

Lenten Devotional

Shelby Presbyterian Church Weekly Devotional for Lent

"Be prepared." This is good advice. It is the motto of the Boy Scouts and it is the reason we participate in Lent. And so we prepare, for the mystery of Jesus's resurrection.

Lent began after Christianity was legal in the Roman Empire as a way for Christians to ward off complacency after persecution ended and it became popular to convert.

This Devotional is meant to give you a boost for each week to grow in relationship with God much in the same way you would grow in relationship with your loved ones.

Spending Time - Couples grow close by spending intentional time with each other. You can do the same with God. This devotional is one tool you can use to spend time with and be present to God.

Communicating - We get to know each other through communication. With God, we communicate through prayer and study of scripture. This devotional is rooted in these practices to help you.

Shared Experiences - Bonds are forged in the activities we do together. Through this devotional, you will be given ways to share in Jesus's life and share your experiences with others.

You Can Do It! This Lent, you can grow in your faithfulness and commitment by sharing in the tradition of many before you and we hope this devotional will help.

This devotional has been created for you by Shelby Presbyterian Church.

Ash Wednesday (2/22)

*"By the sweat of your brow, you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, because you were taken out of it. For you are dust and to dust you shall return."
- Genesis 3:19*

On the first day of Lent we receive ashes, which are a reminder of our sinfulness and mortality, with the words from Genesis after pride led to banishment from the garden. Adam in Hebrew means "ground." So this season begins with humility, through a sign of our weakness in our corruptible bodies.

Yet, in our pride, we hide or justify our sin, but we cannot escape God. When we confess, we tell a truth that God already knows, but this humbles us to lay aside our excuses for our actions. Yet in humility, we become empowered by the Spirit to be co-creators in the ministry of reconciliation.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, in your faithfulness, you love, and never stop pursuing your beloved. By grace, you sent your Son to live like me, and by his death and resurrection, we find life in him. Though I will be dust again, I trust in your love to forgive my sins and restore me to life everlasting in you. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

You share in the love that the Father has for the Son in and through the Holy Spirit. This is not given to be a source of pride, nor is it something to hoard. Take a moment this week to truly listen to someone else, without looking for your chance to speak. Do not try to be right, or correct, but listen and show your love.

Week One (2/26)

"Blessed is the one whose rebellion is lifted away, whose sin is covered." - Psalm 32:1

In the season of Lent, we repent of our sin and confess, or tell the truth about where we have failed to love God and neighbor. The root of all sin can be found in pride and expressed in idolatry. By this, we think we know better than God, and we put our trust in false gods that turn us away from God.

The Psalmist declares that we are blessed, or made full by our proximity to God, when our rebellion (transgression) is lifted away, taken off of us, or forgiven. The image of sin being covered is one of it being taken out of God's sight and our own. God forgives us to restore relationship with us, and put our love in proper order.

PRAYER

Eternal Father, in the sending of your Son, you have called us to a ministry to reconcile all things to you in him. You came down to us so that by sharing in our humanity, we might rise to you in new life. Help me to forgive and seek reconciliation, loving you and loving my neighbor in humility. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

The mystery of the Eternal Son being born in our flesh, despite being one with the Father and the Spirit, is an example for us. God came down to our level. God is by definition in the right, yet as Paul put it, "became sin." Is someone missing in your life, who you keep distant by waiting for them to come to you with an apology? How might you in this season, come to them, in hopes of finding reconciliation and new life with them?

Week Two (3/5)

"For God did not send the Son into the world in order that he might judge the world, but in order that the world might be saved on account of him." - John 3:17

The sending of the Son is the sign of God's love so that any who believe in Him, might have eternal life. This is John 3:16, but too often we fill in the blank by reasoning that whoever does not believe, will not be saved. But John's gospel cuts that off with a reminder that the purpose of the Son is not to condemn, but to save on his account.

The purpose of God becoming human to live, die, and rise for us, is to save the world. The Son, fully one with God the Father, is the mediator that brings us, as humans, into God's life. Belief is more than an intellectual exercise. Whomever is faithful will have life, because we are free to join Jesus in his work for the good of the whole world.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Son of God, on account of you, the whole world will be redeemed. Yet, you know me by name, calling me to believe in you, trust in your grace, and be a part of your work in this world. Help me to see this world with your eyes, and act here in my community for your glory. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

God's love is made visible in the sending of the Son to save a sinful world. In Shelby, many neighbors do not know God's love, but arguing with the mind won't affect a heart. Call a friend, and go intentionally share God's love with someone who believes differently, without trying to convert them.

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Week Three (3/12)

"Moses named the place Massah and Meribah because of the strife of the children of Israel and because they put the Lord to the test, saying, 'Is the Lord among us, or not?'" - Exodus 17:7

The children of Israel had just seen the Red Sea parted. They had just received bread in the morning and quail at night. Now, they are thirsty, and still, they doubt the Lord.

The good news of Jesus is not that we can avoid hell, but rather that we can live now, knowing God is with us and that this will never end. We repent, not to avoid wrath, but to choose life in Christ as a part of the ministry of reconciling all things in him. We sometimes think miracles would strengthen our faithfulness, but we must resist trying to put the Lord to the test. Tests make our faith conditional, but we should remember that God's grace for us in Jesus is unconditional.

PRAYER

Eternal Son, you are grace. You shared in our humanity to live as we live, and in your death, resurrection, and ascension, you have made us temples into which you and the Father send your Holy Spirit. You are in and among us. Help me to remember this truth and trust in you. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

Miracles do happen by God's power. But God also calls us to be the miracle we want to see in the world first. Where do you see a need for the presence of God in your circle, your community, or beyond? Who can you partner with to share God's presence in and through your service and ministry?

Week Four (3/19)

"Jesus answered, 'Neither this man, nor his parents sinned. Instead, it is in order that the works of God might be revealed in him.'" - John 9:3

Our human tendency is to put ourselves at the center of everything – especially our relationship with God. This leads us to think good things are rewards we can earn, and challenges are punishments we can undo.

The gospel says that all things, good or bad, are the means by which God's works might be revealed. A blessing is that which brings us closer to God, makes us aware of God's presence. We will wear ourselves out and never live into our calling if we are always trying to earn God's favor or appease God's wrath. Rather, we must look for God's presence in our joy and sorrow, because we are never alone. The Spirit is with us.

PRAYER

Most Holy Spirit of God, you rejoice with us and you groan with all of creation that it is not yet in your rightful order. Instill in me a hope that builds my faith, so that I might love as you love. Empower us in your church to feel your presence in times of plenty and times of tragedy, so that by knowing your love, we might love as you do. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

You are a beloved child of God and you have been called to love. Is there anyone in your life you have judged as worthy of the challenges they face, or whom you favored because you thought they had God's favor? Consider reaching out to these individuals and asking how you might help them today.

Week Five (3/26)

*"From out of the depths I have cried out to you Lord." - Psalm 130:1
"Jesus shed tears." - John 11:35*

In all aspects of our life, Jesus was like us, except sin. Just as the Psalmist cried out, so too, Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, his friend. Even though he knew that he would raise him, this profound moment of grief, in the presence of Lazarus's sisters, is real.

We believe in an all powerful God, who will make all things new. But for now, and for whatever reason, God chooses not to just fix it all and is grieved by the disorder and death that remains in our world from sin. We are called to trust God, even in the hardest moments, not because we expect those moments to be taken from us, but because we can trust our God is with us in them.

PRAYER

Most Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul says that you groan at our sides with sighs too deep for words, praying when we do not have the words to pray. Be with me today, and help me to see those who mourn with your eyes, that I might reveal your presence. Comfort your people, O Spirit, and renew us. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

We live in a world of the Kingdom of Heaven being both now, and still not yet. We cannot escape the impact of sin and disorder in our world, but we can respond to it. Who do you know that is grieving? Can you let them be vulnerable and safe with you? The church should be a safe space for grief. Are you grieving? Have you been able to share your grief and pain with others?

Holy Week (4/2)

"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you do." - Matthew 26:39b

The eternal Father and the Son share one will, but in this moment, the Son in our flesh knows that he will die. He knows he will suffer. In this moment, Jesus is vulnerable.

At the start of Lent, we read in church about Jesus being tested in the wilderness by Satan. He rejects food when hungry. He rejects the opportunity to prove his divine power. He rejects the chance to claim worldly power. But now, with pain, death, and the end of his earthly ministry coming, he prays a prayer that seems to go without an answer. He hopes another way has been opened but commits to the original plan.

PRAYER

Triune and Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are mortal, unable to know life without you. In our flesh, you wrestled your mortality, but died for us anyway. By your Spirit now, empower me to embrace your honest example, and allow me to be vulnerable, honest, and hopeful. Amen.

FAITH AND ACTION

In prayer, we ask God for what we want, but Jesus taught us to ask that our will be brought in line with his. In the Lord's Prayer, we say, "thy will be done," but do we mean it? As we emerge from Lent into Easter, consider what you may have on your heart to do in this world for God, that you've put off? Take a small step toward it. If you don't have a new idea, you can join an existing ministry as a volunteer.