

Let the Cross Change You

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear — hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

~ *Jude 1:20-23 (NIV)*

Praise God for His plan in sending Jesus, and praise Jesus for His obedience to this plan of salvation. Jesus is the only way, and His blood was the sacrifice worthy and precious enough to bring eternal life. It is my prayer that you have accepted Christ as Savior and King and have repented, for the born-again life is a life that leads to forgiveness of sin and eternal life. After reading the Scripture from Jude, this is the question I pondered: *What do we do after forgiveness and justification?*

Jude reminds us to “keep yourself in God's love.” In other words, the journey is far from over after we are justified. John Wesley believed that grace has its seasons of working in our lives. Grace moves in such a way that *prevenient grace* allows us to come to repentance. *Justifying grace* saves us from sin because of the cross of Jesus. *Sanctifying grace* allows us to seek holiness!

Let us not give into the world's desires but show mercy, as Jude said in verse 23, “mixed with fear,” as we live for Christ. The cross has saved us, and by the power of the cross and resurrection, we also can be changed! Let us seek holiness and pray that conviction never stops in our hearts. We pray this not because God is against us, but because God is for us!

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to live according to your Word as we know that the power of sin has been broken, thanks be to the cross! Let us live in obedience to you rather than the world.

Pastor Mike Chapman
Pitman United Methodist Church

The Primary Source

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. ~ *John 1:1-2 (NIV)*

There are many good reasons to read a daily devotional message like the ones in this book. The writers help us think about God and His Word in new ways. This builds on the knowledge we have to help us develop a deeper understanding of God and our relationship to Him. Some messages point out areas in our life and faith journey that need some tweaking or growth. It is also helpful to see how others have faced experiences and challenges, which in turn gives us wisdom and encouragement in the things that we face.

But devotional readings are just tools to bring us to the Word of God. They do not replace or represent God's Word. For that we need to go to the primary source and get firsthand, eyewitness accounts — which is the Bible. You can't learn enough about God or build a true relationship with Him by reading what someone else thinks, no matter how learned they are or how skillfully they write. You have to go to the source of all truth and read the Bible yourself.

Daily routines are important, and you may already read one or more devotional selections each day. But, other than reading the Scripture at the top of the page, are you opening your Bible and directly reading God's Word yourself?

Be intentional about it. Don't just randomly open to a page and start reading. Choose a place to begin, and keep going, a little each day. Try starting at Matthew 1:1, and read a chapter each day about the life and words of Jesus, continuing to the end of the book. Then move on to reading more about Jesus in Mark, and then on through the New Testament. Or start at the beginning, Genesis, and read the rich stories beginning with creation and the patriarchs, onto histories and prophecies.

There are no rules you have to follow — you don't have a deadline or even minimum daily requirements — you just need to read. Immerse yourself in the Word of God every day, and get to know Him better.

Devotional books are great to enhance our knowledge and expand our faith, but nothing is as important as the original source. Make a commitment to really read your Bible every day and see what God has in store for you to learn.

Father God, open yourself to us as we read your Word each day.

Beth Price

Zion United Methodist Church

Our Life

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

~ *Matthew 28:20b (NLT)*

It was winter. There was sickness in the house. My granddaughter had the flu. My son Michael and his wife, Liz, were coughing nonstop. As for me, I'm thinking, "It's Christmas. There is too much to do — baking, wrapping, and so on. I can't get sick right now."

Michael had been out of work since October and had looked for work every day. Since he was out of work, there was no health insurance. Then the freezer died on us. Then my TV went, and then I needed four new tires on my vehicle. Liz had a flat on her vehicle, and they had to get two new tires.

I was starting to feel like Job. What else could go wrong? Then I thought of a saying that God does not give you anything you cannot handle. So here I was writing a Lenten devotional, not knowing really what I was going to write about. So I decided to write about our life — how kids get sick, how things go wrong, yet God is there for us every day.

Many times I say to myself, it's got to get better. And it does. We have had to swallow our pride and let people help us. This is God's way. He tells me every day — with a card in the mail, gift cards that help with groceries, friends giving hugs, friends buying a pound of fudge, others buying breads and cookies, or selling one of my homemade bows. It's God winking, reminding me, "I am here for you."

And here we are in my favorite time of the year: Easter, when God gave His Son for us. What love He has shown to us by doing this!

Jesus gave His all. He told us in no uncertain terms: "I am with you always." Through the hard times, He is here with us, and through the good times as well. I know Michael will find work, and everyone will get better from their illnesses. Life will go on, and we will be stronger for it. Yes, God is with us every single day.

Thank you, Jesus, for what you do for us every day of our lives. Help us to recognize your presence and lean on you.

Jane Koponick
Evangelical United Methodist Church

Because He Lives

I am the living one. I died, but look — I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave. ~ *Revelation 1:18 (NLT)*

As we travel through Lent and reflect on our Lord Jesus, much of our thinking focuses on a theme that revolves around the death of Jesus followed by His resurrection.

During 2025 my life also seemed to have a theme connected to death — funerals and memorial services. From the first week of January to December 30, I received far too many phone calls, texts, and emails sharing the sad news about the death of a friend, relative, or close acquaintance.

Dealing with personal loss, funerals, and memorial services could have led to a mindset of fear, uncertainty, or depression. However, some of the families involved chose to have a “celebration of life.” This is a change of focus. No longer was the emphasis on thinking about personal loss and death but about a loved one who was now with Jesus, the living God!

At one of the celebrations, they sang “Because He Lives” by Bill Gaither. The lyrics of this gospel song have always given me peace and hope:

“An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.”

Even though we would still experience sadness and be aware of the void in our lives left by the passing of our friends and relatives, we were also aware that we had the joyous hope of being reunited with them in eternity because of the sacrifice made by Jesus, the living God. Our hope is in Jesus as we sing “My Savior lives!”

“Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Because He lives, all fear is gone.”

I can know that He was victorious over death. I can rest in “calm assurance,” as the song says.

I can look forward to His guidance in my life on earth and look forward to spending eternity with Him.

One final thought: We received a challenge from a recent church sermon when the pastor asked, *How is the living God guiding your life?*

Heavenly Father, help me to follow your guidance daily in my life and to rejoice in thinking about spending eternity with you, the living God.

Marsha Hahn
Pitman United Methodist Church

Prone to Wander

Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.” Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” ~ *John 18:8-11 (NIV)*

Have you ever read a passage of Scripture so much that it becomes normalized? When reading it, you even skim the page because you’ve read its words so many times. This happened to me a little while ago, except, as I was skimming the page, the Lord said, “Look at these Scriptures a little deeper.”

The above Scripture is the account when the soldiers came to get Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter was ready to fight at any cost. He drew his sword and sliced the ear off one of the guards. He was fearless, he was bold, he was ready to protect Jesus whether it cost him his life or not. He was standing in Jesus’ presence, which made him courageous.

Now, flash forward a few verses and we see Peter cowering around a fire and denying that he ever knew the Lord Jesus. I asked myself: *What changed? How could Peter be so daring one moment and so cowardly the next?* The answer the Lord showed me was that in His presence, Peter would go to any length to keep the Lord close. When Jesus was taken away and not around, Peter’s faith wavered. He became frightened and confused.

As I thought about this concept, I realized that we’re a lot like Peter in that if we don’t stay close to the Lord, we lose sight of His goodness when things go sideways. Every day as I’m in prayer and Bible study, I hear the Lord say, “Stay close, beloved, stay close to my heart.” Only in this way can we withstand the days that lie ahead.

Dearest Father, I pray with the hymnist Robert Robinson:

*“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above.”*

Corine Ingles-Elliott
Evangelical United Methodist Church

The Sacrificial Lamb

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ~ *John 1:29 (NIV)*

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” ~ *John 1:35-36 (NIV)*

The events during Jesus’ crucifixion mirrored the preparation of the Passover (Paschal) lamb, which was sacrificed by the priests to cover the people’s sins. Let’s take a look at some of these events.

The high priests examined a male lamb for defects before using it for a sacrifice. Likewise, in John, Jesus is examined by the high priest and the Roman governor Pilate (see John 18-19).

Jesus, the Passover Lamb, carries His cross up Golgotha Hill. The Passover lambs were carried to the temple to be sacrificed. Many scholars also believe that Jesus was slain on the same day as the Passover lambs, which was the day of preparation (John 19:31).

Jesus is nailed to the cross. After He dies, He is pierced with a sword, and blood and water run out (John 19:33-34). Similarly, as it was being slain, blood ran out of the Passover lamb. Then the lamb was hung up to be gutted.

When Jesus dies, none of His bones are broken (John 19:36), just as the Passover lamb could not have any broken bones.

When Jesus hangs on the cross, He speaks words from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Likewise, psalms were sung as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed.

Just as Israel celebrated the Passover to remember God saving them from death in Egypt, John’s gospel tells us that as Passover Lamb, Jesus would “take away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) and “would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:51-52).

Jesus, our Passover Lamb, takes away our sin once and for all so we may walk in the light of His grace and mercy! Hallelujah!

Lord, what amazing love you showed as you took upon yourself this painful sacrifice. You alone are worthy. Thank you for paying our sin debt in full.

Diana McMillion
North Raleigh United Methodist Church

It Is Finished

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. ~ *Matthew 6:34 (NIV)*

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. ~ *John 19:28-30 (NIV)*

Worrying about what is to come can be overwhelming. Worrying about what I should have done can be debilitating. Thinking of ways I can change other people’s minds to think as I think or how I believe they should think can be frustrating.

The worrying was all settled when Jesus said, “It is finished.” We tend to take matters into our own hands when, in fact, it was all done prior. It’s only human nature to worry and fret over what is or can be. It’s only human nature to try to control the narrative. When we do this, we place God inside a box and believe somehow by doing X we will get Y as a result.

As a dad of five and grandpop of seven, I can’t stop myself from worrying about what is to come and how my kids will be able to navigate through life. I need to remember the end of the Bible. The evil one loses and God wins!

Jesus gave up His spirit not as an end result but as a beginning point. We need to give up our human spirit of worry and control to allow the Holy Spirit to enter and control. Doing that allows us to live in the moment of our daily lives and enjoy what God has in store for us.

Father God, thank you for your Holy Spirit to guide us and to comfort us from our daily worries. We tend to forget that your sacrifice gives us meaning to know “it is finished” and that you have our best interests in mind. Allow us to live each day in a new, fresh way to praise you for your wonderful presence in our lives.

Bill Schober

Evangelical United Methodist Church

I Know That My Redeemer Lives

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ~ *John 20:29 (NIV)*

It’s hard to believe in what we have not seen. Each of us at one time or another may have a divine encounter with Christ. During those times, God kindles a faith in us that testifies Jesus is Lord and we know that He lives.

During this Lenten season as we walked with Jesus to the cross and His ultimate crucifixion, we waited and watched for His resurrection. We know that He lives just as He promised. Because He rose to sit at the right hand of God, we have the assurance that He is with us.

Even though we have not seen Him as the disciples had, we believe that our Redeemer lives. Belief leads to eternal life, and this life is a gift through the power of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. We have the hope of Christ that one day when our life here on earth passes, we will be with Him forever. Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, and He is alive and well. Jesus is a person. He is God incarnate in human history.

Even though there are some dark days in the Lenten season, especially Good Friday, we have the hope that Sunday comes and Christ is risen. Jesus is alive. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is our Savior and our Redeemer. He loved us enough to die on a cross for our sins. In the tomb there was a folded napkin, which was a sign that He will return, and we can count on that because that is His promise. We know that our Redeemer lives, and we can trust Him to be with us every moment of every day and forever.

Thank you, Jesus, for loving us enough to die for our sins. Thank you for keeping your promises to love, comfort, heal, and protect us. I know that you are alive and are coming again. I wait with joy and expectation for your second coming. Jesus, no matter what I’m going through, I have the hope that you are with me on my journey of life because I know that my Redeemer lives.

Char Gaylord
Bethlehem Lutheran Church

He lives to silence all my fears, He lives to wipe away my tears,
He lives to calm my troubled heart, He lives all blessings to impart.

I Know That My Redeemer Lives
Samuel Medley, 1775

The Road You Travel

I will run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding. ~ *Psalm 119:32 (NIV)*

Road construction has always fascinated me, particularly seeing how the physical environment affects how the road is built. Take Route 90 through South Dakota as an example. It is like a Roman road, straight as an arrow for miles. Then there is Eagle Road, a segment on Road 63 in Geiranger, Norway, probably the most crooked road I have ever traveled, with 11 hairpin curves. Your vehicle's odometer might show that you traveled five miles, but in reality you advanced two miles.

If you were asked today to describe your Christian journey using a road as an example, how would you describe the road? Would it be like Route 90 or Eagle Road? Do you think it will be different tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year?

As you know, it is difficult as a Christian to stay on a straight spiritual path. My road is constantly changing. I can remember times when it was "straight as an arrow" and at other times, as described in the Beatles song, "A Long and Winding Road."

Galatians 5:7 (NIV) tells us, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?" We are bombarded each day with distractions and temptations in our travel.

Look at the road signs we see today, such as *stop*, *curve ahead*, *yield*, *detour*, *dead end*, *do not enter*, and *one way*. God has spiritual signs similar to those signs, and at times we ignore them and ultimately stop our spiritual journey, slow it down, or run off our spiritual road.

We need to be reminded of those who have set examples for us, telling us through Scripture what we are expected to do to be faithful Christians. As stated in Hebrews 12:1 (ESV), "Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

Heavenly Father, as Luke told us in Acts 20:24, "The aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me." I pray that I always keep focused on this assignment.

Ted Frett

Pitman Church of the Nazarene