

PREPARING THE WAY

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL
by the
Shenandoah District
of the Wesleyan Church

Lent 2026

About this book

Lent is the 40 days (not including Sundays) leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the foundation of our beliefs—that Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, died, was buried, and rose again on the third day and ascended into Heaven. Through this Lenten season we invite you to fast, pray, and seek God in your life. As we draw closer to Easter and the celebration of Christ’s resurrection it is our prayer that you too will draw closer to Him. This year Lent Starts February 18th and ends April 4th.

We have prepared a devotional book written by many of the pastors and leaders in the Shenandoah district. We invite you to download a digital copy available on the district website: www.shenandoahdistrict.ws. Please check with your church about getting a paper copy.

Forgiveness

**By Rev. George Larue
Salem Faith Wesleyan**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin. - Psalm 32:5

True confession begins with honesty by acknowledging we agree with God that our actions have been sinful. We must be brutally honest with ourselves and with God; glossing over will not do. Making excuses is not acceptable.

True confession gives detailed accounting:

Every sin is addressed,

Every sin is confessed,

Every sin is forgiven, then,

Guilt is removed!

Can we forgive? Forgiveness is truly a beautiful thing, but for some people it is very hard to forgive when they have been done wrong. I’ve heard it said so many times, “I’ll forgive them, but I’ll never forget it!” Sure, if you’ve been done wrong by someone, every time that you see that person, you may be reminded of what they did, but if you dwell on it, have you truly forgiven them?

David had done so many wrong things and had committed so many sins, but the key for David here was that he acknowledged his sins and iniquities and then confessed them to the Lord, and God forgave him. David didn’t stop there; he said the simple word, “Selah.” That one word, “Selah,” sums this verse all up. Selah means to stop, look, and listen, or pause and think about that.

We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but our Father has forgiven us of all our iniquities (Romans 3:23). We don’t deserve His forgiveness, but it is freely given to us. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (KJV).” Even our Lord said on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Since He forgave us, shouldn’t we also be willing to forgive? “Selah!”

Humble Ourselves and Pray

By Rev. Windy Walton

New Hope Fellowship

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” - 2 Chronicles 7:14

As we seek God's presence and enter a time of repentance, prayer, and fasting during this Lenten season, let us acknowledge this moving and daunting passage that we have read so many times before for its specific context for ancient Israel.

The Temple had been built, King Solomon was reigning over its dedication, and the Lord reminds them of how He punished them and how there had been grueling days in the past. But if His people, who are called by His name, will repent, He will bless their land. That is not only a powerful word and promise from God but also a powerful reassurance and inspiration for the people of Israel then and for us today.

It is a call for us as Christians and the church to humble ourselves, repent, and to seek God. When we truly humble ourselves, oneself, the church, and our communities will begin to heal as we transform into the hands and feet of Jesus. God will heal our land through His grace that will flow through us as we seek His face.

Gracious and Merciful Father, first and foremost we thank You for who You are and what You have done and will continue to do for us. We repent before You now and ask that You stir in us a hunger and a thirst to seek more of You. Forgive us, Lord, for anything that we have done in word, thought, or deed that is displeasing to You.

Lord, in today's world everything feels so uncertain and changes each minute of the day. It seems we are battling fear and worry at every turn. We do not know what tomorrow will bring, but we believe You are holding us and that You never leave us or forsake us. We are desperate to feel Your presence, and we thank You that no matter what we face, we know You are greater. Thank You for Your grace and mercy that is new for us each day. It is in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Commitment

By Rev. Herb Shaffer

First Wesleyan, Roanoke

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

Romans 5:8

Commitment is defined as “the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.” The problem for many is that we are committed as long as it is easy. That’s what separates many athletes from those who are Olympiads. Christ was committed completely to doing the Father’s will. He was committed “to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Philippians 2:8

1 Peter 2:23-24 reveals the depth of Christ’s commitment. “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.”

Jesus Christ was committed to the call of God on his life and he pleased the Father in all he did no matter how much it hurt. But not only was Christ committed to the Father, He was committed to us even before we became Christians. Romans 5:8 says, But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus was totally committed to the Father and us. He was committed to die on a cross for you and me, so that we might be free to delight in Him forever and bring glory to Him with our lives. However, that does not mean that God loves only those who love Him. God was very purposeful in reaching out to lost humanity. God made a move toward sinful people. In Jesus birth, ministry, death and resurrection, God was on the move. But it doesn’t stop there—God’s movement calls us to the commitment to move. God calls his followers to embrace a lifestyle of “being on the move” for him. The beautiful gift of movement gives us a great awareness that He is with us while we are on the move for him. Just like the shepherds seek out the Christ Child and tell others about him, that should be a move we are committed to make too.

God’s people are to be very purposeful in reaching out to others far from God. How can we make a move to share the Good News and reach people who are far from him? Are you fully committed?

The Life God Desires
By Pastor Jessica Degener
Christ Wesleyan

No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. - Micah 6:8

What I love about Lent is that it is an intentional season of reflection and reliance on God. As we look at Micah 6:8 in relation to that, I love the invitation here to pause and reflect on this simple instruction. Am I doing the right/just thing in each area of my life as the Bible describes how we are to live (am I loving others well, am I loving God well, am I worshiping God with my actions, etc.)? Do I love mercy (am I once again loving others well, am I handling things at the lowest level possible while seeking the best for those involved and seeking justice)? Am I humbly walking with God (am I loving God, am I walking with Him, letting Him shape and transform me in all areas, or am I resisting)? I love how in many ways this verse reflects the greatest commandment found in Matthew 22:37-40.

Just before this in Micah was a dialogue between God and Israel where God is reminding a rebellious nation of what He had done for them, and Israel responds with an ungrateful heart. They were doing all the religious check boxes, but not loving God or loving others, which led them to the place they were in.

This season is busy with ministry, and things to prepare for, and special productions, church events, school events, etc. As we go through our day to day, let's say yes to Micah's invitation to reflect and ask how we can pause to love God and to love others well even in this busy season and to respond with a grateful heart.

Why?

By Kylee de Pineda

Shenandoah District Administrator

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). - Matthew 27:46

We have all asked the question, “Why”? Why did this have to happen? Why me? Why now? Our whys sprout from the roots of disbelief, loss of hope, or lack of trust. They grow from the lie that the enemy whispers that we believe: “If you are a good God, then why?” This leaves us questioning the validity of God’s sovereignty.

Of all the whys that could be uttered from human lips, Jesus asked the preeminent why: “Why have You forsaken me?” Jesus, however, does not cry this from a place of doubt or fear, but from anguish. He prefacing His question with, “My God.” Even amid His suffering, His questioning never allowed Him to falter in His belief in God.

This agonizing scene unfolding on the cross was known before the creation of the world, and Jesus still volunteered to die a horrific death as Savior. It was in this moment, as Jesus was crying out these words, that the Almighty, Sovereign God tore Himself from the humanity of His Son, creating a cosmic tear in the heart of the Divine. Humanity’s sin was thrust upon a sinless, perfect Jesus. Jesus felt forsaken, separated from God. But it was not God “turning His back” on Jesus. No, this forsakenness came as a grief-stricken God wrestled with the ultimate clash between justice and love. A penalty for the sin was required, and God’s wrath needed to be administered. Yet God had to restrain the power of His spoken word, as the same voice that spoke creation into existence from “Let there be light” could also call a legion of angels to save His Son. Had God not forsaken, Jesus would have been rescued from the cross. Had God rescued, death would not have come. Had death not come, no defeat of sin would have prevailed. If victory over death had not triumphed, there would be no salvation.

May we celebrate this Easter that Jesus was forsaken. Because in His forsakenness, God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us... 2 Corinthians 5:21. May we know that the forsaken arms stretched wide at Calvary reveal the vast depths of Jesus’s love for us and demonstrate God’s ultimate sovereignty. May we rejoice that, despite the anguish and suffering of the Trinity, God loved us so much that He still chose to send His Son.

Perspective

By Rev. Janet Guthrie

Shenandoah District Superintendent

“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” - 2 Corinthians 4:16–18

Negative circumstances often cloud our vision. Church leaders share about low attendance, financial struggles, weary volunteers, a lack of baptisms, or new disciples. Individuals confide: “My son is wandering from the Lord. My spouse is struggling with a destructive habit. There’s a cancer diagnosis. I feel alone. My debt is overwhelming. I don’t know what to do.”

Yet the response remains: He knows. He sees you. He hears you. He is with you through it all. The answer is always Jesus. The reason we do not lose heart is Jesus. The Apostle Paul reminds the church in Corinth—and us—of three principles for times of struggle or weakness. Struggles may be personal, at work, with family, friends, or even in church, but God’s promises do not change. Look at your situation through God’s eyes, knowing He remains faithful.

1. Progress isn’t always visible. “But not crushed; perplexed.”
2. Struggles, while difficult, develop us. “But not in despair; persecuted.”
3. Fix your focus on eternity. “But not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Prayer: Lord, thank You for being trustworthy and for knowing what is next in my life. The outcomes belong to You. I need not fear or be dismayed, for You are the One who strengthens and helps me.

Application Question: What is one area of your life where you need to shift your focus from what is seen to what is unseen, trusting God’s rather? (Remember: Jesus is always the answer!)

Running the Race
By Rev. Adam Watts
Parkway Wesleyan, Staunton

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,
- Hebrews 12:1

If the Christian life is anything, Scripture teaches us it is a race. The writer of Hebrews gives profound insight into the process that God has designed for His children to participate in regarding this race. God's plan is for us to not only participate but also emerge victorious. As we reflect on the pursuit of victory in the Christian life, there are a few simple truths we are called to consider.

First, we must embrace the example of those who have gone before us... those who have inspired and challenged us by their walk of faith and obedience, even in dangerous and difficult times (Hebrews 11). As we consider the influence of those who have touched our lives in the Holy Word of God, we can find strength and encouragement to stay the course and stay true to our Savior just as they have.

Secondly, we see the instruction to throw off or eliminate everything from our lives that could potentially hinder us in running the race. Just as a runner must put himself in a favorable position by discarding any extra weight or baggage that would slow him down as he competes, we must commit ourselves to the discipline of examination by the Holy Spirit and humbly receive any correction and pruning that He desires to do in our lives. This step of the process speaks to the core of biblical discipleship and being willing to surrender and let go of anything that the enemy might use as an obstacle to our race.

Lastly, we are called to persevere faithfully and run the race marked out for us. We often focus on the cutting away of hindrances and obstacles, but we sometimes forget to offer our lives in submission and accountability to run the race God has marked out for us. Too often, we are guilty of trying to run the race marked out for others. We find ourselves frustrated, fruitless, and unfulfilled in our spiritual journey. The only way for us to experience true joy and victory as God's children is through surrender and consecration to our Master and the specific race He has set before us.

As we consider our pursuit of God and His calling to be holy, let us fully receive the admonition to faithfully, fervently, and fearlessly run the race our Savior has marked out for us.

Examination that Leads to Repentance

By Rev. Lisa Palmer

Clearview Wesleyan

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”- Lamentations 3:40

Jerusalem. King David had made it Israel’s capital. In it had lived the kings from David’s line. Solomon had built the temple for God in this incredible city. Now everything was lost. After 500 years of biblical history, the city of Jerusalem catastrophically fell to Babylon.

The poems of lament in the early chapters of Lamentations find the Israelites in the sacred space of processing human emotion as they question God’s faithfulness in a world filled with sin, violence, and ruin. In the Hebrew text, these chapters are made up of acrostics in which verses begin with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrew letter nun appears before Lamentations 3:40 and is said to represent both faithfulness and the reward for faithfulness.

Jeremiah knew what we often forget—that God’s affliction on His people is not cruel acts of a God who desires to hurt His children, but rather the divine nature of a God who is compassionate and is faithful to His covenant. God was using the adversity and distress of His people to draw them back to Himself. And so, the prophet exhorts the Israelites to examine their sin-filled hearts with honesty and repentance, trusting in the faithfulness of God to forgive every rebellious act.

Prayerful lament is crucial in our faith journey. It is at this precipice of pride and repentance where we encounter a righteous God who longs for a restored relationship with each of us. Faithful obedience to Christ compels us to both an individual and communal responsibility of repentance. As we “examine our ways,” we can have confidence that the infallible covenant of our Savior provides the forgiveness of sin and the power of the Holy Spirit so we can live victoriously in His abounding grace and relentless mercy.

Mercy for the Honest Heart

By Ashley M. Volk

Crosspoint Wesleyan

“One who conceals his wrongdoings will not prosper, But one who confesses and abandons them will find compassion.” - Proverbs 28:13

What do we do when we are confronted with those who bear the name of Christ but are compromised by chronic hidden sin? Something hopefully rises up in us as believers: a deep grief, a cry for justice, a heart to protect. It can be tempting to believe that our utmost responsibility to fight such an epidemic is to be someone who will hold others accountable so that sin will not slip through the cracks in our churches and organizations. Although this certainly is vital, it is not our first or most important response in this fight.

The most crucial way we rise up against the plague of compromised Christianity is to flesh out our own sin before God and in our communities. The enemy will pull out all the stops to barricade our path to confession, whispering every lie in our ear and unearthing any fear that was once put to rest. If you lead or serve in any capacity especially, the enemy wants you to believe that to confess sin is to admit you are not fit to serve. Yet this level of transparency may be the bold act our communities desperately need to ignite greater integrity and spiritual growth.

When we sin, it is fruitful to grieve how far we have fallen from the call “...be Holy for I am Holy” (1 Peter 1:15–16), but this productive humility can also turn to a destructive shame if we are not careful. Our grief should lead us toward confession, not away from it. We must remind ourselves that confession is holy and a necessary demonstration of our consecration to God (Nehemiah 9). When we confess to one another and lift those burdens together in prayer, it is also healing (James 5:16). We cannot outrun our shame, nor can we turn away from a sinful path in our own human strength and power. Yet we can, by His grace, respond to the conviction that we have grieved the Spirit and acknowledge our deep need for God.

His tender kindness and compassion is not hidden from us; it is when we choose to live in hiding that we turn away from fully receiving these gifts. Turn to God today in the inner recesses of your heart and name your sin with a trusted friend. Let His love and grace overwhelm you.

Letting Go of the Old Life
By Rev. Lewis Brandon
Jordantown Wesleyan

“Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” - Colossians 3:5

Paul’s command feels heavy. How is it possible to put sinful desires to death? These cravings feel strong, persistent, and deeply rooted in the human heart. But Paul has already given us the key just a few verses earlier: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above... set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1–2).

Victory over sinful desires does not begin with willpower. It begins with a change of focus. We do not simply try harder to resist sin. We fix our hearts on heaven.

Paul highlights covetousness, or greed, and calls it what it truly is: idolatry. Greed is an intense desire for more. It always promises satisfaction but never delivers it. It is like sugar to the soul—sweet for a moment, but addictive and never filling. The more you consume, the more you crave. It creates a cycle of dissatisfaction that leads only to misery. If you want to be miserable, play with the demon of greed.

Many people would never bow before a false god, yet they daily serve the cravings of sinful desire. That is why Paul is so direct. These desires do not simply mislead us. They will rule us.

Scripture shows us the deeper issue behind every sinful craving: worship. Romans 1:21 explains that when people stop honoring God and giving Him thanks, their thinking becomes darkened and their hearts drift into deeper sin. Humanity’s fall began not with behavior, but with misplaced worship. You will always become like what you worship (Psalm 115:8).

So what happens when we reverse the process? When we honor God, thank Him, and fill our hearts with His Word, something powerful takes place. Gratitude dethrones greed. Worship starves sinful cravings. The more Christ fills our vision, the less power earthly desires hold.

Lent invites us to lift our eyes again—to worship, give thanks, and allow heaven’s joy to break the cycle of sinful sweetness. As we do, what once ruled us begins to lose its grip, and what is earthly in us is put to death by the life of Christ within us.

The Secret Place of Devotion

By Rev. Dennis Wright

Retired Missionary with Global Partners

“Now whenever you fast, do not make a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they distort their faces so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” - Matthew 6:16–18

A vivid memory regarding fasting and prayer comes from our missionary years. We were traveling in the Soviet Union and visited Pastor Misha. As we talked, he shared about his church developing. I asked him, “What helps your church grow?” “Oh, we fast & pray every Friday,” was his answer. “That’s why your church is growing in this difficult situation,” I responded. But he replied, “No, you misunderstood me. It’s not for us we pray & fast, but rather for the church in the West. For us here, it is simple and clear. All is either light or dark. Either people are believing Christians and willing to count the cost, or they choose to live in the darkness. But, if I understand the West correctly, it is not that clear; nothing is ‘light or dark.’ Rather, all things are various shades of grey. Therefore, because all is grey, Christians living in the West continually must make choices. That’s the reason we pray & fast for you. We have it much easier here.”

The never-forgettable part of this conversation was the “why” they were fasting and praying. It was not what I expected.

In a similar way, Jesus’ teaching on fasting & prayer seems to have an emphasis that I did not expect. I was expecting an instruction on “how-to” fast and pray. But Jesus’ focus is our attitude of heart when fasting & praying. He’s teaching us to address the “grey.” He makes “Light” or “Darkness” by reminding us of God’s truth. He says, “Your Father is in secret.” “Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Our experience of fasting and prayer will be rooted in our concept and belief about God. He desires to reward us with His presence as we seek Him in prayer and fasting.

The Path of Humble Return

By Brianne Clemmer

Penn Forest Wesleyan

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ Luke 18:13–14

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

What is humility? It’s one of those words we all know, but when you stop and think about it, it’s not as simple as it sounds. A basic definition says humility is having a modest view of your own importance—not thinking too highly of yourself. In Luke 18:13–14, Jesus gives us a pretty clear picture of what humility looks like in real life.

The tax collector in this story seems to have a very real understanding of who he is and where he stands with God. He doesn’t try to clean himself up or pretend he’s something he’s not. He doesn’t worry about what the people around him might think. Instead, we’re told he stands at a distance in the temple and won’t even look up. His body language tells us everything—we’re looking at someone who knows he’s messed up.

If you’ve ever been around kids, you’ve probably seen this exact posture before. A child who knows they’ve done something wrong might drag their feet when called. They won’t look you in the eye. You don’t even have to say much—they already know. That’s the same kind of awareness we see in this man. He knows he’s done wrong, and he knows he needs mercy.

Jesus compares this tax collector to the Pharisee in the story, and the difference couldn’t be more clear. The Pharisee stands proud and confidently lists all the good things he’s done. His prayer sounds more like a résumé than a confession. The tax collector, on the other hand, beats his chest and simply asks God for mercy. No excuses. No comparisons. No “at least I’m not as bad as that guy.”

And Jesus tells us something surprising—it’s the tax collector who goes home justified before God.

That should probably make us pause and think about our own prayer lives. It’s easy to thank God for our blessings and then jump straight into asking for more. But humility calls us to slow down and take an honest look at our hearts. We can’t skip over our sin or pretend it’s not there. We have to bring it to God openly and honestly.

The good news is that God meets us there. When we come with humble, honest hearts—like the tax collector did—God responds with mercy and grace every time.

Create in Me a Clean Heart

By Rev. Colby Calloway

Christ Wesleyan

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” - Psalm 51:10

Psalm 51 is David’s prayer of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. Notice that David does not ask first for restored reputation, eased consequences, or emotional relief. He asks for something deeper: a clean heart. David understands that sin is not merely a behavior problem but a heart problem. Lent invites us into this same honest posture before God, not to manage appearances, but to seek inner renewal.

The word “create” is striking. David does not say “repair” or “improve.” He uses the same Hebrew word found in Genesis 1, describing God’s creative power. David knows he cannot cleanse his own heart through effort, regret, or religious activity. Only God can create what does not yet exist. True repentance acknowledges our inability and leans fully on God’s mercy!

Moreover, a “clean heart” in Scripture is not about moral perfection, but about wholeness and purity of devotion. It is a heart undivided, no longer hiding or rationalizing sin. David pairs this request with another: “renew a right spirit within me.” The word “right” can also mean steadfast. David longs not only for forgiveness, but for transformation—a heart and spirit capable of faithful obedience going forward.

Lent often exposes how easily our hearts drift. We may continue outwardly faithful practices while inwardly harboring pride, resentment, secret sin, spiritual fatigue, etc. Psalm 51:10 reminds us that spiritual renewal begins when we stop pretending and start praying honestly. God is not repelled by broken hearts; He welcomes them! Verse 17 of Psalm 51 assures us that a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. PRAISE GOD!

This prayer is not a one-time plea but a daily posture. Creating space in Lent for confession, solitude, fasting, and Scripture allows God to do His creative work within us. As we surrender what is unclean or unstable, God reshapes our desires and restores joy rooted not in circumstances, but in His presence.

As you reflect, ask yourself: What parts of my heart am I avoiding bringing before God? Where have I tried to manage sin rather than confess it? What would it look like to truly ask God to create, not just adjust, a clean heart within me this Lent?

It Is Finished

By Rev. Matt Reynolds

Emmanuel Wesleyan

Assistant Shenandoah District Superintendent

“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” - John 19:30

Throughout the four Gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus, there are seven statements Jesus made on the cross. All of them significant. All of them important. All of them conveying a message.

We need to know and understand each of them, but the last statement Jesus made that only John records is undoubtedly my favorite and perhaps the most important. Only three words, but those three words changed the course of human history and eternity: “It is finished.”

What was finished? His life, ministry, mission? What was Jesus saying had taken place with those three words, “It is finished”? So much more than we ever thought!

The Greek word that Jesus used, “Tetelestai,” has three meanings, based on three different contexts, and all of them are life-changing!

The first context is that of a business contract in which a receipt is owed and payment is expected to pay the debt that’s owed. With the death of Jesus, the sin debt had been paid. Man could go free because the ultimate sacrifice for sin had been fully paid by the blood of the Lamb of God, and Jesus told us so when, from the cross, He said, “It is finished!”

The second context of the word Jesus used is a legal context. A law has been broken, someone is guilty, and a sentence must be served. There on Calvary, Jesus suffered separation from God, the holiness of God, and the judgment of God. All those things that Jesus suffered were meant for us, but Jesus willingly went to the cross to serve our sentence; and as God’s wrath was satisfied and our sentence had been fully served through Jesus, He said, “It is finished!”

The third and final context of “It is finished” is a military context. A battle, a conflict, a war has been fought and had come to a victorious end. In His final moment on the cross, all creation grew still. Heaven hovered over Calvary, and even the angels were silent as they watched, but more importantly, they listened to the sweetest words ever uttered—a cry of finality, yes, but more importantly a declaration of victory as sin, Satan, and hell are defeated: “It is finished!”

Only three words, but perhaps they are the three most important words ever uttered: “It is finished.” When Jesus spoke those words, He was saying the debt of your sin has been fully paid, the judgment for your sin has been fully served, and the spiritual war against death, sin, and Satan has been fully won!

He did it for us and told us so with three words: “It is finished!”

No Need to Hide
By Pastor Nicholas Conn
Penn Forest Wesleyan

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” - 1 John 1:9

Every one of us has tension when it comes to keeping our innermost secrets to ourselves, especially our mistakes. We keep it to ourselves so that way we don't have to be accountable to someone, including God. We use our heart like a closet; we stuff our mistakes in and shut the door so no one sees.

There is a misconception, though. We think that no one would understand or forgive us, including Christ. We think that He will be shocked or disgusted, but we need to remember that Christ has abounding grace and mercy for us. That's why He came down to save us. He is never shocked. We don't need to hide or put our mistakes behind closed doors.

That is exactly what the verse in 1 John 1:9 tells us—that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Let us finally bring to light our sins, because once we do so, we are finally freeing ourselves from the guilt that we lock inside when we keep our mistakes a secret.

Have you ever noticed that when you do something wrong and try to hide it until you bring it to light, you actually feel so much worse than the actual mistake that you originally made? Our guilt can make us feel terrible. So instead of keeping it down and leaving it in the dark, let's bring it to light because when we do so, again like John said, if we confess it, He is faithful and just to forgive us.

A very fine example of this we see in Genesis, where Adam and Eve sinned. They hid because they realized they were naked—because of their guilt, because of their sin. There is no need to hide because God knows everything we do, and He is not surprised or disgusted. He knows that we are human, and He created us in His image, but we are also fallen humans. He loved us enough to send down His Son to save us from our sins because He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

The Healing Power of Confession

By Pastor John Rogers

New Post

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” - James 5:16

Lent invites us into a season of honest reflection, a slowing down that makes room for repentance, renewal, and deeper dependence on God. James 5:16 speaks directly into this sacred rhythm: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” These words challenge a deeply ingrained instinct within us—the desire to hide our brokenness rather than bring it into the light.

Confession is often misunderstood as weakness, embarrassment, or spiritual failure. Yet Scripture presents confession not as a burden but as a gift. When we confess our sins to God, we receive forgiveness through Christ. When we confess to one another, we step into healing. Sin isolates; confession restores connection. Lent reminds us that transformation rarely happens in secrecy; it flourishes in community.

James ties confession directly to prayer, revealing that healing is both spiritual and relational. We are not only invited to admit our need, but to entrust that need to the prayers of fellow believers. In a culture that values self-sufficiency, this feels countercultural. But the Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. God often chooses to bring His healing through the loving prayers of others who walk beside us.

The verse continues, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” This is not a statement meant to elevate certain believers above others, but to encourage faithfulness. Righteousness here speaks to a life surrendered to God, one shaped by humility, repentance, and obedience. When such a life prays, heaven responds—not always in immediate or dramatic ways, but with power that heals hearts, restores relationships, and aligns us with God’s will.

During Lent, we are invited to examine not only our private devotion, but our openness to community. Who do you trust enough to be honest with? Who can pray with you, not as a judge, but as a fellow traveler in grace? Healing often begins when we stop pretending and start confessing.

May this season lead us into deeper honesty, bolder prayer, and a renewed trust in the healing work of God who meets us in our confession and restores us through His grace.

The Lord be with you.

Hooper Humperdink
By Rev. Paul MacGregor
Penn Forest Wesleyan

God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing – Psalm 68:6a

“I’m going to have a party, but I don’t think that I’ll ask Hooper Humperdink.” (From “Hooper Humperdink” by Theo LeSieg)

Thus goes the first line of my favorite childhood storybook. Just ask my mom; she can probably still recite it from memory. By the famous Dr. Seuss and written under his less famous pen name Theo LeSieg, it is a story about a child planning a party. The party planner is making a list of people they are inviting to their party. They invite practically everyone they can think of—names from every letter of the alphabet—EXCEPT poor Hooper Humperdink.

Why? Is he a bully? A weirdo? Does he have poor hygiene? The list maker doesn’t know, except to say, “somehow, I just don’t like that guy.” In the end, all is well, however, because “A party big and good as this is too good for anyone to miss! And so, you know, I think... I will ask Hooper Humperdink.” Everyone is invited to the party; everyone is included. The end. Well, maybe...

At some point in our lives, we have all been Hooper Humperdink, left out of the party, and we have all been the party planner who excluded Hooper Humperdink. It could have been intentional, or it could have been an oversight. Either way, it doesn’t feel good.

We can’t do much about the former. But we can remember how it felt and try not to leave anyone out when we are the party planner. It will probably still happen; we are just human, after all.

The good news is there is one party to which we are all invited. That is the party in Heaven, with the angels, the saints, and Christ Himself.

Revelation 19 speaks of this party. In verse 9 John writes, “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’” You see, God has an invitation list too. And the good news is your name is on it! No matter how odd we are or how often we have been left out, we will be included there. We are all invited. We just need to accept the invitation.

What Are You Doing?

By Edward Arrington

Clearview Wesleyan

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. - Luke 23:34

Did you ever go to a children's soccer game and watch the children running all over the field in every direction, often nowhere near the ball or the goal? Each one seems to be doing their own thing. You might see one of them kneeling on the ground picking dandelions. One is staring at the clouds. Maybe one of them is kicking the ball to the wrong goal. The other players are just milling around. Meanwhile, the spectators are thinking: “They don't have a clue what they are doing.” And the coaches are wondering if the kids listened to a thing they were told in practice.

Let me assure you that is not what Jesus meant when He was hanging on the cross and said, “...they do not know what they are doing.” They knew exactly what they were doing. They were putting a condemned man to death. These same soldiers had probably performed these same actions numerous times before. And yet, they truly did not know what they were doing. This Man Jesus was unlike any man they had ever crucified before or ever would afterward. Jesus was fully God and fully man. The soldiers did not know that the Man on the middle cross this time was hanging there with all of the sins of all mankind from the beginning to the end of time upon his shoulders. They did not realize that even their sins were borne by Him. They were playing a role in one of the most momentous acts of all time and were oblivious to the significance of what was happening. Even as Jesus was asking the Father to forgive them, they knelt on the ground at the foot of the cross to cast lots for His garments. And Jesus was freely giving His life's blood as the supreme sacrifice for their sin if they would only turn to Him.

During this Lenten season, would you set aside some special time to take a long look at Jesus and think about what you are really doing with your life?

Seen by the Father

By Sarah Torres

Baywood Wesleyan

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. - Matthew 6:5–6

He started his day with a whispered prayer of thanks, gratefully acknowledging his Father's watch care over him through the night. As he made his bed, he began bringing before the throne of the Almighty the needs of those He laid on his heart, interceding for them with a fervor that only the Holy Spirit could give. No one was listening; no one saw the compassion on his face as he prayed... no one with earthly eyes, that is.

He was not great in the eyes of men. They did not follow him on social media, did not hang on his words, did not even notice him much of the time as they passed him in their daily lives. He was a good man; everyone could see that, but not one that caught anyone's attention. There were times, yes, when he questioned his worth. He would lie down at night sometimes wondering if he really mattered to anyone, wondering if he had done anything worthwhile for his LORD. But the next day, he would always get up and seek once again to serve and glorify God in whatever way he could, large or small.

The days of his life passed quietly, and his deeds passed largely without recognition... without earthly recognition, that is. And one day, just as quietly, his earthly life came to a close. And suddenly—suddenly it all became clear. There, before his LORD, he saw with clarity what he had always believed he saw through the beautiful, misty lens of faith. God had always seen him: the 3:00 AM battles fought on his knees for people the Holy Spirit laid on his heart; the times he gathered up the neighbors' trash when their dogs got into it, while no one was watching; the fledgling sparrows he picked up and returned to their nests; the offerings he gave anonymously; so many deeds that no human ever acknowledged or perhaps even noticed.... Here they were, recorded by the hand of the I AM for all eternity. How could this be?

The answer was as sweet to this simple man as it can be for you and me: "Because I AM Jehovah El Roi. I have seen you since before you were conceived, and I have loved you. Your deeds were seen by my eyes even when no one else was watching. And now, you have your reward."

Let Us Reason Together
By Rev. Dr. Todd A. Conn
Abundant Life Wesleyan

**“Wash and make yourselves clean.
Take your evil deeds out of my sight;
stop doing wrong.
Learn to do right; seek justice.
Defend the oppressed.
Take up the cause of the fatherless;
plead the case of the widow.
‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the Lord.
‘Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.’ - Isaiah 1:16–18**

When I was in elementary school, I spent a great deal of time in the principal’s office. On one occasion, I became annoyed with a girl who was sitting at the desk in front of me. I had spent a great deal of time organizing my pencil and eraser on my desk. She had long hair put up in a ponytail. She was adjusting in her seat while moving her head back and forth. In the process, she swept my pencil and eraser off my desk onto the floor.

Irritated, I tapped her on the shoulder and said, “Hey, dumb girl, stop swishing your hair and knocking my stuff off my desk.” My exhortation was not received well. She proceeded to rapidly swish her hair while leaning back, which resulted in my desk being cleared off completely.

Our desks were the old type, which had a hole known as an inkwell. Since there was no ink container in the hole, I decided to run her ponytail through it and pull it from underneath my desk. She yelled out, “Ow!” To me, she sounded like a train whistle blowing. I kept pulling her hair until I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was my teacher, and my fun was now over.

As Isaiah exhorted the Israelites to “cease to do evil,” “learn to do well,” and “let us reason together,” so my principal tried to reason with me and exhort me to cease evil and do well. Although he did not quote the Scripture from Isaiah, his message was the same.

As we live through the Lenten season together, let us remember what Jesus came to do and strive to do likewise. Be kind and care for those less fortunate than ourselves. Be willing to make sacrifices to help people needing encouragement through physical, emotional, and spiritual trials in life.

That I May Know Him

By Rev. Chris Shinn

Williamson Wesleyan

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians 3:10–11

These verses conclude Paul’s recalling the “sea change” living with a Christ Mindset had on his value system. “Gain” and “loss” teeter-totter throughout verses 7–10. Paul once held his heritage, upbringing, political affiliation, and blameless rule-keeping as dear and advantageous. These instantly devalued when confronted by the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road. Paul thereafter assayed them as loss, rubbish, filth, or dung (KJV). Paul divested himself of everything except the “gain” of knowing Christ.

Each Lent calls us to divest, too. We “give up this or that for Lent.” We replace favorite activities with intensive fasting and prayer. This is the what of Lent. Paul challenges us that the why is “that I may know Him.” Acts of surrender or self-denial make room for the truly dear and advantageous—knowing Christ. These acts do not “gain” us access to Christ, but they make us accessible to Christ. What counts this Lenten season is not how much we’re giving up, but that we’re gaining a deeper understanding of and closer walk with the Lord—a surpassing value.

This Lent we can know experientially the power of Christ’s resurrection at work, giving us the desire and ability to live right with God and neighbors (Philippians 2:13). Paul equally hoped that we share in “his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” Unlike our suffering, the suffering of Christ was voluntary and all for the benefit of others. “He took up our pain and bore our suffering...” (Isaiah 53:4–5). Jesus bore His cross and calls us to do the same, for others. His power and sufferings go hand in hand.

Lenten disciplines are not for our benefit alone. Times of self-denial give birth to empathy for those who daily deal with deprivation and want. Fasting can finance feeding the hungry by donating what is usually spent on the item or activity we “gave up,” and can inspire our personal participation in alleviating the suffering of others. We suffer loss so that others may gain.

Ultimately, for us “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Our accounting of losses and gains has flip-flopped—that we may know Him.

Rooted in Christ

By Rev. Mason Yopp

Hope Rising Wesleyan, Huntington, IN

(Former student Penn Forest Wesleyan)

“Having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:12

The book of Colossians is one of my favorite letters of Paul, particularly because I believe that it speaks directly to many of the issues that we see culture—and even the Church—facing today. Paul wrote during a time when many were being led astray by every false teaching or new philosophy out there. Young believers who had yet to build a solid foundation in Christ were being pulled and swayed in every direction. Sound familiar? We live in a time when there seems to be a new teaching, a new religion, a new way of life every day. With everyone swaying to their own definitions of truth, there seems to be no solid ground to stand on.

Yet I believe that the answer Paul gave the believers in the church of Colossae is still the answer for us today: the foundation of our lives is Jesus Himself. In Jesus, we have a new identity, a new story, and a new future. Our old selves couldn't help but be swayed in every direction, but the new self in Christ is rooted on the foundation of His life, death, and resurrection. Not only that, Jesus invites us into His resurrection life through the waters of baptism, symbolizing that we have been raised to a new life. Our old self, our old way of living, can be dead and gone, and we live new lives that are shaped by Jesus.

So my friends, as we continue in this Lenten season and journey to the cross of Calvary, remember that the foundation of your life is Jesus Himself. He is that solid foundation that never moves, is never shaken, and never changes, even in the midst of the shaking ground all around us. In Jesus, you have a new life. You are a new creation. And because of this, you can be His witnesses to a world that is in desperate need of the Truth.

Crucified with Christ

By Rev. Rick Brookens

Kentucky Mountain Bible College

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me .- Galatians 2:20

Galatians 2:20 is one of those verses in the Bible to which we can point and say it is a seminal, life-changing verse. It is the key verse, the thesis of Paul in his letter to the Galatians. It is the foundation of our atonement in Christ: to be reconciled to God, we must die. We must enter into the experience of death with Jesus. If we want our sins forgiven, to be covered and cleansed by the blood of Jesus, to have peace, to know the presence of God in our lives, we must die.

And stay dead! The verb “crucified with” is in the perfect tense, suggesting an action which began in the past and has continuing and ongoing effects in the present. Dead men don’t come down from crosses. Dead men don’t come back to life. Dead men don’t do anything! The verse doesn’t end with our death in Christ, however; we are raised with Him in life. The old life we lived is dead, but now we are a new creation in Christ. We experience and participate in His resurrection life! It is now not us who live, but the Holy Spirit within us transforming and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2; 8:29).

Dead men also have no debts. Our sins are paid for when we die with Christ. The debt to God is gone forever. The curse of the law was satisfied on the Cross by Jesus Christ. We are free! Our shame and guilt are replaced with freedom. We are no longer under the law’s jurisdiction, obligation, or power. We are free from the law’s curse and its demands. We live in the Law of Christ, the Law of Love, if we would remain in New Covenant communion with Christ. This is the fulfillment of the OT law. We only keep that law by and through the power of the Holy Spirit working within us moment by moment. What freedom is this death in Christ!

The Path of Humility

By Rick Chase

Abundant Life Wesleyan

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” - James 4:10

Good morning, loved ones, and God bless you.

I must do something great! I need to have the biggest ministry ever! I need to lead more people to Christ than anyone else! I need to have the greatest legacy so that my name is remembered by everyone. Is it your goal to be remembered, or that God would be glorified? I have camped in both places.

Be humble. Do whatever you do so that God might be glorified and not yourself. Be faithful. Look for opportunities to spread the gospel. Always be ready to speak Jesus into the ears and hearts of anyone who will listen. Give your life to God and be content with what He gives you in return. Most importantly, be ready to move when God stirs your heart, and let it be Him who exalts you and not you yourself. How many people have already been led to Christ by those who have no idea what God has done with their faithful service?

Let God have control. Be content with His many blessings and always be ready to serve, that God may have the glory. Let your legacy be that you loved Jesus faithfully to the end so that you may begin your new and eternal journey. Just wait and see what He has accomplished by your humble service; I think you will be amazed.

Let God do what only He can do with a humble servant such as yourself. Hallelujah! Have a wonderful, blessed day. Jesus loves you!

Widows' Pew

By Rev. Myron Atkinson

Penn Forest Wesleyan

"Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." - Matthew 6:20-21

I walked into the little white church built during the depression era. It had wooden oak pews, wood floors, an old fashion wooden attendance board, and a red carpet runner down the center aisle. As I walked around, I noticed golden plaques on the side of the pews. I noticed one with several women's names and was curious about it. People in the church told me this pew had been donated in honor of all the widows. These men and their wives sacrificed their time, energy, and resources to see the church built. Individuals generously gave to purchase the pew in their memory/honor.

I thought of the things for which people usually sacrifice. It's easy to think about people sacrificing to build a home for their children, send them to college, or make sure their children receive proper health care. That is understandable because my mom wanted her boys to have a better life than she had.

But why would these people have sacrificed much of their time, energy, and resources during these difficult times to build a church? It was because their real treasure wasn't here on this earth; they were storing it up in heaven. The men and women who sacrificed to build that church knew that in that church, lives would be changed, marriages would be restored, people would be healed, and people would find hope. They knew that things on this side of eternity would not last, but what will last forever would be a relationship with Jesus Christ.

They were investing in eternity, and their investment has paid huge dividends. It reaps enormous dividends when we invest in eternity, in our lives, our children's lives, and our church!

We invest in eternity by focusing our attention and energies more on eternity than the things of this world. Spend time reading the Bible, praying, and listening; spend time teaching those things to others, and don't become so tied down with debt and life on this side of eternity that we can't give generously.

In what ways are you investing in eternity in your life, others' lives, and in the church?

A Christ Mindset
By Rev. Chris Shinn
Williamson Wesleyan

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. - Philippians 2:3-4

Much emphasis has been placed, in the past few years, on having a Christian Worldview. Many sermons and earnest entreaties have challenged Christ-followers to view the world through a lens shaped by Christian teachings. More than a perspective, a Christian Worldview has been presented as a sword to protect minds, homes, and churches from the evil onslaught of the enemies of faith. Holding the correct set of beliefs, based on the Bible and certain traditions of understanding it, has been purported to be the only hope to stay connected to truth and God in an increasingly non-Christian society.

Paul, however, didn't call the first generation of Christ-followers living at Philippi to fuss over building a lens based on a set of correct beliefs, but to build a life based on the mindset of Christ our Lord. Our relationships with others must be guided by the perfect example of Jesus Christ. Correct beliefs based on the truth of God's Word are vital, but how we live out the Good News better reflects the Word-Made-Flesh.

A Christ Mindset describes the others-focus, humility, service, deference, obedience, and sacrifice by which Jesus carried out Salvation's mission. Jesus didn't devalue himself; he esteemed others as more valuable. Jesus' humility was not self-abasing; it was self-forgetting in the face of the needs of others. Jesus deferred to the Father in Gethsemane declaring, "Not my will but yours be done." Jesus didn't just know the Scriptures; he obeyed the God of the Scriptures. Jesus gave himself to suffering and death to ransom and rescue us.

We will interact with many, many people today. A Christ Mindset calls us to focus not on how we see them, but how we treat them. May we, like our Lord, humbly serve and sacrifice because we value others and their interests more than our own. May we not use our relationship to God in Jesus "to our own advantage," but to help everyone we meet today through love and prayer. The lost are won not by sharing a better worldview, but a better way of living and loving.

Walking in Newness of Life

By Rev. Randy Garner

Dirt Roads Network

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:4

Lent is a sacred season that invites us to slow down, to reflect deeply, and to walk intentionally with Christ on the road that leads to the cross. It is a time for honest examination—of our hearts, our habits, and our hopes. In Romans 6:4, the apostle Paul reminds us that following Jesus is not merely about believing the right things, but about being made new.

Paul uses the language of burial intentionally. To be buried with Christ means that something real has died—the old way of life marked by sin, self-reliance, and misplaced loyalties. Lent calls us to name those things honestly. It asks us what still clings to us that belongs in the grave: attitudes that resist grace, patterns that dull our witness, or distractions that keep us from wholehearted devotion to God.

Yet Lent is never only about death; it is always moving toward resurrection. The same glory of the Father that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in us. We are not only forgiven people; we are resurrected people. To “walk in newness of life” means to live each day shaped by Christ’s victory—choosing obedience over convenience, humility over pride, and faithfulness over fear.

This newness is not achieved by our own strength but received through surrender. Lent teaches us to let go so that God can give life. As we pray, fast, serve, and repent, the Spirit helps us to become more like the image of Christ. What was buried no longer defines us, but the new life now directs us.

As a district family, may this Lenten season draw us deeper into the life of Christ. May we walk together—pastors and congregations alike—in the power of His death and resurrection, bearing witness to the new life God is bringing forth in us and through us.

Prayer:

Gracious Heavenly Father, during this Lenten season, help us to lay down what belongs to the old self and to walk faithfully in the new life You have given through Christ. By Your Spirit, form us into people shaped by the cross and alive in the power of the resurrection. Please, Holy Spirit, have Your way in us. Amen.

The Only Way to Win
By Rev. Tony Schiavone
Cornerstone Community

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.” - Mark 8:35

As an avid sports fan, there's something I've noticed that can be a dangerous way to play any competitive game. Both of my sons play high school baseball, and over the years there have been games where their team had the lead, but instead of continuing to play to win, they started playing not to lose. Safer pitches. Fewer swings. More bunts. Little to no stealing. The focus shifts to protecting the lead, playing it safe, and avoiding risk. Slowly, the momentum changes. They tighten up, and eventually the game is lost. Playing not to lose almost always leads to losing.

In Mark 8:34–38, after talking about how much He must suffer, Jesus calls the crowd to Himself for a difficult teaching moment. Jesus knew that our natural tendency as human beings is toward self-preservation: comfort, control, and safety. That was true then, and it's still true now. Taking risks, making sacrifices, and stepping into the unknown can feel scary. According to Jesus, the more tightly we cling to our own version of life, the more we end up losing it. But the moment we entrust our life to Him, we begin to truly find it.

It's an upside-down way of thinking in an upside-down Kingdom, and yet it's the calling of every believer. Jesus isn't asking us to be reckless or unwise with our lives; He's calling us to simply trust Him. He's calling us to surrender everything, even our very lives, for the sake of the Gospel.

So what does this look like practically? In our relationships, it may mean forgiving instead of holding a grudge. With our finances, it could mean living generously rather than fearfully. With our reputation, it may mean choosing obedience over approval. With our faith, it could mean sharing the Gospel even when there's a risk of rejection.

Saving our life means leaning toward comfort, control, and self-interests. Losing our life means stepping forward boldly and placing it fully in Jesus' hands. And in the Kingdom of God, the only way to truly win is to stop playing it safe.

Great Expectations
By Rev. Myron Atkinson
Penn Forest Wesleyan

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” - 1 Peter 1:3

I still remember the excitement of graduating from high school. I didn’t enjoy school, so graduation day felt like freedom. I counted down the days, threw my cap in the air, celebrated with my family—and then reality hit. Life. Responsibilities. Expectations that didn’t quite live up to the hype.

We all live with expectations, and most of them eventually fall short. Careers don’t unfold as planned. Relationships disappoint. Dreams get delayed or reshaped. But there is one expectation that will never disappoint and will always exceed anything we imagine: an eternity with Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote his letter to believers who were under intense pressure—exiled, criticized, and pushed to the margins of society. Yet he begins not with fear or frustration, but with praise and hope. Why? Because their expectation was anchored in something unshakable. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Peter writes, reminding them that their hope is not rooted in circumstances, but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because God raised Jesus from the dead, we have been given new life and a secure future. Jesus Himself said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3, NIV). That promise gives us confidence to live with hope today.

When we focus on eternity, we are less likely to become complacent, less satisfied with the temporary comforts of this world, and more committed to living out what Christ has commanded us to do. Scripture reminds us, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV).

Sometimes life is hard, and it’s tempting to lower our expectations just to protect ourselves from disappointment. Scripture calls us higher. Don’t lower your expectations because life is difficult—raise them because Jesus is alive. Your future is secure. God is still at work.

As Paul writes, “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NIV).

Because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, we can live with great expectations—real hope, resilient faith, and deep joy—even when life is hard.

Rend Your Hearts
By Rev. Lisa Shinn
Williamon Wesleyan

“‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.” Joel 2:12–13

These familiar verses are the lynchpin in Joel’s prophecy warning of the divine judgment coming in the day of the Lord. Verses 1–11 are vivid with descriptions of darkness, fire, desert waste, and celestial disturbances so dreadful that it seems doubtful anyone could endure it.

It is here we find the bridge to hope, a reminder of our Father’s unending love and mercy. There is a promise of restoration—a way we can survive. These directions are the path forward: “Rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Rend is a bit of a “church word,” a Bible word indeed. The KJV, NIV, ESV, and RSV versions all use the word rend here. However, the poetry of *The Message* puts it this way: “Change your life, not just your clothes.” We have a beloved family story that is often shared by my Shinn relatives. When “the boys” (my husband and his three brothers) were younger, one of them liked to stand up in the back seat while their dad was driving. This was, of course, before car seats and safety belts were required. This brother was often scolded and repeatedly told to sit down. It was only after he was given the universal dad ultimatum, “Don’t make me pull this car over,” that the brother sat down.

As he sat down, he crossed his arms and revealed the condition of all our hearts by saying, “Dad, I may be sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside.”

God values internal change over external observance. Lent is not just a ritual—a seasonal time marked on the calendar where we may give up chocolate or our favorite TV show to fast from worldly things.

Lent gives us the opportunity to change our routines and change our habits. We can change our lives, not just our clothes.

God desires a sincere turning of our hearts to Him. All of us, pastors and laity (verses 16 and 17), are called to intercede for God’s mercy. Together, may we seek Him with heartfelt repentance this Lenten season.

Choose Life

By Rev. Joshua Householder

Christ Community

“Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel?” Ezekiel 18:30–31

I heard a story once about a man who was sitting on a fence. God appeared to him and begged him to get off the fence and come to His side. The man looked at God's side of the fence and saw that it was good, and he started to get down, but then Satan appeared and urged the man to reconsider. Instead of making a decision right away, the man thought he'd wait and weigh his options, so he stayed on the fence. “Surely God won't send me to hell for sitting on the fence. I'm not on Satan's side, and I'm so close to His!” he thought to himself. Then one day he died. When he opened his eyes, he found himself in hell! He called out to Satan in protest, “This must be a mistake! I was on the fence, not in your territory!” Satan smiled and said, “True, but I own the fence.”

My focus is specifically on Ezekiel 18:30–31, but I really appreciate the context of the entire chapter. We truly see the heart of the Father in this passage. He calls out to His children with great emphasis and a burden for their salvation. We even see the rare use of exclamation points! It's as if someone took a sponge to God's heart and soaked up all His tears for us, only to pour them out in this chapter. When we think of grace, it is usually rooted in the New Testament, but here we see that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

“Why will you die?” As a father, the thought of my children making poor, life-altering decisions breaks my heart. Here God calls out passionately to His children, pleading with them to repent and be saved. He's made the way, He's cleared the path, He's given clear instructions and warnings, but He's also given us free will to make our own decisions. One thing we are not able to do, however, is ride the fence and hope for the best. Contrary to what worldly compromises masquerading as “love” would have us believe, God does not want us to settle in our sins; rather, He calls us to a life of repentance and rebirth. He will give us “a new heart and a new spirit.” We need to stop justifying our sins and instead be justified freely through the blood of Jesus.

Take Up Your Cross

By Rev. Mason Yopp

Hope Rising Wesleyan, Huntington, IN

(Former student Penn Forest Wesleyan)

Luke 9:23

“Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’” (NIV)

The older I get (I know, 27 isn't that old, but humor me), the more I start to understand the importance of denying myself. If I gave in to my every desire, then I would stay up late every night, I would eat nothing but junk food, I would sit around and watch TV all day, and I would have no money. While at first glance that sounds amazing, I know that isn't the life I want to live.

You see, we often think in our world that denying ourselves is wrong, that it is a bad thing. The status quo seems to be “do whatever makes you feel good.” Yet all that leads to is a life of self-centeredness and wasting our lives away on things that don't matter. Jesus invites us into a different kind of life—a kind of life where denying yourself isn't meant to restrict us, but rather free us. A kind of life where denying yourself develops discipline, discipline develops character, and our character shapes us to be more like Christ.

Jesus makes it clear in the verse above that to be His follower is to deny ourselves. Yet He doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that we must take up our cross daily and follow Him. As a twenty-first-century reader, sometimes the weight of those words can get lost on us. Yet to the first-century Jew and Gentile, these words had a profound impact. They knew that to take on a cross was to take on the instrument of your own death. So for Jesus to say, “Take up your cross daily and follow me,” was as if He was saying, “You must be willing to die daily and follow me.” In a way, for some of those who heard these words, following Jesus meant a literal death. But for others, it meant completely dying to themselves to take up the way of life Jesus was teaching and showing them—to follow Him.

That's the invitation that Jesus gives to us even today. Here in the U.S., we are so fortunate to be able to worship openly and freely, with hardly any risk to ourselves outside of social critique. But if the day were to come, to truly follow Jesus' words, we would have to be willing to die for Him. Until that day comes, Jesus' invitation to us is to die to ourselves—to the way of life that we want to live daily—and follow the way of life Jesus has taught and shown us. This may seem challenging, but remember, His commands and teachings are never burdensome. He always leaves us with a promise when we follow His way.

“If you try to hold on to your life, you will lose it. But if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it.” (Luke 9:24, NIV)

Living in God's Mercy
By Rev. Theresa Blyskal
Jordantown Wesleyan

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” - Romans 12:1

I wonder how my life, with God's help and long-suffering, is to be presented to Him as a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” I ponder just what might be a holy and acceptable sacrifice to a holy God. Looking back on my actions, thoughts, responses, and even different areas of ministry, I try to discern what He might consider “reasonable service.”

I've prayed for direction and done my best with God's help, but very often I'm my own worst critic. It's an adventure and a joy accurately sharing the Gospel with others, ministering as faithfully as I know how, doing my best not to conform to this world, and worshiping in spirit and truth. God has been transforming me as I go, renewing my mind as well. Praise God!

Then all of a sudden my life is rocked by some unforeseen event or situation. I've found that when I get tired and worn out, I personally tend toward ritual, my mind whirling with “what ifs,” “now whats,” and the question of whether or not I've blown it. We all have certain tendencies; we need to be aware of them.

When I stop to review what is going on, it strikes me that I belong to a merciful God. There's no place I can go that He's not there. I can't outrun Him. I finally come to the place where I sense His loving arms around me and His deep, comforting mercy. He has promised to catch me when I fall, to lift me up when I get pressed down by life, encouraging me as I enter difficult situations.

God wants us to stretch without fear as we grow more confident in Him, trusting His heart in all things. He will enjoy our worship to Him as we sacrifice our whole selves in grateful response to Christ's work on the cross—heart, mind, and spirit. We're living in the precious, unmerited favor of God. We are honored and joyfully share this with others as we go, glorifying God.

His Mercies Are New Every Morning

By Rev. Heather St. Clair

Penn Forest Wesleyan

“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:22–23

Lamentations 3:22–23 is a verse we quote like it belongs on a farmhouse sign—and it does. It’s beautiful. I think of the verse every morning as I encounter the beauty of the sunrise.

But Lamentations was written in the middle of a mess. Jeremiah wasn’t sitting there with instrumental music playing in the background—he was watching everything fall apart. The city was wrecked, and the people were grieving. It was there, in the middle of the mess, that he says God’s mercies are new every morning. It makes me appreciate this verse all the more because I don’t know about you, but I’m not waking up to perfect circumstances. I’m waking up to laundry, hard conversations I’ve been avoiding, and life in general. Many times, we’re waking up to the same prayer we prayed yesterday.

And still...morning comes.

“New every morning” seems dramatic, but it doesn’t need to be. Sometimes it just looks like opening your eyes and realizing you’re still here. You made it through the night. The sun came up. And somehow, even though nothing magically fixed itself, you’re not crushed.

That’s what mercy is—it’s not flashy or loud. It’s just steady.

If we aren’t careful, we start our days from a deficit. We wake up carrying yesterday and things we regret—maybe regretting something we said that we shouldn’t have or something we should have said but didn’t. But this verse reminds me that we don’t have to live this way.

God isn’t handing me leftovers from yesterday’s grace. He’s not saying, “Well, let’s see how you do today.” His compassion doesn’t run thin. It doesn’t roll its eyes and say, “Again?”

It simply shows up.

Great is His faithfulness—which is comforting, because while mine wobbles sometimes, His doesn’t. So if you’re waking up to something heavy, just remember this: you are not starting from empty. You are starting from mercy. And that’s more than enough for today.

Don't Avoid Death
By Pastor Corey Adkins
Reclaim

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” - John 11:25

Jesus doesn't avoid death—He walks straight into it and overcomes it.

The world says: protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself.

Jesus says: lose yourself, and you will find life through Me and the resurrection.

Every time we surrender ourselves, our control, or comfort, something in us “has to die.” But strangely, our hearts are warmed by the Holy Spirit, our joy increases, and peace overwhelms us.

We don't come alive through success—
we come alive through surrender.

My Prayer:

Jesus, teach me that nothing I surrender to You is lost. As I die to myself, may I truly be alive in You.

Be Careful What You Pray For

By Rev. Perry Lundy

Penn Forest Wesleyan

“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” - Psalm 145:18

“Lock-INS” are wonderful ways to build unity and introduce a youth group to deep spiritual truths. One such event I organized personally impacted me with a lesson in prayer in a very dramatic way. I had a guest speaker, music, and movies. I also had invited a young adult drama team to open our evening. With our youth and another church group, we had over 100 “amped-up” youth. Everyone sat on sleeping bags around a roped-off area.

A young woman stepped in the circle and announced a wrestling match between “Satan” (to her left) and Jesus Christ (to her right). *Important to note: the young man in the role of “Jesus” was kneeling in prayer.

I knew this group and their passion for Christ and their amazing athletic abilities. Music from Carman’s “The Champion” blared across the gymnasium. The two opponents met in the center. For the next 15 minutes, the two opponents (Jesus vs. Satan) did flips, body slams, and other stunts. The kids cheered and screamed when Jesus was winning and booed Satan.

Barely 15 minutes into the event, one of the wrestlers fell to his knees crying out, “I’m hurt!”.

Two of our young adults helped our injured “Jesus” to his feet. His right arm had dislocated from his shoulder. With his arm in a sling and our adult leader in charge, I drove him to the hospital.

*Remember what he was doing before the event?

Three hours later, our exhausted and somewhat embarrassed warrior was in the car on our way back to the Lock-In. Just before we went in, Steve (our Jesus) turned to me. “Perry, thanks for sticking with me. I gotta tell you something,” he said. “I don’t know if you noticed, but I was praying for something only God could do.” Close to tears now, he continued, “I asked God to let me feel a little of the pain His Son Jesus felt on the cross—and He did!”

Needless to say, the atmosphere in the gym changed. Steve shared about the prayer and the pain that followed. After a million questions began to form, prayer was now the talk of the night.

This Lenten season focus is on preparing to meet God in prayer!

R.C. Sproul shared the following acrostic—ACTS—that can prepare you to pray with the right focus:

A - Adoration: whether lifting hands to heaven or kneeling (1 Tim. 2:8)

C - Confession: leads to a righteous prayer (James 5:16)

T - Thanksgiving: God expects it. (1 Thess. 5:18)

S - Supplication: Because God can (1 Jn. 5:14–15)

Made For This Mountain

By Rev. Lewis Brandon

Jordantown Wesleyan

“Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said.” - Joshua 14:12

Does anyone like to fish and will admit it? One time I went fishing with some friends. After a hot day of fishing at a pond, we got in the vehicle to leave. We didn't catch anything. As we loaded back up in the truck, my friend's dad pushed the gas pedal. The ground was wet, and our tires began to spin. We were stuck. One of the back tires sank deeply into the mud. We had to find a farmer to bring his tractor to pull us out. Maybe if the truck had been a Ford, it would have made it out of the mud hole.

We didn't decide to get stuck; we just wanted to fish. The ground was wet, the truck was heavy, and the tires sank. It feels like some problems choose us.

In Joshua 14, Israel had entered the Promised Land. Forty years had passed since they spied out the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb were two of the spies, and they were the only ones still alive. They encouraged Israel to follow the Lord, yet the people didn't listen. They chose to believe a negative and fearful report.

However, the courageous attitude of Caleb was blessed by the Lord (Nu 14:24–25). Caleb didn't let the negativity around him sink into his heart. He trusted the promises of God. The time had come for land to be distributed, and rather than running away again, the story was going to be changed. It was his moment to take the mountain! He said, “Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day.” He was ready to climb the mountain, chase the giant, and change the story.

We all have a mountain to face. All mountains vary by size and by name, but the common factor is that everyone will face a mountain. As we travel through our days, it is inevitable.

Don't despair about what has happened in the past. Don't let what others have done hold you back. You were made to climb mountains; you were made to be victorious in Jesus Christ. To be a conqueror, you have to conquer something. God didn't bring you to the bottom of the mountain so that you could stare at it. You were born again to be a climber and an overcomer. You were made for this mountain.

Climb the mountain, chase the giant, and change the story.

Faith Filled Worship
By Rev. Carley Moore
Parkway Church on the Mountain

"No, this is the kind of fasting I want: Free those who are wrongly imprisoned; lighten the burden of those who work for you. Let the oppressed go free, and remove the chains that bind people. Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. - Isaiah 58:6-7 NLT

In the book of Isaiah, we find a powerful call to true worship and genuine faith that extends beyond a ritualistic check-box faith and worship. This is a faith and a worship that is beyond "religion" and "tradition."

In these verses, the Lord challenges us to rethink our understanding of fasting and true devotion. True fasting, according to God, is bigger than just abstaining from food, but about engaging in acts of justice and mercy. There are two calls found in these verses:

A Call for Freedom: The Lord calls us to "free those who are wrongly imprisoned" and "let the oppressed go free." This means actively working to free those who are bound by injustice through advocacy, support, and other means of assistance. We are called to "remove the chains that bind people."

A Call for Generosity: True devotion involves sharing our blessings with those in need. "Share your food with the hungry" and "give shelter to the homeless" are direct calls to action. These acts of kindness, compassion, and generosity reflect the heart of God and demonstrate the love of Christ to our neighbors and nations.

As I read this, I am reminded of the phrase, "give them the shirt off your back." Providing basic needs for others like this is how we live out our faith. It's about seeing the humanity in others and responding with kindness, compassion, and generosity.

Isaiah's message urges us to move beyond superficial religious practices and to embody the principles of love and justice in our everyday lives. May all members of the Shenandoah District of the Wesleyan Church engage in community-focused actions that reflect freedom and generosity for those we encounter. Whether it's volunteering, donating, or simply being a good neighbor to those near and far, every act counts.

Let's commit ourselves to this higher calling, inspired by Isaiah's words, to serve and love our neighbors and nations more deeply. Answer the call.

Even Jesus
By Kari Moore
First Wesleyan, Roanoke

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” - Matthew 26:39

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we witness the profound humanity of Christ. Even Jesus, the Son of God, fell to the ground in prayer. Even Jesus struggled with what lay ahead, asking if this heavy cup could pass from Him. Even Jesus had to surrender His will to the Father's.

The word “even” carries remarkable weight here. It reminds us that if Jesus needed to kneel before God in desperate prayer, how much more do we need to? If the perfect Son of God wrestled with difficult circumstances, we shouldn't be surprised or ashamed when we do the same. If Jesus had to consciously choose trust and surrender in the face of suffering, then our own struggles with God's will are not signs of weak faith; they're signs of honest faith.

What Jesus shows us in this moment is not a path without struggle, but a path through struggle. He models something profoundly important: He didn't deny the difficulty. He didn't pretend the cup wasn't bitter. He didn't put on a brave face and act like everything was fine. Instead, He brought His honest, aching heart to His Father and poured out His real feelings. And then, in an act of ultimate trust, He chose surrender: “Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

This is the pattern Jesus gives us for navigating our own hard seasons. We are to bring the full weight of our struggle to God without pretense. We are to ask boldly for relief, for another way, for the cup to pass. We have to choose to believe that the Father's will is good, even when we can't see how, even when it hurts.

Today, whatever heavy thing you're carrying, remember that you follow a Savior who truly understands. Fall to the ground if you need to. Be completely honest about the weight you're bearing. Ask for the cup to pass—God can handle your honest prayers. And then, like Jesus, choose to trust that the Father's will is good, even when it's hard or when you don't understand.

The Cry of the Forsaken
By Rev. Nathan Marone
Emmanuel Wesleyan

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?” - Psalm 22:1

If you were hanging on a cross, knowing that your death was coming in the next few hours, what would you say? What words could you speak to express your pain and distress, your sense of hopelessness and desolation? In this moment on the cross, Jesus chose to quote the opening line of Psalm 22, the cry of a son whose Father has left him alone to suffer the pain of death and the heartbreak of abandonment. If we follow the first verse of Psalm 22, we find that God is “far” from David—far from saving him, so far that God cannot even hear his anguished cries.

Why would Jesus choose these words? Why would He accuse His Father this way?

Jesus is recalling David’s suffering and using it to express His own suffering. Though we don’t know the cause of David’s pain in Psalm 22, we can rest assured that his pain was real. And, like David, the pain Jesus endured was real. Jesus had been left to carry out this sacrifice, to go through this pathway of suffering, down to the bitter end, alone.

But Jesus also recalls these words from Psalm 22 knowing that those who heard His words, and those who would read them later, would recognize the reference and remember the whole song. Psalm 22 does not end where it starts. Though it begins with anguish, David’s song also remembers that Israel’s trust in God has been vindicated in the past (vv. 3–4). David remembers that God has been faithful to him even from birth (vv. 9–10). He pleads for God to rescue him (vv. 19–21). Finally, David proclaims that because God listens to those who suffer and does not hide His face from them, trust in God will eventually be justified and, in turn, God will be glorified on earth.

During this season of Lent, let us remember that Jesus’ cry of agony points both to the suffering of the cross and also beyond it—to the resurrection, the vindication of God in all things.