives back accordingly.

And I don't think the passage is just about financial gifts. I think it is about our trust in God. Do we trust God to provide for us? If we do, it does not matter how much we have left after we give back to God. If we really trust God, we will know that He will provide for us.

It is hard to trust in God – to give back what is His to start with, because without God, we would have nothing. The faith it must take to give all of what you have, believing that NO MATTER WHAT, God will provide for you! I will continue to work to be more like the woman of the story – to give extravagantly and be radically hospitable, and to worship passionately - to trust in God, that I was given the necessary gifts to help others come closer to Him.

Aaron Van Ningen

Day 32 - Read Mark 13:1-37

“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.” (Mark 13:33 NASB)

It was a stormy night. I was traveling with my boyfriend and his St. Bernard, Louie, from St. Paul to Minneapolis on I-94. Just before the Mississippi River Bridge, the highway makes a sharp turn from the west to the south, making it impossible to see the traffic ahead. As we rounded the curve, traffic came to a swift stop. I looked behind us, to see a semi was rapidly approaching. Suddenly, everything was in slow motion as I saw the semi's headlights go up and over the top of the car. I thought, “This is it!” The impact crushed the rear of the car, threw Louie into the front seat, as I shattered the windshield with my forehead.

From that backward glance until impact, a profound sense of calm settled over me. I knew I was going to be okay, whether I lived or died! I was wrapped in peace! Was it because I had no control, or because I was ready to go home? I may never know, but fear of death was no longer there.

Do you wonder how you'd react if you had to stare death in the face? No one is anxious to know that. Chief Tecumseh said in his poem, “Fear of Death,” “So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart. . . When it comes your time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way.”

Patty VerDouw

Day 33 – Read Mark 14:1-11

- 1) Why did the woman pour perfume on Jesus?
- 2) How is the gift of perfume in Mark 14 like the widow's offering in Mark 12?
- 3) How is it different?
- 4) Where do you currently give of your time, talent, and treasure to extend God's grace and build God's Kingdom? Is that surrender an accurate reflection of your trust in Christ? Why or why not?
- 5) What motivates you to give extravagantly or participate in risk-taking mission and service?

Amanda Rue

Day 34 – Read Mark 14:12-31

We all have forgiveness waiting for us in Christ. Jesus knew that Peter was going to betray him three times before the next morning, but he was still willing to break bread with him. Everyone makes mistakes, and God knows that we can overcome these tough times by turning to Him for support. **This week, I challenge you to ask for forgiveness.** Not only from God, but from your family, friends, and peers as well. Be willing to give the gift of reconciliation.

Payton Bergman

Day 35 – Read Mark 14:32-52

"Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, what you will" (Mark 14:36 NIV).

As humans, we're sometimes handed situations we'd rather not face.

However, as Christians, we know we serve a mighty God who is bigger than any situation. It's a common and understandable reaction to pray for God to change our situation, even when we know this is His will for us. Isn't it a comfort to know that Jesus had the same thought? Our situation will not be to lay down our life to save mankind from our sins like it was for Jesus, but it can be overwhelming and heartbreaking. Even though Jesus obviously didn't look forward to what He knew was going to happen, He still knew that God's will was for the best and for the love of all His people. If our current situation is God's will for us, the rewards will far outweigh any pain we can encounter. Gather a couple of trusted friends and go to your own Garden of Gethsemane like Jesus did. Pray for peace, knowing God has a plan to use this time for good.

Bethany Whitworth

Day 36 – Read Mark 14: 53-72

Following the betrayal and arrest in Gethsemane, we find ourselves alongside Peter. Keeping a safe distance, Peter has trailed behind Jesus and the crowd. Upon arriving in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter goes no further, but instead takes a seat by the fire and warms himself.

The following verses run in parallel time, with Jesus inside the home of the High Priest and Peter in the courtyard. Both men are accused; Jesus of blasphemy and Peter of being his follower. When false witness testimonies fail to provide enough evidence to put Jesus to death, the High Priest asks him directly “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus answers, “I am.” Outside, Peter is accused three times of knowing Jesus, and he swears “I do not know the man!”

By the rooster’s second crow, Jesus’ truthful answer has led to his death sentence. Conversely, Peter’s lies have kept him physically safe. It’s easy to point out Peter’s triple failure and believe that I would have done better. Why did Peter even bother following Jesus if he intended to stay at a safe distance, warming himself by the fire, protecting himself from sharing Jesus’ fate?

But If I’m being honest with myself, I find that I’ve protected my own sense of safety and well-being in situations that were far less life-threatening than Peter’s. Like me, have you ever ignored the nudge to share a word of hope or give more to those who have less? Have you sat quietly through gossip or let the fear of offending others keep you from sharing your faith? Or maybe you’ve lied by omission or failed to give God glory for the successes in your life. Like Peter, we all have moments where we stall out in a safe place - afraid of the cost of acknowledging we know Jesus.

Our verses for today leave with us with a broken Peter, weeping at his failure as the rooster crows a second time. But we can rejoice at the promise of restoration from a gracious God! Not only does the risen Jesus send joyous news specifically to Peter (Mark 16:7), he later commissions Peter not once, not twice, but three times in a powerful call to ministry (John 21: 15-17). Let’s rejoice that Jesus both forgives our past denials and calls us back into ministry, restored by his boundless grace!

Melissa Hendrickson, in collaboration with Amanda Rue

Day 37 – Read Mark 15:1-20

In Mark 14 and 15, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, put on trial, and handed over to be crucified. Every person mentioned in this passage has power. Many of the people mentioned also possess the ability to influence the outcome of Jesus's final days on earth.

Pilate – The Roman governor who was hungry for power and ultimately refused to go against the demands of the crowd.

Priests – The leaders of the church who twisted the truth and fabricated lies to create chaos in the crowds.

Crowd – An easily influenced group of people who allowed the heat of the moment and blind belief to hinder the truth.

Barabbas – A revolutionary who rebelled against the government and was in prison for murder.

Soldiers – Cruel men who tortured and berated Jesus and executed their duties with no respect for life.

Jesus – Fully God and fully man, Jesus exhibited a quiet, unshakeable power and overcame the impossible circumstances of his mission.

As you consider each person, wrestle with what could have been their thoughts or actions. Who do you identify with? Although we may never walk through an experience of this magnitude, many of us will encounter unjust situations, as well as opportunities to speak of the hope we have as believers (1 Peter 3:15). May these challenges become opportunities to choose what is right, influence others with the truth, and speak words that give life.

Amanda Rue

Day 38 – Read Mark 15:21-47

“Then at three o’clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’” (Mark 15:34 NLT)

In the 70’s, Gilbert O’Sullivan sang a sad song titled “Alone Again (Naturally).” Some words of this song are:

“Talk about, God in His mercy
Oh, if he really does exist
Why did he desert me?”

When our prayers seem to go on unanswered, aren’t we tempted to say these words?

When the cancer doesn’t seem to be improving.

When the Alzheimer’s continues to take its toll and takes our loved one farther and farther away from us.

When our relationship or marriage seems to continue to be falling apart.

When (insert whatever your situation is in your life).

Don’t we want to say, “God, where are you in my time of need?”

Let’s turn to the words in our scripture above. This is God hanging on the cross saying these words to His (our) Father. These are desperate words as Jesus is about to die. When He needed His Father the most, Jesus asked what we ask, “God, where are you in my time of need?”

Guess what? God has and will always be there. Prayers may not get answered in the way WE want them answered. Don’t be discouraged. Keep praying and believe!

I found these words in my study Bible, “We had a significant part in the drama that dark afternoon because our sins were on the cross, too.” Jesus died 2000+ years ago, but the sins we commit today, tomorrow and the next day were nailed to the cross when the spikes were driven into Jesus’ hands and feet.

Thank God that Jesus died and rose again, so our sins can be forgiven!

Bruce Walth

Day 39 - Read Mark 16: 1-8

I can't even begin to understand the unimaginable grief that the three women were experiencing as they approached the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They had been there on Friday when Jesus was crucified, and Mary Magdalene had watched as Jesus's body was placed in the tomb. Then grief changes to fear upon finding the tomb empty except for the young man in a white robe who assures them, "Do not be alarmed, you are looking for the Jesus of Nazarene who was crucified. HE HAS RISEN." Now, at this point in the story, I would expect a celebration of some sort, but instead the women fled the tomb and told no one.

The words "He has risen" contain the promise of Easter for all of us. Let us be joyful and celebrate this promise.

Pray: Heavenly Father, you have given your Son to die for us with the promise, "He has Risen." Help us to celebrate that promise and to share the joy and the message of Easter by how we live our lives every day.

Lori Campbell

Day 40 – Read Mark 16:9-20

This verse really resonates with me. I have just finished the 30 Hour Famine. We learned about how well off we live compared to many people around the world. The Bible teaches us to give our excess to those who live with less. I saw God through that weekend in how much excess we were able to donate to World Vision. We raised over \$9,000! We were able to have what we needed, and still help others. I encourage you this week to take a step back and notice what you have and think about a few things:

What have you done in the past week, month and year to give back?

What is one way you can “Go into all the world” and give to the community in the next couple of weeks (time, money, etc.)?

Payton Bergman