



**Daily Devotionals For Lent  
March 2—April 16, 2022**

Written for members and friends of  
Cedarville United Presbyterian Church,  
and for anyone else who wants to deepen  
his or her relationship with God. Come join us.

by Rev. Anne Horton

## **Ways To Participate**

1. Use this print version of the daily devotionals.
2. Go to our website, *www.cedarvilleunited.org*, and subscribe to the blog. Each day the devotional will be sent to your email.
3. Subscribe to our YouTube Channel, *Cedarville United Presbyterian Church*. I will be reading the daily devotionals and then there will be a song video or two.

Even if you use the print version or subscribe to the website, I encourage you to check out the YouTube channel.

# Welcome!

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied. — Matthew 5:6*

"We live in a full society, a full age. Compared to almost any other period in history, we lack seemingly for nothing, yet spiritually we are more dull than ever before..."<sup>1</sup> — Dean Briggs

We live in a society that goes full-speed 24/7. Our expectations are high and our patience low. We can always find something to entertain, excite, or amuse. But do we perhaps have too much? Are we too full of the world?

This Lent, we will take a prayerful look at our lives. How full are our spiritual plates? Are our lives overflowing yet we feel unfulfilled? Does God feel far away? Maybe we are so busy we have not even noticed something is missing.

Lent is a 40-day season (46 with Sundays) where we slow down and take a look at ourselves—where we are faithful and where we have strayed—and repent for our sin and recommit to the narrow path. It is not the only time we repent, of course, but during Lent we take a more thorough inventory.

The word "repentance" in Greek has a two-fold meaning—to change our minds, and to allow ourselves to be turned around. Our responsibility is to recognize

our sin and come before God and confess. Then we allow Him to turn us around so we are back on His path, obeying His will.

So for 40 days, we are going to slow down and ask ourselves important questions: Are our plates full of things that spiritually nourish us or is there a lot of junk? Are we able to see our lives through the lens of faith or are our lives so full of distractions we cannot even focus on God? How can we get back on the right track?

We also will pray each day for a business, school, church, or public figure in Cedarville. This is a way we can bless others in our village. Everyone can always use prayer, but some people are under extra stress due to the pandemic. On the next page you will find examples of how to pray from scripture.

I am looking forward to traveling with you on this journey as we all seek to grow deeper in our faith.

*Anne*

<sup>1</sup>Briggs, Dean. *Consumed: 40 Days of Fasting, Repentance & Rebirth* (p. 8). Champion Press. Kindle Edition.

# Prayers

Each day in Lent, we will be praying for a person or group of people in Cedarville. At the bottom of each daily devotional, there will be a small business, school, church, public figure, etc. for whom to pray. If you need some help, consider starting by putting names in the blanks below and letting God lead you from there.

## **Prayer to walk by God's power...**

Lord, I pray that you would give \_\_\_\_\_ the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of you, that the eyes of \_\_\_\_\_'s understanding are enlightened; that \_\_\_\_\_ may know what is the hope of your calling on his/her/their life (lives).

(Eph. 1:17-19)

## **Prayer for Christ's presence to be manifest...**

Lord, I pray that you would strengthen \_\_\_\_\_ through your Spirit. I pray that your Son Jesus Christ would dwell in \_\_\_\_\_'s hearts through faith. I pray that \_\_\_\_\_, being rooted and grounded in love, may truly know *your* love, which surpasses knowledge.

(Eph. 3:16-19)

## **Prayer to know God's will and to be fruitful in ministry...**

Lord, I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ would be filled with the knowledge of your will. I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ would have a walk fully pleasing to you, that \_\_\_\_\_ would be fruitful in every good work and increase in his/her/their knowledge of you.

(Col. 1:9-11)

## **Prayer to be filled with joy, peace and hope...**

Lord, give \_\_\_\_\_ all joy and peace in believing, that he/she/they may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Rom. 15:5-6, 13)

## **Prayer for the fruit of the Spirit to be manifest...**

Lord, I pray that you give \_\_\_\_\_ love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Help \_\_\_\_\_ always walk by the Spirit, putting off things that are not of you and clothing him/herself in Christ.

(Galatians 5:22-26)

## **Prayer for health...**

Lord, I pray that all may go well with \_\_\_\_\_ and that \_\_\_\_\_ may be in good health. I also pray for \_\_\_\_\_'s family, that they may stay healthy. Protect all of them at work and home.

(3 John 2)



# Section 1

## Am I Unsatisfied?

Are you unsatisfied?

I picked that word deliberately. Dissatisfied means you experienced something and did not like it. Unsatisfied means you were left unfulfilled. Something about the experience was simply...lacking.

Maybe the answer is no. You have a wonderful relationship with God and feel close to Him. If so, keep going and help others along the way.

Maybe your plate is full and you are outwardly successful, but God feels like a distant relative rather than a personal, loving Father. Maybe your plate has things that amuse and entertain but contains no real nourishment. Maybe you are running so fast you have not even had time to think about it.

And maybe...you have become too easily satisfied. Somewhere along the way, God became someone to schedule in rather than the center of your life.

During our first four days of Lent, we will explore the concept of being unsatisfied. That is actually a good place for us to be as Christians. We are called to be in the world, but not of it. We should not be satisfied with what the world offers, but should seek to be nourished by what God offers.



# *Ash Wednesday, March 2 / Day 1*

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters...  
— Isaiah 55:1a*

How do you quench your thirst?

It often depends on availability and preference: at a birthday party the only option may be punch, and perhaps you like lemonade but cannot stand iced tea.

But coffee, tea, pop, and juice are supposed to be treats rather than sustenance, secondary to fresh, clean water. Doctors even recommend we drink eight glasses a day to stay healthy.

Sometimes thirst is not a physical need but an emotional one. Do you turn to drinks that contain alcohol or sugar or caffeine when you are stressed or tired or need a boost or want to calm down? Do you become dependent on them to get you through the day? Maybe you half-jokingly declare: "Do not *talk* to me before I have had my \_\_\_\_\_."

What about spiritually?

Psalm 42:1-2 says, *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Do you crave God when your soul is parched, or have you become too easily satisfied, consuming whatever is available to quench your thirst in the moment?

God offers more. Come...everyone who is thirsty. Come to the waters. Come and drink of the Living Water.

Do you want that? To desire what God offers, we all must stop drinking the things on which we have become overly dependent. To desire what God offers, we need to let ourselves thirst again.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Have you become dependent on alcohol, sugar, or caffeine to deal with emotions? In what way do they "satisfy"? What do you think would happen if you stopped?

Are you thirsty for a deeper relationship with God? What do you need to set down or stop in your life so you have room to explore that more fully?

**Prayer Focus:** Barber of the Ville / Mayor Tony Pergram

# Thursday, March 3 / Day 2

*...and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost...  
— Isaiah 55:1b*

Yesterday I asked if you were thirsty for a deeper relationship with God, and what you might have to set down to more fully explore that relationship. Did you decide on something?

Lent is about repenting, but also about fasting. Usually just mentioning the word “fast” scares people. We do not like to go without, and fasting means we stop something for a set amount of time.

If you have not already chosen, I encourage you to pick something in your life you sense is crossing the line from enjoyment to addiction, something you feel you inappropriately depend on. Pick something whose absence will leave a hole in your life. Choose to put that thing down until Easter.

Once you have made the decision, the hard work begins. You have to let yourself feel the emptiness that thing has been filling. You have taken away the crutch. Now you can see how you have been propping yourself up with something other than God.

What is coming to your mind? What has become “too big” in your life? Maybe it’s

caffeine or alcohol or sugar. Maybe it’s social media—it began as a way to connect with people but now you just mindlessly scroll. Maybe it’s TV—it began as a way to relax and became a way to escape problems or a constant distraction in the background. Maybe it’s junk food—it has become more than an occasional treat. Maybe it’s...you fill in the blank.

The first few days of fasting are always hard because there is a detox. You will feel cravings and be tempted to put that thing back in your life. When you feel that way, pray to God for strength, and remember why you chose to fast from it. In the long run, it will be worth it.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

What has become too big in your life? What can you give up whose absence will let you feel hunger and thirst again? Commit to it here, and tell someone else. Both writing it down and being accountable to someone else make you more likely to follow through.

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**Prayer Focus:** Beans -n- Cream

# Friday, March 4 / Day 3

*Why spend money on what is not bread,  
and your labor on what does not satisfy?  
— Isaiah 55:2a*

How are you feeling?

Are you feeling the absence of whatever you decided to give up for Lent? Do you find yourself reaching for the remote, junk food, social media apps, sugar, or whatever you chose? The cravings are strong but will calm down. Right now, we are all resisting the urge to pick something up that has gotten too big in our lives. Expect temptation. Ask God for help. We do not do anything alone—God is there. We just need to call on Him.

In today's verse in Isaiah, God asks, "Why are you spending time on things that will never fulfill you? Why are you wasting your energy on things you already know will not satisfy you?"

How do you spend your time and energy? How do you organize your day? Do you deliberately do things that nourish you and glorify God, or do you spend a lot of time trying to numb or distract yourself?

The harder question is why. *Why* do you spend your time and energy the way you do? It may be because you are raising young children or taking care of elderly

parents and this season is simply extra busy. It may be because you are a health care worker or teacher or in some other profession that is under more stress because of the pandemic.

But consider whether you have fallen into the trap of glorifying busyness. Society says we are important if we have a jam-packed schedule. Being exhausted is a point of pride.

But at what cost?

Has God become someone to schedule in when convenient, or is He the center of everything? Do you ask God how He wants you to spend your time, or do you organize your life the way you want it and God can come along for the ride?

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

How do you spend your time and energy? More importantly, why? Is your schedule your own, or do you involve God in the process of organizing your day?

**Prayer Focus:** Brentwood Builders

## *Saturday, March 5 / Day 4*

*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.*

*I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. — Isaiah 55:2b-3*

No doubt by now there is temptation to put that “too big” thing back into your life. I did a 40-day fast from something while writing this, and slipped up on day five. Even if you indulged, recommit and keep going. Do not let it derail you.

Today’s scripture is very encouraging. In the last few days, God has given us all an invitation. Come. Come to the waters. Come without cost. Stop spending your time and energy on things that do not matter. And then today...listen to me.

This is not God clapping His hands and saying, “Hey, listen up everyone, I need your attention over here for a moment.” God says, “Give ear and come to me.” Other versions say “incline your ear” and “open your ears.” The Hebrew word has a connotation of submission. Stop and surrender completely to God.

Imagine a child is playing, and her father says, “Come here, sit on my lap, and look at me.” The child stops what she is doing, walks over, and sits on his lap. Then she either pays attention to her father or looks longingly at the toys on the floor. God wants us to listen to Him,

not just with our ears, but with our hearts. He wants us to give Him our full attention.

This is what Lent is: a yearly reset where we take a close look at our relationship with God, and make bold adjustments to realign our hearts with His. It is not easy. It is not meant to be.

These devotions are meant to stretch and challenge you as they did me as I was writing them. They are meant to make you think about where God is in your life. Someone described a pastor as “someone who helps a community and/or person pay attention to the work and activity of God.” That is my goal.

Next week we will dig in a little deeper.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

What things in your life need your attention right now? Work? School? Family? Home repairs? No doubt you have a list. Where is God on that list? Do you think you incline your ear and listen well?

**Prayer Focus:** CedarCare Pharmacy



## **Section 2**

### **What Is On My Plate?**

In this section, we move from the question “Am I unsatisfied?” to “What is on my plate?” What is on your plate that fills you for the moment but in the long run leaves you unsatisfied? For the next two weeks, we will explore the subjects of people-pleasing, success, self-sufficiency, pride, bitterness, busyness, and several others.

Some days, you will read the devotional and think, “that does not apply to me.” Other days, it will strongly resonate. You may feel angry or offended or want to stop reading or stop fasting. At that point, ask yourself if the enemy is trying to distract you, and if the Holy Spirit is convicting you and giving you an opportunity to repent and make changes in your life.

I have said this in sermons: “Only when I read the Bible do I have a desire to do laundry.” The enemy knows how to distract us. Satan cannot steal our salvation, but he does try sneaky little things to get our minds off of the Word so we do not grow in our faith. But Jesus Christ is greater. He will help us push through the distractions.

If you feel things derailing, ask for God’s help. He will give you strength. Call me and I will pray with you. Tell someone and ask that person to pray with you. Again, Lent is not meant to be easy, but transformational. Not because of my words, but because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, intercedes for us, helps us, convicts us, and encourages us. We worship a God who loves us and wants us to grow closer to Him.



# Monday, March 7 / Day 5

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "* — Matthew 4:1-4

How is the fast going? Yes, I am going to keep asking. It is hard to give something up that you depend on too much. But if it is too big in your life, bigger than God, you want to get rid of it, or at least put it in its proper place. At the end of the fast, you can decide if what you have given up should come back into your life, and in what way.

Now onto today's topic. Henri Nouwen, in his book entitled *In the Name of Jesus*, talks about three temptations of Christ—to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful. The verse above explains the temptation to be relevant. Turn these stones into bread, Jesus. Do something that matters. Something that will help people, that will make other people value you.

People-pleasing. Are you caught up in pleasing others to the extent it causes issues with your relationship with God? Trying to please others all the time gives those people control over you, and eventually you feel like a puppet on a string. You are only happy if someone

else is happy...but you are not *really* happy because you are running yourself ragged doing other people's bidding.

Is people-pleasing taking up a lot of room on your plate? The first step is recognizing it is there. But do not stop there.

As you go through this week, bring any of these issues to God in prayer. For example, "Lord, I repent of letting people-pleasing (or whatever the day's theme is) hinder my relationship with you. Show me when I am doing it. Show me why I am doing it. Help me get it off my plate so I can focus on pleasing you. Help me resist when I am tempted to let it back into my life. Amen."

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Are you trying to please other people at the expense of your relationship with God? How is it hindering your life in general and your relationship with God?

## *Tuesday, March 8 / Day 6*

*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."  
— John 6:27-29*

Most pastors have been to regional and national gatherings. It is a great way to catch up with old friends and meet new ones. When meeting someone new, I am often asked: "How big is your church?" Some are simply curious, but for others it is used to compare. Some believe that the larger the membership, the more worship services, the bigger the staff...the more successful the pastor is. When I told one large-church pastor how many members were in my church, he replied (in a very patronizing tone), "That's okay...your call is still holy."

Comparisons are everywhere. How many students are in your classroom? Oh, I have more than that. How many acres do you farm? I harvest three times that. How many hours a week do you work? Wow, I put that in by Wednesday!

So what? Whose standards should you follow? Who should be guiding your steps? There is nothing wrong with trying for a promotion...but why? For the glory of God? Great! Or have you fallen into the trap of thinking the more you do, the more successful you are.

It says in John, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." The word "believe" in Greek is translated "keep on believing." Continually believe in Jesus. Continually learn from him. Continually lean in to him. Continually define yourself based on his standards. According to God, we are all sinners saved by grace through faith.

And what does God want us to do with our lives? That is different for each person and cannot be compared. God is looking at your heart. Are you faithful to Him? Are you seeking to grow in Him? Then you are successful.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How do you define success for yourself? Do you feel pressure to live up to someone else's expectations, or do you ask God what He wants you to do with your life?

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Community Food Pantry

## *Wednesday, March 9 / Day 7*

*My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. — Jeremiah 2:13*

"I can do it all by myself!"  
— any 2-year-old

It's called the Terrible Twos, when children want to do things themselves but lack the ability to do them well. They may get their shoes on...the wrong feet. They may help bake cookies, but get more eggshell than egg in the batter. Children in this age group insist on independence and resist supervision, but giving them the amount of freedom they want would be disastrous.

Jeremiah warned the people of Judah that their desire for independence would lead to disaster as well. The people had decided they no longer needed God's supervision but would live their lives their own way.

Jeremiah used images of water to illustrate the people's sin. The best water in the area was from a flowing stream. The worst was from a cistern as the stagnant water became scummy and attracted insects. The people spiritually rejected God and dug cisterns over and over, until God gave them to their enemies and they were carried off into exile.

If you desire self-sufficiency, it will lead to a sort of exile. You turn your back on God and do your own thing. God will not beg you to follow Him. Luke 9:23 reminds us all to take up our cross *daily* and follow Jesus. We have to continually choose to trust, to submit, to ask God what He wants.

Is self-sufficiency on your plate? It is an easy trap to fall into. We can organize our lives the way we want and no one would know if God was leading us or not. We have to stop and take a look ourselves. Only you can answer this: do you live your life trusting God, prayerfully asking what He wants you to do? Or have you made a life for yourself, independent of God? If you realize it's the latter, take some time to repent.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

One way to move from self-sufficiency to dependence on God: pray over your schedule. Pray that the Holy Spirit will be with you in your meetings with others, your decisions, and your conversations.

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Family Practice

## *Thursday, March 10 / Day 8*

*And he told them this parable: The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. — Luke 12:16-21*

It has been a week since we began fasting, temporarily eliminating something that has become too big in our lives. How is it going? Many years ago everyone in my Bible study gave something up for Lent, and this was about the time the cravings began letting up. Do not let your guard down too much, because that is when things often try to sneak back in.

On to our theme for today: possessions. Do you put too much emphasis on what you own? Do you have plenty of things but still find something is lacking?

In our passage for today, the problem was both the man's actions and attitude. He had several barns full of grain, meaning he already had an abundance for himself. Instead of sharing his grain, which he probably would not have noticed was gone, he made plans to hoard it and "eat, drink, and be merry." God called him on that.

In this congregation, we share well. When there is a need, people step up quickly. Our food pantry volunteers do an excellent job of getting food to those in the village, and have made several confidential porch deliveries during the pandemic. Corporately, we do not struggle with holding on to our stuff.

How do you view your own possessions? Nowhere in the Bible does it say possessions are wrong, but you can fall into the trap of trusting in what you have rather than asking God how to use what He has given you. You cannot take it with you when you die. How tightly are you holding onto what you own?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How do you view your stuff? How do you use what you have to glorify God?

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Police Department

## *Friday, March 11 / Day 9*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:1-2*

“Technology addiction refers to the uncontrollable urge to use technology to the point that it starts to interfere with the individual’s mental, physical, and social life. This can be in forms of social media, internet surfing, video games, online gambling, and other related acts.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, ask yourself if technology is taking up too much room on your plate. Are there ways technology has moved from enriching your life to distracting or numbing you?

Technology can be wonderful. I have reconnected with childhood friends on Facebook, and love the convenience of my iPhone. Our church benefits from having live-stream and a YouTube channel, two things we never thought we would need.

But there is a dark side. Have you ever sat at a gathering where everyone is playing with his or her phone rather than engaging in conversation? Children play games on their tablets rather than going outside with friends. You now can access

anything you want on the Internet—if you have an addiction to pornography, gambling, or shopping, you do not even have to leave the house to indulge.

We are told in Hebrews to throw off everything that distracts and the sin that entangles. Do you use technology well, or do you mindlessly scroll for hours? Or has it completely entangled you? Would you be embarrassed if someone found out how much time you spend or what you look at on the Internet?

How can you glorify God with your use of technology, making sure you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus?

<sup>1</sup> *What is Technology Addiction, and What Harmful Effects May It Bring?* (addictionresource.com)

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Has technology become too big in your life? In what way can you scale back? What do you need to completely stop doing?

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Post Office

## *Saturday, March 12 / Day 10*

*Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." — Luke 10:38-42*

Back on Day 3, I asked you to look at how you spend your time and energy, and if you are too busy. I asked you to look at *why* you spend your time the way you do. In some cases, you are caring for children, or elderly parents, or are in a profession that is on the front lines right now.

Then I wrote, "But consider whether you have fallen into the trap of glorifying busyness. Society tells us we are important if we have a jam-packed schedule. Being exhausted is a point of pride. But at what cost? Has God become someone to schedule in when convenient, or is He the center?"

That brings us to Mary and Martha. Martha's issue was not that she was preparing a meal, but that she overdid it. "Anxious and troubled" has a connotation of a whirlwind. Instead of serving the first-century version of sandwiches and chips, Martha worked herself up into a frenzy over the meal and got mad at her sister for not joining her in her

anxiety. "Can't you see how busy I am? Make Mary help me!" The "good portion" Mary chose was to put Jesus at the center rather than overdoing it. It was customary to offer a meal to guests, but it did not have to be a big production.

Are you too busy? Do you *like* being too busy? Do you equate a busy schedule with success? What can be removed or delegated? Do you have to do everything you are doing?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Where is God in your schedule? Is everything you do an outpouring of your relationship with God or is He penciled in somewhere? As you pray over your schedule each day, listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps God is nudging you to make changes.

*Daily Devotionals will resume Monday, March 14 — tomorrow's sermon will be part 2 of our theme "What Is On My Plate?"*

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Public Library

# Monday, March 14 / Day 11

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. — Ephesians 4:31-32*

For most of this week we will look at attitudes we might have on our plates. Bitterness. Pride. Apathy. Fear. Self-Pity. Until we stop and take an inventory like we are doing this Lent, we do not always realize those things are there.

Today we look at bitterness. Joanna Weaver says, "Bitterness is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die." You may get angry when someone hurts you or when you do not get your way. Bitterness happens when anger takes residence. Hebrews 12:15 warns, "See to it...that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble." Do you know any bitter people? The thing that hurt them got so big in their lives that it became part of their personality. It is isolating—who wants to spend time with people who spew hatred and resentment all the time?

So today, take an inventory. Are you harboring bitterness against anyone? Have you forgiven those who hurt you? Forgiveness does not mean we think what the person did was okay. It means we release that person to God for Him to judge. We no longer drink the poison. We no longer hold on to the anger.

Keep a piece of paper or the notes app on your phone available. Pray for God to bring up the names of those you need to forgive. Write them down, then later pray the prayer below or your own prayer to release them to God.

Depending on how deeply someone hurt you, this may be a process. You may feel peace, or you may need to continue to release this person to God each time you think of him or her.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I repent of letting bitterness into my life. Whether it is a small root or has completely taken over, I repent and ask forgiveness. Help me forgive those in my life who have hurt me. Right now, especially, I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for hurting me. If there are others I need to forgive, bring their names to me now. (You might pause for a while here.)

I release these people to you, as only you are the judge. Forgive me, and cleanse me of bitterness, and give me love, joy, peace, patience, and all the fruit of the Spirit. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville United Methodist Church

## Tuesday, March 15 / Day 12

*He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" — Luke 18:9-14*

Quick check-in: Have you been able to keep that too-big thing out of your life? If you slipped up, reset and keep going. This is not about perfection, but faithfulness. It is hard. We do not want to feel empty. But soon we will talk about what God offers, what you can put in the place of what you depend on too much.

Yesterday we looked at bitterness. If you come up with more names of people you need to forgive, just go back and pray that prayer again or declare to God you have forgiven them. This is a process.

Today we are looking at pride. The Pharisee's monologue sounds more like a list of accomplishments than a prayer. And how convenient is it to say, "Well, at least I didn't do *that*" and feel proud because we never sinned in *that* specific way. We are not *that* bad.

The tax collector, on the other hand, begged for mercy. He knew he was a sinner and that only God could forgive.

When you are prideful, you compare yourself to someone else and find the other person lacking. Or you compare yourself to God, and conclude that you can make better decisions for your life than He can.

Is pride on your plate? This is a tricky one, because rarely are we aware of our level of pride. Ask God to reveal it to you, and leave time and space for Him to bring to mind times you have been prideful. We all struggle with it.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I repent of pride. I repent of putting myself as a god in my life rather than submitting to you. I repent of judging others rather than seeing them as your children. Forgive me, cleanse me of my pride, and give me humility. Let me see myself and others the way you see me, as your son/daughter. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville United Presbyterian Church  
and CedarCliff Ministerial Association

## *Wednesday, March 16 / Day 13*

*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.  
— Revelation 3:14-16*

I would like to buy \$3  
worth of God, please.  
Not enough to explode my  
soul or disturb my sleep,  
but just enough to equal a  
cup of warm milk  
or a snooze in the sunshine...  
I want warmth of the womb,  
not a new birth.  
I want a pound of the Eternal  
in a paper sack.  
I would like to buy \$3  
worth of God, please.  
— Wilbur Rees

Today we are looking at apathy. The Laodiceans were accused of this—they were neither hot nor cold. Just tepid. They simply did not care.

The nearby city of Hieropolis had hot springs people soaked in for healing. Another nearby city, Colosse, had cool, refreshing water that came out of the mountains. Spiritually, it was good to be hot and healing or cool and refreshing.

The water in Laodicea was lukewarm, full of minerals, and tasted terrible. It

matched their faith. They were ambivalent. Jesus was not as much their Lord and Savior as he was an ornament. It would be like having a Bible on your coffee table not because you read it but because it fits your décor.

Are you apathetic about your faith? Do you want to grow closer to Christ, knowing you may need to make bold changes when he reveals sin? Or do you find you do not care? Is God the center of your life, or does He fit in with your décor?

Come before God and ask Him, and do not be afraid to repent. When God reveals sin, He wants us to come to Him and repent and be cleansed. He wants us to be transformed, not embarrassed.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I repent of apathy. I repent of not caring about my faith, about whether I grow or just stay the same. Forgive me, and re-ignite my faith. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville University

## Thursday, March 17 / Day 14

*But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." — Isaiah 43:1-3a*

So far we have looked at bitterness, pride, and apathy. All these may "fill" you because they take up space in your life, but they leave you unfulfilled.

Today we are talking about fear. Almost exactly two years ago, Session moved worship online for thirteen weeks because of a world-wide health crisis. About that time, the fear level of this nation exploded. Fear of disease. Fear of death. Fear of the unknown. Fear of leaving the house. Fear of rights being taken away. And so on.

When is your fear justified and when is it a sin? God created everyone with a fight or flight response. There are times fear shows up as adrenaline, fueling you to run faster and fight harder to get out of a scary situation. But it is meant to be temporary. When it fills your plate and runs your life, when it becomes bigger than God, then it turns into sin.

The Bible says "do not fear" 365 times—a reminder for every day of the year.

How do you respond when fear rises up in you? You may need to remind yourself *why* you need not fear. God says in Isaiah, "You are mine." No matter what you go through, you belong to God. God does not promise a life of sunshine and roses—you will pass through the river and walk through the fire—but He does promise you will not be overcome. Why? Because He is the Lord. He is in charge.

How big is fear on your plate? Does it run your life, or do you believe God will take care of you no matter what? Trusting God is hard. In a few days we will talk more about why.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I repent of letting fear become too big in my life. Forgive me for not trusting you. Show me how to trust you more. Show me how you are with me even when I pass through the waters and walk through the fire. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Cedarville Volunteer Fire Department

## *Friday, March 18 / Day 15*

*The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" — Numbers 11:4-6*

We have talked this week about bitterness, pride, apathy, and fear. Are any of these things taking up too much space on your plate?

Today we are talking about self-pity. Self-pity is defined as dwelling on one's sorrows or misfortunes. People who struggle with self-pity are trapped in a "woe is me" frame of mind. If you ask them how they are, they share a tale of how someone has done them wrong.

Everyone has dealt with self-pity at some point. It is easy to fall into the trap of feeling sorry for yourself, especially if you are feeling tired or overwhelmed. In this passage, we meet the Israelites after they had been freed from Egypt, had crossed the Red Sea, and had been traveling for a while. They were bored, tired of walking, and hungry for anything but manna.

The rabble started to crave other food. This group of people followed the Israelites out of Egypt. Maybe they were curious about God's blessings. Maybe they hoped for a better life than what

Egypt offered. But when the going got tough, they complained. God was providing for them even though they had come along uninvited, but still they wanted more.

The Israelites were also stuck in self-pity. "Remember the food in Egypt? That would be great about now. Sure, we were enslaved and doing back-breaking work, but at least we had cucumbers."

Do you ever get stuck in self-pity? What do you do when you realize it? Do you justify it? "If only you knew the problems I had, you would understand." Do you pray about it? Do you give your problems over to God and trust Him?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I repent of letting self-pity onto my plate and into my life. I repent of complaining when you do not give me what I want or think I deserve. Forgive me, cleanse me, and show me the path you want me to take. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Church Street Cookies

## *Saturday, March 19 / Day 16*

*The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. — Psalm 34:17-20*

This is the last day of looking at what may be on your plate. Over the last two weeks, we have talked about people-pleasing, success, self-sufficiency, possessions, technology, busyness, bitterness, pride, apathy, fear, and self-pity.

Today's topic is a wound. Broken heartedness. Crushed in spirit. This ends up on your plate because someone has hurt you or something bad has happened in your life.

Your heart can be spiritually broken for multiple reasons. Maybe you are a survivor of childhood abuse. Physical, sexual, or verbal abuse leaves a child feeling broken and wondering whom to trust. Maybe something tragic happened to you and shook your faith. You realize you still believe in God, but you wonder why this terrible thing happened to *you*. Why didn't God stop it?

When you are broken hearted, you feel like you cannot trust anyone but yourself. You put walls up to keep other people and God at a safe distance.

Our scripture reminds us, however, that God is close to the broken hearted. He did not cause the pain that broke your heart. Either someone sinned against you, or something happened because we all live during the time of the Fall and things are not perfect.

Trusting God is a process. That wall needs to come down, but it will probably happen brick by brick. One thing I suggest is the *Father's Love Letter*. The video is at [www.fathersloveletter.com](http://www.fathersloveletter.com) and a written version is on page 52 of this devotional. Be gentle with yourself. God can bring healing, but it will take

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Prayer: Lord God, I feel broken hearted because \_\_\_\_\_ happened in my life. I am having trouble trusting you, so I pray you help me do that. Help me take the step to let you into my heart to heal me. Help me see your love for me. Help me see other people's love and care for me. Amen.

**Prayer Focus:** Colonial Pizza



## Section 3

### How Did THIS Get On My Plate?

So far we have talked about whether you hunger and thirst for more of God or if you are too full of things of the world. If you are full, are you satisfied? Is there something missing? As a way of fasting, you removed something from your life you felt you depended on too much, something that was “too big.”

We also talked about what things of this world are on your plate: people-pleasing, success, self-sufficiency, possessions, technology, busyness, bitterness, fear, pride, apathy, self-pity, and broken heartedness. What did you discover about yourself?

This week, we turn to the question of *how* these things ended up on your plate. How did you get caught up in pleasing other people? How did you get so busy that you moved God from the center of your life to the periphery?

It most likely happened so slowly you did not even realize it. Maybe you were deceived by the enemy. You may covet something else. Maybe God disappointed you in some way, and you replaced Him with things you thought would satisfy you. Maybe you need to recover your love of God—you definitely love Him, but you wonder if you love Him as much as you do other things in your life. Maybe you struggle because of plain old sin. Because we live after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit but before Jesus returns, we will always struggle with sin. Let us turn to our next question about how these things ended up on your plate.



## *Monday, March 21 / Day 17*

*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. — James 1:13-15*

I once heard a story about a father who asked his son to cut several boards to make a wooden fence while he (the father) put the posts in place. The son measured the first board with a tape measure and cut it. To save time, he put the second board against the first, drew a line, and made the cut. He put the third board against the second...and so on. When he was finished, the last board was a few inches shorter than the first and did not fit correctly between the fence posts. His father explained that the son, without realizing it, had drawn each mark slightly off the one before it. If he had used a tape measure, he would have made identical marks.

By now, you have identified things that have slowly crept onto your plate, things that fill you but leave you unfulfilled. You have repented for letting those things get too big. In some cases, you want them out of your life. Things like bitterness, self-pity, and apathy do not serve any good purpose and only hurt and isolate. In other cases, you are thinking through how much of something should be in your life. Technology is wonderful

but too much can be a distraction. Promotions are great, but do you only feel successful if you compulsively climb the corporate ladder?

James explains how sin works its way into our lives. Rarely do we dive in head-first. It is deceptive. Sin tempts us to take a closer look. "Wow, that looks good. One bite won't hurt." Then before we know it, it becomes a meal. It begins as a thought, a look, a "maybe just a nibble," and progresses from there.

No one will ever be completely free of sin this side of heaven. But today, think through things you can do to catch sins more quickly.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

What safeguards will you put in place to help you see the sin creeping in so it does not make it on the plate? If it is not a sin but something that can become a distraction, what can you do to make sure only the appropriate amount makes it on the plate?

**Prayer Focus:** Cutting Edge of Cedarville

## *Tuesday, March 22 / Day 18*

*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. — 1 John 1:8-10*

We are almost halfway through Lent. How is the fast going? Hopefully by now you can see the harm that came from depending too much on whatever you chose to take out of your life. And hopefully the temptation is not quite as strong to go back to it. Keep it up. Next week we will talk about what God offers us, all of which is so much better than whatever worldly things we are trying to use to satisfy us.

Yesterday we talked about how sins or inappropriate amounts of things can get onto your plate slowly. You do not always realize they are there until you have indulged for a while. They are filling you, but you are left unfulfilled.

Another way those things get onto your plate is by deception. Deception is how Satan got Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He got them to believe that God was holding out on them by not letting them eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God was being unfair, and wouldn't it be nice to know what God knows instead of having to obey Him? There is a reason Satan

came as a serpent—he slithered into their lives and into their thoughts.

Our passage for today reminds us that we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are without sin. We tend to justify or downplay sin. "It wasn't that big of a deal." Sin is a big deal, and God has already planned for it. If you confess, He will forgive you. You do not have to confess every instance of every sin, but I encourage you to cultivate an attitude of repentance. Rather than relying on the twenty seconds of silence during the corporate prayer of confession on a Sunday morning, get into the habit of confessing when you realize you have sinned. Keep that slate clean. Ask God to help you resist temptation.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How can you cultivate an attitude of repentance, catching the thoughts when they begin to invade your mind? Maybe you end each day going over the day's activities. Maybe you stop throughout the day. What works for you?

**Prayer Focus:** Dollar General

## *Wednesday, March 23 / Day 19*

*One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." — 1 Samuel 11:2-5*

We have talked about how sin often enters your life slowly. We also talked about cultivating an attitude of repentance, checking yourself regularly.

How would King David's life have been different if he had done that? His sinful attitude began before this passage. When other kings went to war, David shirked his duty. He took naps and strolled around on the roof instead of leading his men in battle.

Bathsheba was not doing anything wrong. There was often a privacy fence around the flat roof of a home, and people put water in tubs to let it warm in the sun. People could see Bathsheba bathing only if they were looking at her from above, which David was. The palace was higher than the other homes, so he had a clear view.

David did not look away, but asked about her. Even after finding out she was married (David also had multiple

wives), he sent for her, and slept with her. It was unlikely she felt she could refuse. He got her pregnant, and had her husband killed to cover his sin.

Do you think you would be fulfilled if you could just have something (or someone) you know is off limits? Instead of being content with what God has given you, you want more. If you could have that one thing, you would be satisfied. Covetousness. What God provides is not good enough, so you go on the prowl for something you think is better. Do you struggle with wanting something off limits?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

What do you covet? What do you think would make you happy and whole if only you had it? Can you cultivate an attitude of gratitude to God for what He has given you? We may never have everything we want in life, but God does provide.

**Prayer Focus:** Feed the Ville

## Thursday, March 24 / Day 20

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters; He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. — Psalm 23:1-4*

We talked about how sin slithers onto your plate slowly, and how to cultivate attitudes of repentance and gratitude.

Today we are talking about anger and disappointment. You may be filling your plate with things of this world because you are angry with God, or disappointed in Him, and you do not trust Him. You look to other people or things to help you and end up with a conglomeration of things that just leave you unsatisfied.

Have you ever been angry with God? Maybe you were in a dark valley and did not feel His presence. Maybe you blame Him for what happened. Maybe something tragic happened and you feel God should have stopped it. Even worse, maybe someone said, "What did you do to get God mad at you?"

Have you ever been disappointed in God? You look at your life and wonder why He has not given you things you asked for, or you have prayed about a situation and nothing has changed, and you question whether God is really almighty after all.

Theologically, we believe God is not the author of evil and does not target us for tragedy. Because we live in a sinful world, people sometimes hurt us, the enemy tries to steal from us, and sometimes bad things happen because we live in the time of the Fall of humankind and our world is imperfect.

But when you are angry or disappointed, that explanation does not help. If you are in this situation, you may have stopped talking to God. I encourage you to tell Him what is on your mind. Read the psalms. Some of them are filled with frustration and anger, but even in their rage, the psalmists end by knowing God loves them. The same is true here. God did not cause your pain. But He does want to heal it.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Are you angry with or disappointed in God? What happened in your life to bring you to this place? Tell Him. He can take it. Pour out your thoughts and feelings to Him. Even if you do not feel His love, He does love you unconditionally.

**Prayer Focus:** The Garage In Cedarville

## *Friday, March 25 / Day 21*

*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. — Revelation 2:4-5*

We have talked about how sin often comes slowly, how to keep repentance at the forefront of your mind, how to avoid covetousness by being grateful to God for what He *has* given you, and how to come to God with your anger and disappointment.

Today we are talking about regaining love for God. You may reply, "I do love God!" You would not be reading this devotional and seeking a closer relationship with Him if you did not love Him. But do you put Him first in everything? That is His hope for all of us, but we have divided hearts and minds. You may put all sorts of things on your plate you think will fill you but only leave you feeling like something is missing.

Today's passage is about the church in Ephesus. The people were praised for many reasons. They worked hard, they persevered, they did not tolerate wicked people, they endured hardships, and had not become weary. It sounds like they were busy doing a lot of worthwhile things. But in the meantime, their love for God and one another had faded.

1 Corinthians 13:3 reminds us that even if we have faith to move mountains or give everything we own to the poor, these things are nothing if we do not have love.

How much do you love God? I do not mean on a scale of 1-10, but is He the center of your life, and everything you do is an outpouring of your relationship with Him? Or is your plate filled with all sorts of things you love more than God? Only you can answer that.

Sometimes we put all sorts of good works on our plates and forget that what God really wants from us is our love. When we love Him with our heart, mind, soul, and strength, everything else will fall into its proper place in our lives.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How much do you love God? A good way to gauge this is to ask how important He is in your life. Is He at the center, or one of many things you value? Is He Lord or is He a consultant?

**Prayer Focus:** Governor Mike and Fran DeWine and their security team

## *Saturday, March 26 / Day 22*

*He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person." — Mark 7:20-23*

This week we have looked at how things ended up on your plate, filling you but leaving you unfulfilled. We talked about how it happened slowly, how to keep repentance at the forefront of your mind, how to avoid covetousness, how to come to God with anger and disappointment, and how to focus on your love for God over what you do for God.

Today we look at one more reason you may put the wrong things on your plate. Simply put, it is because of plain old sin.

Before Adam and Eve took the bite of forbidden fruit, humankind was without sin. The couple enjoyed a loving relationship with God. Then Satan slithered in as a snake and tempted them. He got them thinking that God had been holding out on them by not letting them eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If they just ate the fruit from that tree, they would not have to obey God. They could know good and evil for themselves. They could be self-sufficient and could call the shots for themselves instead of depending on God.

Since then, human hearts have been sinful, divided, and tempted. Though God loves us unconditionally, it is impossible in our current state to love Him unconditionally. We will always have sin in us.

This explanation is not meant to give you an excuse. When you see sin in your life, you are commanded to repent. When you realize your life is out of balance and you have made success your god, or have gotten too busy and pushed God aside, or think your worth is in what you possess...put these things back into their rightful place. There will always be tension and temptation, but each person must take responsibility for his or her own sin.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

It is overwhelming sometimes to look at the depth and breadth of our sin. But take heart—God already knows our struggle. It is not about perfection, but faithfulness. Are you faithful in your desire to love God and to keep worldly things as second-place in your life?

**Prayer Focus:** Grace Baptist Church



## Section 4

### What Food Does God Offer?

So far on this Lenten journey we have looked at what it means to be unsatisfied, what you may have put on your plate that has filled you but left you unfulfilled, and how those things got on your plate.

The first four days, we talked about whether or not you were even hungry and thirsty for more of God. I challenged you to take something out of your life that you felt you depended on too much. How are you doing? Has it slowly made its way back in? How did it fulfill you in an unhealthy way? There was a reason you chose to remove it for Lent. Even if it has slipped back in, recommit to avoiding it for the rest of Lent.

For two weeks, we looked at the kinds of things you may have put on your plate that left you unsatisfied. We looked at people-pleasing, success, pride, technology, apathy, self-pity, and others. Then for a week we looked at how those things got onto your plate. Often, they slithered in slowly, filling a void that left when you stopped going to God for your needs. You also may have been deceived—the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Maybe you coveted something God said was off-limits.

This week, we are looking at what God offers. Now that you know what might be on your plate that is not spiritually good, and you know how it got there, it is time to look at the banquet God offers instead. What He has for us is far superior to what we have chosen for ourselves.



# Monday, March 28 / Day 23

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Romans 8:38-39*

Henri Nouwen, in his book *In the Name of Jesus*, gives an excellent explanation of unconditional love and why we struggle with it: "The love that often leaves us doubtful, frustrated, angry, and resentful is the second love, that is to say, the affirmation, affection, sympathy, encouragement, and support we receive from our parents, teachers, spouses, and friends. We all know how limited, broken, and very fragile that love is. Behind the many expressions of this second love there is always the chance of rejections, withdrawal, punishment, blackmail, violence, or even hatred."

He goes on to say, "The radical good news is that the second love is only a broken reflection of the first love and that the first love is offered to us by a God in whom there are no shadows."<sup>1</sup>

Some of you felt very loved in childhood whereas for others of you it was full of pain. For some, it is easy to understand that God loves you. But others assume since important people in your life did not love you, why would God? Still others of you are convinced God is disgusted with you because of your sin.

We are all promised in scripture that nothing—NOTHING—will separate us from the love of God. God does not always approve of our choices—some of what we do is sinful, and we need to take responsibility for that and repent and accept that we are forgiven.

But He loves you no matter what. You may turn away from Him, your love for Him may waver, but His love for you is unconditional no matter what. When unconditional love is on your plate, other things become less important. People-pleasing, success, self-pity, bitterness, pride, and the other things we have discussed become much smaller when you embrace the truth that you are completely, unconditionally loved by God.

<sup>1</sup>Nouwen, Henri. *In the Name of Jesus* (pp 25-26). Crossroad Publishing.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Do you embrace that God loves you unconditionally?

**Prayer Focus:** Hearthstone Inn

## *Tuesday, March 29 / Day 24*

*Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." — John 6:32-35*

Yesterday we talked about how things you put on your plate become much less important when you truly embrace God's unconditional love for you.

Today we are looking at the nourishment Jesus Christ offers. When you let the wrong things into your life, or the wrong amount of something (it crosses the line from enjoyment to addiction), you are responding badly to a natural craving. God created all of us to crave Him, to come to Him for all our needs. Originally, He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden and taught them. Psalm 23 reminds us that the Lord is our shepherd and He has everything we need.

But because we live in the time of the Fall, we often push God away and reach for things that look enticing and exciting but provide no real nourishment. If you offered a child an ice cream cone or a carrot, which one is he likely to choose? An ice cream cone is okay as a treat, but if that is the main source of nutrition there will be major deficits.

There are many books and devotionals about God out there. Many of them, like this one, quote passages of scripture. But they cannot compare to the Word of God itself.

Jesus tells us in today's passage that he is the bread of life, and that whoever comes to *him* will be satisfied. While it is okay to read words modern authors write about Jesus, be sure to read the Bible. What Jesus taught in the gospels. What Paul said to the churches about Jesus. The visions John received about Jesus. The Bible will provide the best nourishment of all.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How often do you read the Bible? Just as we eat regularly to nourish our bodies, we need to be in the Word to nourish our souls. Whether you are following our congregational two-year read of the Bible or have a different schedule, be sure to get into the Word.

**Prayer Focus:** Kent's Feed Barn

## *Wednesday, March 30 / Day 25*

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. — John 15:1-5*

So far we have looked at God's unconditional love and the nourishment you get through reading the Word of God. When you put these things on your plate, you find there is little room for things like pride, self-pity, people-pleasing, etc.

Today we are looking at three other things Jesus Christ offers: presence, power, and pruning.

Presence. Jesus says to abide in him. In fact, you cannot bear fruit *unless* you abide in him. You can spin your wheels and do all sorts of things on your own. You can make five-year plans and vision boards and do a lot of good things. But when you abide in Christ, when you ask God what He wants you to do, then you are truly bearing the fruit God has for you. Then you are using your spiritual gifts in the way He wants you to.

Power. Notice you are called to bear fruit, not produce it. How often do you get so caught up in doing things that

you burn yourself out? When you abide in Christ, you do things by his power. He gives you the strength to do what he wants you to accomplish.

Pruning. No one likes this. But part of growing in Christ is letting the Holy Spirit prune you. When you live life for yourself and indulge in sin, you have a lot of dead, tangled vines in your soul. The more you take responsibility for your sin and repent when you realize you have strayed, the more dead vines get cut off and the healthier you are.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How much do you do on your own power and how much do you pray for God to lead you? Do you pray for God to reveal sin in your life so you can repent and be cleansed? Do you believe you need to accomplish things on your own or that God will guide you?

**Prayer Focus:** Lola's Mexican Restaurant

## Thursday, March 31 / Day 26

*And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law...I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. — Galatians 2:16, 19b-21*

So far we have looked at unconditional love, nourishment through God's Word, and Christ's presence, power, and pruning. When these things are on your plate, they provide nourishment.

Today we are talking about salvation, and we have to back up a few verses to understand this passage. The Apostle Peter visited Antioch and found Jews and Gentiles fellowshiping together, united by their belief in Christ. But some missionaries began harping on him for ignoring Jewish dietary laws, so Peter pulled away and did not eat with Gentile believers. Soon other Jewish believers did the same, and they had division.

Paul opposed him to his face: "Peter, we don't have to follow the dietary laws because the law doesn't save us! Christ saves us." It does not mean you proclaim Christ as Lord and Savior and then simply go your merry way because you are "covered." Salvation in Christ is not just a ticket to heaven. When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and

Savior, you are crucified with Christ and sin no longer reigns in you—you still sin, but you can confess and be forgiven. The Holy Spirit reigns in you as a believer!

The next verse says: "*The life I live in the flesh (body), I live by faith in the Son of God...*" Do you believe that? The life you live, you live by faith. Not by faith in yourself, or in what you achieve, or in what others think of you, or in striving to do something. You live by faith in Christ ...who loves you and died for you.

Stop and let that sink in today. You live by faith in Jesus, who loves you. You are loved not because of what you have or have not done, but because God decided to create you and love you. That is the best news there is!

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? How do you live out your faith?

**Prayer Focus:** Main St. Community Church

## *Friday, April 1 / Day 27*

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

So far we have looked at the unconditional love of God, nourishment through reading God's Word, Christ's presence, power, and pruning, and salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

When these things are on your plate, they provide nourishment and crowd out the other things you have turned to that you thought would satisfy you. When you embrace God's love for you, you stop trying to please other people, or making success your god, or falling into self-pity.

Yesterday we looked at eternal life. Today we are looking at abundant life on earth. Salvation is assurance of eternal life with Christ. When you die, you will be in heaven with Jesus and all other believers. There will be no sin. There will be no death. There will be no pain.

But you can have abundant life here on earth as well. When you believe in Jesus Christ, it does not mean you will automatically have a life of sunshine and roses. But you can have joy. You can have peace that only God can give. You can embrace the love God has for you.

What tries to get in the way of that is the thief, also known as Satan. Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. He does not want you to have anything good. He is the one who tempts you to sin and says you will never be satisfied with God. He is the one who tries to pull you away from God. He is the one who entices you to fill your plate with all the things we have talked about throughout Lent—pride, bitterness, fear, success as our god, people-pleasing, etc.

But Jesus gives you abundant life here on earth. That is a life accepting God's unconditional love, being nourished by the Word of God, focusing on bearing fruit vs. feeling like you have to produce things on your own, embracing salvation by grace through faith, and embracing who you are in Christ (more on this during Holy Week).

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

In what way has the thief tried to steal your abundant life? How is your life different because you believe in Jesus?

**Prayer Focus:** Mom and Dad's Dairy Bar

## *Saturday, April 2 / Day 28*

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. — John 14:16-17*

This week we have looked at the unconditional love of God, the nourishment you get through reading God's Word, Christ's presence, power, and pruning in your life, salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and abundant life here on earth. When these things are on your plate, they truly satisfy you. When you embrace the things God gives you, you will be full but also fulfilled.

This sounds wonderful, but you still will make bad choices at times, or will be walking along one day and realize you have fallen back into bad habits. There is no way you can do this on your own.

The good news is, you do not have to. In the days before Jesus was crucified, he had a long conversation with his disciples. One of things he told them was that he would ask God the Father to send an Advocate to be with them: the Holy Spirit. His disciples would recognize the Holy Spirit because he would abide with them and would dwell in them.

Romans 8:11 reminds us that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives within us. Stop and think about that

for a moment. This is the Holy Spirit who lives within you. This is the Holy Spirit who teaches you and reminds you of everything Jesus said to his disciples and therefore says to you. The Holy Spirit has power!

As you have journeyed through Lent, looking at all the things you put on your plate that have left you unsatisfied, it probably feels a little overwhelming. How in the world do you make these changes? How do you stop choosing the bad things, or making them too big in your life, and how do you start choosing the things God offers?

The good news is, the Holy Spirit who dwells within you will help you. Next week, we delve into how to choose the good spiritual food.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

We are never alone in our faith, but sometimes we feel that way. When you get discouraged, remind yourself that the Holy Spirit dwells within you and is there as your advocate.

**Prayer Focus:** Orion's



## Section 5

### How Do I Choose Good Spiritual Food?

We have begun our last two weeks of Lent. In our final sections, we will look at how to choose and *keep* choosing good spiritual food. Over the last four weeks, we have looked at what it means to be unsatisfied, what you may have put on your plate that has filled you but left you unfulfilled, and how those things got on your plate. You chose something to take out of your life for Lent, something you depended on too much and had become too big in your life.

We looked at the filling things you may put on your plate that leave you unsatisfied—people-pleasing, success, pride, technology, apathy, self-pity, and others. We looked at how those things got onto your plate—through deception, covetousness, and filling a void left when you stop going to God for your needs.

Then we looked at just a few of the amazing things God offers—unconditional love, the nourishment of the Word of God, Christ's presence, power, and pruning, salvation, abundant life, and the Holy Spirit.

You know some of the good things to put on your plate, so let us now look at *how* to choose them. It is one thing to know something in your head, but quite another to apply it to your life. So this week, let us look at repenting, changing your taste buds, loving God with everything you have, saying no, being content with what you have, and being wholehearted and grateful.



# Monday, April 4 / Day 29

*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*  
— Proverbs 28:13

This week, we are looking at how to choose good spiritual food. The more you choose the things God offers, the more you *want* to choose them. Just like when you get a taste of a good food and want more, when you get a taste of the bread of life and living water, you begin to crave that instead of the worldly things you had been consuming.

On the welcome page, I said that Lent was about repenting and fasting. You have been doing both. On day two I encouraged you to fast from something that had become too big in your life, and on several days you had prayers of repentance to use if you had put certain things on your plate.

Today we will look at *why* it is so important to repent. Why is repentance something to do daily rather than something to do in a quick prayer on Sunday mornings?

As I mentioned in the welcome section, the word “repentance” in Greek has a two-fold meaning—to change our minds, and to allow ourselves to be turned around. Your responsibility is to recognize your sin and confess. God cleanses

you and turns you around so you are back on the path of righteousness.

Repenting is like keeping a wound clean. If you do not properly care for a cut, it can fester and infection can set in. Likewise, when you sin and let it sit there, it can take root in your life. It is better to confess quickly and let God cleanse you.

Renouncing means to reject something. When you repent and renounce, you confess *and* commit to stopping that sin. You scoop it off your plate and decide not to choose it again. You may backslide, but perhaps choose a smaller portion, and you may realize it more quickly and get it off your plate. Repenting and renouncing allow you to keep your spiritual plate clean so you have more room for the good things of God.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Is there a sin that has festered in your life, perhaps taken root? Can you repent of and renounce it? Not just confess, but commit to keeping it out of your life?

**Prayer Focus:** Parish Nursing

## Tuesday, April 5 / Day 30

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. — Philippians 4:8-9*

This week we are looking at how we choose good spiritual food. Yesterday we looked at repentance. When you repent of and renounce your sins regularly, you clear your plates of the worldly things and therefore have more room for the good things of God.

I said on the welcome page that Lent was about repenting and fasting. On day two of our journey, I encouraged you to fast from something that had become too big in your life, something on which you had become too dependent.

It is hard to do! No doubt it has been a daily challenge. Maybe you slipped up and indulged and reset. Maybe you did well for a while and then stopped fasting but are more aware of the influence that “too big” thing has on your life.

One reason to fast is to change your taste buds. I asked you to take that too big thing out of your life so you would feel the gap left behind, so you would feel the craving. If you have managed to keep that thing out of your life, by now

your taste buds are changing. You do not have the same craving for it.

It takes about six weeks to change your taste buds. If you change your diet, expect misery as your taste buds adapt. But they will adapt, and you will begin to enjoy, and even crave, the healthier food...if you keep the junk food out.

How do you grow to crave good spiritual food? Confess and renounce the junk and keep it off your plate. Fast from something when you realize it has crossed over from enjoyment to addiction. Fill the resulting gap with huge portions of the things we discussed last week.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

I encourage you to make listening to *The Father's Love Letter* a part of your daily routine, to remind yourself who you are in Christ. It is a way to change your taste buds and counteract the junk.

**Prayer Focus:** Restoration of Cedarville

## *Wednesday, April 6 / Day 31*

*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" — Luke 10:25-27*

So far we have looked at two ways we can choose good spiritual food. First we talked about repentance, clearing your plates of sin quickly rather than letting it pile up. Then we looked at changing your taste buds through fasting. Sometimes the only way to have room for the good things God offers is simply to stop choosing the bad things. If something fills your plate to overflowing but leaves you unfulfilled and unsatisfied, it is time to get rid of it!

Today we are talking about surrendering to God's plan vs. living out your plan for your life. You have to decide if you are doing what God called you to do. Spiritual gifts = where skill and passion meet. Everyone has different gifts from God, so what one person enjoys doing might be tedious for someone else.

What you do is important, but *why* you do it is equally important. Do you use your gifts to glorify God, or is your focus on your plans for advancement? Do you do *what* you do because you love God with everything you have?

When you focus on loving God and neighbor, your behavior will naturally reflect that. The more you focus on loving God with your heart, soul, strength, and mind, the bigger God becomes in your life and the smaller everything else gets.

For example, when you love God with all your heart, does pride make sense? No. Does bitterness toward others make sense? No. But does embracing who you are in Christ make sense? Does reading God's Word make sense? Does praying over your schedule make sense? Yes.

Behavior follows belief. When you focus on loving God, you will put things on your plate that line up with that belief.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

What are some gifts God has given you—where does your skill and passion meet? How do you use those gifts? Does what you do bring glory to God?

## *Thursday, April 7 / Day 32*

*So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*  
— Romans 13:12b-14

So far we have looked at three ways to choose good spiritual food. First was repentance, clearing your plates of sin quickly. Then we looked at changing your taste buds through fasting. And yesterday we looked at how behavior follows belief, so if you love God with everything you have, you will naturally put things on your plate that line up with that.

Today we are looking at setting boundaries on behavior. We all set boundaries. If you are a parent, your young child most likely has a set bedtime. You probably set limits on the amount of sweets your child has. A five-year-old who has unlimited access to candy and is allowed to stay up until midnight is going to be grumpy the next morning. So while they may throw tantrums to get you to give them what *they* want, you know the boundaries are for their own good.

Adults have to set their own boundaries. No one is looking over your shoulder. When you do not set limits on your

energy, it becomes evident quickly. You may need to burn the midnight oil now and then, but consistently staying up until 3am to watch movies if you have to be at work by 6am is going to burn you out. Therefore, you probably have set a bedtime for yourself.

Do you set boundaries with yourself based on what scripture says is right and wrong? Do you avoid things that you are technically free to do, but God says no? Some of those are listed in our scripture above, but the Bible is full of examples of limits God has set on us for our own good. Ultimately, you choose what to put on your spiritual plate. What choices are you making? Are you taking big helpings of things the world says will satisfy you, or are you filling up on what God offers?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

What boundaries do you need to set with yourself? What are you indulging in that God says not to?

**Prayer Focus:** Second Act Thrift Shoppe

## *Friday, April 8 / Day 33*

*Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*  
— *Philippians 4:11-13*

So far we have looked at four ways to choose good spiritual food. We talked about repenting and renouncing, about changing taste buds through fasting, about loving God, and about setting boundaries on behavior.

Today we are talking about choosing to be content rather than constantly looking around for something else. You can always find things to entertain and amuse you. There will always be something newer...or bigger...or more exciting to put on your plate, always something *more* to experience. But at what point do you decide you have enough?

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most misused verse in the Bible. People use it to justify whatever they want to do—I can do whatever I put my mind to because after all, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. But this is not what it means.

Paul wrote this letter from prison—imagine hearing a prisoner say that he

was not in need. But though Paul knew what it was like to have very little, to be hungry, to be in need, he was content. His contentment was not based on external circumstances, but was based instead on his relationship with Christ. Christ strengthened him no matter what he went through here on this earth.

Piling more things on your plate will not satisfy you. It is possible to have an over-full life and an empty soul. Choosing the good things God has for you will fulfill you. Are you always striving for newer and bigger and better or are you content with what God has given you?

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

There is nothing wrong with having a well-rounded life, happily busy with work and family and church and volunteering. Is that how you live, or are you looking around for one more thing that might make you feel fulfilled? If it is the latter, look to Christ to give you strength to be content with what you have.

**Prayer Focus:** St. Paul's AME Church

## *Saturday, April 9 / Day 34*

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. — Colossians 3:16-17*

So far we have looked at several ways to choose good spiritual food rather than things that will leave you full but unfulfilled. We talked about repentance, about changing your taste buds through fasting, about loving God, about setting boundaries on your behavior, and about choosing to be content rather than constantly looking for something else to fulfill you.

Today we are talking about wholeheartedness and gratitude.

Wholeheartedness means being “all in.” It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking of faith as something to do on Sunday mornings. Recently I saw a Facebook post where a public figure prided himself on the fact he “spent an hour a week with God.” Many people commented that this is not how faith works—following Jesus is a daily journey, not something to get done by noon on Sundays.

Letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly means you are guided by your faith daily. You commit time and energy

to getting to know Christ better through the Word. You commit time in prayer to seeking God’s will for your life. You commit your life to following Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You do not do it perfectly, but faithfully.

And you also do it gratefully. Whatever you do, you do in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God. God has given us all two tremendous gifts through Jesus Christ—eternal life and abundant life. We get to live with Christ in heaven one day. And here on earth, he leads us as our Lord.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Is God someone you visit on Sunday mornings or is He the guide of your life? Are you thankful for all God has given you, or do you focus on what you do not have? When God is your guide, it is much easier to choose good things in life because you want things that line up with His will.

**Prayer Focus:** Subway



## Section 6

### How Do I KEEP Choosing Good Spiritual Food?

We are in our final week of Lent...Holy Week. Over the last five weeks, we have looked at what it means to be unsatisfied, what you put on your plate you think will fill you, how those things get on your plate, and how to choose the things of God.

God offers amazing things—unconditional love, the nourishment of His Word, Christ’s presence, power, and pruning, salvation, abundant life, and the Holy Spirit. When you fill your plates with the good things of God, you are satisfied.

Last week we looked at *how* to choose those good things, how to move from head knowledge to heart knowledge. We looked at repenting for and renouncing your sins, changing your taste buds through fasting from things that have become too big in your life, loving God with everything you have, saying no when your behavior does not line up with scripture, being content with what you have rather than always striving for more, and being wholehearted and grateful.

This week we are looking at how to *keep* choosing those good things. How does this become a lifestyle? As we finish up our Lenten series, we will be talking about embracing who you are in Christ, carrying your own load (taking responsibility for yourself without taking too much responsibility for other people), rejoicing, taking a regular inventory of sin, continually clothing yourself in Christ, and resting in God.



## *Monday, April 11 / Day 35*

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*

*— Romans 8:1-2, 5*

Last week we looked at how to choose the good things of God, how to go from knowing in your head what is right to applying these things to your life. This week is essentially an extension of that—how do you *continually* make good choices?

We have talked about filling your plate so full of worldly things you need to scrape them off to make room for godly things. We have talked about what it means to fill yourself to the point you are not even hungry or thirsty for the things of God. What changes do you need to make so you regularly choose things that truly satisfy you?

One of the best ways to continually make good choices is to fully embrace who you are in Christ. Whether you grew up feeling loved and supported or hated and rejected, you are a beloved child of God. Do you believe that?

Many people throughout your life have tried and will try to define you. Many will judge you based on their expectations of you. In some cases it is unintentional, and in other cases they are trying to get you to conform to their will for you. But only God can truly define you, and He has already told you who you are in scripture.

I said this earlier in our journey, but I highly recommend you read or listen to the *Father's Love Letter* on a regular basis. It is on the next page or you can find it at [www.fathersloveletter.com](http://www.fathersloveletter.com).

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Who in your life has tried to define you in ways that do not line up with the Word of God? Can you forgive them for doing this, and embrace who you are in Christ?

**Prayer Focus:** US Bank

# Father's Love Letter

An intimate message from God to you.

## My child,

*You may not know me, but I know everything about you. Psalm 139:1 I know when you sit down and when you rise up. Psalm 139:2 I am familiar with all your ways. Psalm 139:3 Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. Matthew 10:29-31 For you were made in my image. Genesis 1:27 In me you live and move and have your being. Acts 17:28 For you are my offspring. Acts 17:28 I knew you even before you were conceived. Jeremiah 1:4-5 I chose you when I planned creation. Ephesians 1:11-12 You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. Psalm 139:15-16 I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. Acts 17:26 You are fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:14 I knit you together in your mother's womb. Psalm 139:13 And brought you forth on the day you were born. Psalm 71:6 I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. John 8:41-44 I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love. 1 John 4:16 And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. 1 John 3:1 Simply because you are my child and I am your Father. 1 John 3:1 I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. Matthew 7:11 For I am the perfect father. Matthew 5:48 Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand. James 1:17 For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. Matthew 6:31-33 My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. Jeremiah 29:11 Because I love you with an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3 My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. Psalm 139:17-18 And I rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17 I will never stop doing good to you. Jeremiah 32:40 For you are my treasured possession. Exodus 19:5 I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. Jeremiah 32:41 And I want to show you great and marvelous things. Jeremiah 33:3 If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. Deuteronomy 4:29 Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4 For it is I who gave you those desires. Philippians 2:13 I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. Ephesians 3:20 For I am your greatest encourager. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you. Psalm 34:18 As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. Isaiah 40:11 One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Revelation 21:3-4 And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. Revelation 21:3-4 I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. John 17:23 For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. John 17:26 He is the exact representation of my being. Hebrews 1:3 He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you. Romans 8:31 And to tell you that I am not counting your sins. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. 1 John 4:10 I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love. Romans 8:31-32 If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. 1 John 2:23 And nothing will ever separate you from my love again. Romans 8:38-39 Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. Luke 15:7 I have always been Father, and will always be Father. Ephesians 3:14-15*

*My question is... Will you be my child? John 1:12-13  
I am waiting for you. Luke 15:11-32*

**Love, your Dad.**  
**Almighty God**

The Father's Love Letter is a compilation of paraphrased Bible verses that are presented in the form of a love letter from God to you. Father's Love Letter used by permission Father Heart Communications © 1999 FathersLoveLetter.com - Visit GodLovesYou.tv for more versions of this letter.

## *Tuesday, April 12 / Day 36*

*Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. — Galatians 6:2-5*

This week we are looking at how to continually choose the good things of God so it becomes natural. It is deceptively easy to fill your plates with things of this world—there are always things out there to slowly lead you astray, things that are pleasing to the eye but just end up hurting you.

Yesterday I asked what changes you needed to make so you regularly choose things that truly satisfy and nourish you. I told you about the *Father's Love Letter*, which is an excellent compilation of who you are in Christ according to scripture. Continually embracing who you are in Christ is an excellent way to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, like we discussed last week.

Today we are talking about carrying your own load. In today's passage, "burdens" means "boulders" in Greek, and "own load" means "military backpack." When people have true burdens, God tells you to come alongside them. When you have things too heavy for you to carry yourself, you are supposed to reach out for help from others.

Carrying your own load means two things. First, you take responsibility for your thoughts, words, and actions rather than blaming other people when you sin. Second, you keep the focus on your life instead of taking too much responsibility for other people. You let them be responsible for their own thoughts, words, and actions as well.

Taking responsibility shows spiritual maturity. It takes maturity to live a life submitting to God and to embrace your identity in Christ. And it takes maturity not to try to control others' lives. You can pray for them and journey with them, but each person is responsible for his or her own life before God.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

Are there sins you commit that you blame on other people? "You made me do it!" Are there ways you are trying to control others' relationships with God. "All you need to do is \_\_\_\_." Ultimately, the only life of faith you are responsible for is yours.

**Prayer Focus:** Village Market

## Wednesday, April 13 / Day 37

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. — Philipians 4:4-7*

This week we are looking at how to continually choose the good things of God—how to keep putting on our plates things that truly satisfy. So far we have looked at embracing who we are in Christ and growing in maturity by taking responsibility for our own lives.

Today we are looking at what it means to rejoice in the Lord. In today's passage, we are exhorted to rejoice always. Paul even says it twice so no one misses it. He also says it in 1 Thesalonians 5:16-18—*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

When do you rejoice? Most likely, it is when something wonderful has happened. Child graduated from high school—rejoice! Got that job you wanted—rejoice! Test results were negative—rejoice! It is natural to rejoice when things are going well.

Paul tells us to rejoice always. We have talked about cultivating attitudes of

repentance and gratitude, but what about an attitude of joy? While happiness often depends on circumstances, joy is something you can choose no matter what is happening around you.

When things are not going well, it is tempting to put things like fear and self-pity and bitterness on your plate. In fact, that is how they got there in the first place. But one of the ways to resist letting those things back into your life is to choose joy. God is always with you. Nothing can separate you from His love. Even when things are shaking all around you, you can rejoice in God's love.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

When something goes wrong in your life, what is your first reaction? It very well may be things like anger and fear—"why is this happening to me?" But do you stay in those emotions, or do you choose to rejoice in God even in the midst of the difficult times?

# *Maundy Thursday, April 14 / Day 38*

*Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards—  
for our vineyards are in blossom.” — Song of Solomon 2:15*

This week we are looking at how to continually choose the good things of God. Last week we began that process and now we are looking at how to make it a lifestyle. So far we have looked at embracing who we are in Christ, growing in maturity, and rejoicing in the Lord no matter what the circumstances.

Today we are looking at taking a regular inventory of sin and learning to “catch” sins before they take root. During Lent you have looked at a lot of things you may have put on your plate—in many cases, without even realizing it. You may have been startled by the amount of bitterness in your life, or how often you gave into fear, or people-pleasing, or pride. You have identified how those things got onto your plate—you got envious of someone and coveted what he or she had, you were angry or disappointed with God and looked elsewhere for comfort, or perhaps you got apathetic in your faith.

You took time to repent and renounce and reset. You perhaps have already decided to make some changes in your life—you realize you need to turn off the TV and get into the Word of God more,

or keep practicing forgiveness toward someone who hurt you because while some of the bitterness is gone, some is hanging on.

What do you need to do to keep the momentum going once Lent is over? If you do nothing, those ungodly things will be back on your plate before you know it. You have done a lot of good work over the last several weeks. Do not let it go to waste. Take a regular look at your life and see if things are trying to sneak back in. You may need to repent again, and renounce, and make changes in your life so these things stay out. We will always sin this side of heaven. But we can also learn to catch our sins more quickly.

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Take time today to make a plan about what you will do once Lent is over. What have you learned during this season? What was on your plate that was taking up a lot of space in your life but leaving you unfulfilled? What changes do you need to make to keep that from happening? What new routines or attitudes do you need to cultivate?

**Prayer Focus:** Wanderlust

# Good Friday, April 15 / Day 39

*As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. — Colossians 3:12-15*

So far this week we have looked at embracing who we are in Christ, growing in maturity by taking responsibility for our own lives, rejoicing in the Lord no matter the circumstances, and taking a regular inventory of sin so we “catch” things more quickly, before they take up a lot of room on our plates.

Today we are going to look at how you choose to begin your day. While some of you may have a specific uniform you have to wear to work, most of you have to make a choice each day about what you want to wear. You may choose clothes because of color, durability, style, or a variety of other reasons.

What do you dress up in spiritually? You may not have ever thought about that. But if you do not choose what to wear, you will end up wearing things you do not like. For example, if you choose to put on forgiveness—you decide to forgive people quickly and not keep a record of wrongs—it will not be as tempting to put on bitterness. But if you

do not choose forgiveness, you may get to the end of the day and realize you got angry over lunch because of what someone said to you and you are still angry hours later.

Paul encourages us to clothe ourselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love. It is impossible to choose perfectly. But we can faithfully seek to honor God in the ways we interact with others. How do you clothe yourself spiritually?

## *To Think/Pray About Today*

Take some time to think about how you “clothe” yourself spiritually? What do people see when they see you? Would they know you are a Christian by your words and actions? What changes do you need to make to your wardrobe—your thoughts, words, and actions—so you glorify God in your daily life and interactions with others?

**Prayer Focus:** ZCI Consulting

## *Holy Saturday, April 16 / Day 40*

*So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. — Hebrews 4:9-11*

So far this week we have looked at embracing who we are in Christ, growing in maturity by taking responsibility for our own lives, rejoicing in the Lord no matter the circumstances, taking a regular inventory of sin, and clothing ourselves with Christ.

On the last day of our devotional, we are looking at what it means to rest in God. I have challenged you throughout Lent to look at what is on your spiritual plate, how it got there, and what changes you may need to make. For some of you, it will be very tempting to turn this into a spiritual exercise—make a list of all the things you need to change, and get busy fixing yourself so you are a more spiritual person. As a list-maker myself I understand the temptation.

My encouragement is to make sure you bring Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into this journey. You are called to bear fruit when you abide in Christ, not produce fruit with your own blood, sweat, and tears. You are called to embrace who you are in Christ, not try to be a more positive person so more people will like you.

There is a rest for the people of God—for all of us! When the passage says to make every effort to enter that rest, it sounds like we are being told to try really hard to rest. It is actually saying to keep our focus on resting in God instead of striving to do things our way.

So as we end today, I encourage you to look over the last several weeks to see how you want to live life differently, and then trust God with the process. I do not mean to sit back and wait for God to magically do something, but spend time in prayer. Spend time in silence. Ask God to guide you. Ask God to transform you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you areas of sin in your life and to help you repent and choose another way.

### *To Think/Pray About Today*

How much do you trust God with your life? How much do you pray for guidance and wait on His will, and how much do you do things your way and tell God He can come along for the ride? Today is the day to trust God completely.

**Prayer Focus:** Zion Baptist Church



# *Where Do We Go From Here?*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied. — Matthew 5:6*

Thank you for going on this journey with me. I pray it has blessed you, not because of my words, but because of how God has awakened you, encouraged you, convicted you, and transformed you during this time. I was convicted as I wrote it—God called me on things and said, “How are you going to live differently knowing this is taking up too much room on your plate?”

Where do we go from here? I talked a little bit about that in the last devotional. If we do nothing, all of the hard work will eventually fade into the background and we will find ourselves right back where we started. So here are some suggestions on how to keep this going:

1. Fasting. What did you choose to take out of your life for a time? If you fasted until Easter, do you want it back? If not, how will you keep it out? If so, how will you keep it from taking over? If you did not fast all the way until Easter, is it still taking up too much room on your plate? What will you do about that? In general, how can fasting become a part of your life? Will you routinely look at your life and say, “this is getting too big, and I need to set it down for a while?”

2. Prayer. Most of the prayer I discussed this Lent focused on repenting and

praying for others as we prayed for various people and groups in Cedarville. But prayer is vitally important as we grow in our faith—it is our way of communicating with God. Make prayer a priority throughout the day—you can pray at any time.

3. Scripture. Make scripture a part of your daily life. It is not as hard as you might think. Sometimes I sit and read, but often I use the YouVersion app on my phone and listen to scripture as I am doing other things. Both are important, but I hear more scripture when I have it on as I drive somewhere, clean the house, make dinner, fold laundry, etc. It is my way of letting the word of Christ dwell in me richly.

Easter blessings! Know that God loves you more than you will ever know, and may you continue to grow in Christ.

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