

Daily Lenten Devotions

2016

scripture readings ~ reflections ~ prayers

While
still
Far Off

his father
saw him
and was
filled with
compassion.

Luke 15:20

Society of St. Andrew

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Lent is the name given by the church to the 40 days (plus seven Sundays) leading up to the resurrection of Jesus. The word itself comes from Old English and means, simply, “spring.” Traditionally, Lent is a time for penitence—a time to consider our misdeeds and to seek God’s forgiveness for them.

Often people choose to forego something during Lent: sweets, perhaps, or watching television. But each year the Society of St. Andrew offers you the opportunity to do something extra during Lent: take on the spiritual discipline of daily Scripture reading, reflection, and prayer. In this booklet, you’ll find readings for each day of the Lenten season, from Ash Wednesday (February 10) through Easter (March 27.)

Our theme this year is “While Still Far Off.” It is based on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32. Throughout the reflections, you will see the phrase “prevenient grace.” That’s what we call God’s grace that “comes before” any action on our part. It means that, like the father in the parable, God reaches out to us when we are lost, loving us in spite of ourselves and longing for us to come home. Another way of saying this is that God loves us “first, best, and most.”

As your spiritual hungers are met, please help the Society of St. Andrew meet the physical needs of others through a monetary contribution that will provide healthy, nourishing food for people in greatest need, right here in the United States.

Perhaps you will collect your pocket change each day at day’s end; or perhaps you will set aside a particular amount of money each day. (It only takes 2¢ to put a serving of nourishing food on the table!)

You might give an amount equal to what you spend on fresh fruits and vegetables during the Lenten season; or you might even set aside a tithe of your food budget to provide healthy food for our hungry neighbors through the Society of St. Andrew.

Thank you for using and sharing these devotional materials, for telling others about the Society of St. Andrew’s gleaned and feeding ministries, and for giving generously to further the mission.

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The Fast That I Choose

Scripture: Isaiah 58:6-7

If you're taking on a Lenten discipline or giving something up for Lent, remember that the task isn't just about you. That is, giving up sweets for Lent isn't just a way to lose five pounds as bathing suit season approaches. And it's not a season of punishment, either. God isn't interested in self-flagellation. When his prodigal son returns, the father isn't interested in a speech about how horrible he has been. Instead, the father wants to celebrate his son's return.

Use the time or money you would have used to bake or buy those sweets you've given up, and give something to the hungry. Instead of beating yourself up about your sin, take a moment and write your representatives, asking them to do right by the oppressed, the homeless, and the hungry. Make this season's fast about God and God's children, and celebrate with God the abundance you have been graciously given.

Prayer: Loving and just God, I approach you with humility and gratitude. May my fast be the fast you choose. Make me an instrument of justice and grace, so that the Kingdom of Heaven may be ever nearer. Amen.

Jeannie Hunter
Nashville, TN

Beloved Child

Scripture: Luke 15:20

In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, the younger son squanders his inheritance. Hungry, broke, and desperate, he returns home. He feels he has "messed up" and is prepared to work as a servant. The parable goes on to tell us that his father sees him first and runs to meet him—hugging him, kissing him, and welcoming his beloved son home.

This parable reminds us that God reaches out and comes to us, even when we, because of our circumstances or our choices, feel unworthy of God's love. I attended a spiritual life retreat a few years ago, themed "Hearing Our True Name... Beloved Child of God." All of our retreat

activities helped us understand, know, and really begin to believe that we are unique to God, that God loves us as though we are the only person on earth! All weekend, we were reminded that no matter what the world calls us, we have only one true name, and that is given to us by our heavenly Parent: “Beloved Child.”

God has helped me understand that all whom I meet are his beloved children. Because of God’s love and grace, I see so much more clearly the need for each of us to love one another; being willing to love first, as God does.

Prayer: Dear Father, you loved us first. Thank you for showing how to accept your love and, in turn, love others first. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Deb Broadwater
Moneta, VA

Friday, February 12

Dunk It!

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11

He’s only fourteen, but he’s tall and he’s strong. And he loves basketball. Yet, a broken arm and a sprained ankle slowed his progress until just a week ago. Today he’s in an old, leaky gym, getting back in the game. My son drives to the basket. He soars, glides close to the rim, and the ball goes in. A few more lay-ups and a father near me asks, “Can he dunk it?”

I hesitate, “I’m not sure.”

A moment later I hear the father shout, “Can you dunk it?”

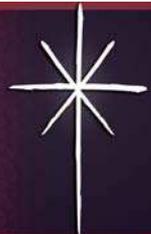
My boy shakes his head, “No.”

Several more trips across the floor and, as he is poised to shoot, a different voice calls out: “Dunk it!” The ball goes up and in, fingertips almost brushing the rim. Still no dunk. But the boys are having fun. Each appears to have something he’s working on—a dunk, a special shot, a cool

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move. When the scrimmage ends, a father near the exit catches my son's attention, shakes his hand, and beams, "I loved watching you play."

We head home, and my son is content: happy and peaceful. I find myself recalling words offered by a wise mentor not long ago, when I was expressing my own angst about this child, wondering what I should do to move him along.

"Maybe," she pondered, "You should just wait and see what God will do."

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the mysterious and unexpected ways you reveal yourself in the daily-ness of our lives. Amen.

Florence Brooks
Richmond, VA

Saturday, February 13

When I was Far Off

Scripture: Luke 15:20

It was the winter of 1973, and I was on active duty with the US Army, in basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, near Columbia. That winter, Columbia received an immense snowfall, truly extraordinary for that area—24 inches of snow. We basic trainees were ordered out into the cold weather, tasked with troweling snow off the sidewalks with our entrenching tools. (Imagine a garden hand trowel. Not much good for removing snow!)

Everything in Columbia and on the post shut down. There was just no equipment for removing snow from the streets. For most of that weekend, we were outdoors, troweling (not shoveling!) snow.

After the weekend we started running out of food at the mess hall because supplies could not be trucked in. As I recall, we ate a lot of powdered eggs and water. During this time I contracted a very bad sinus infection. When I went on sick call the doctor told me to take some aspirin and let the illness run its course. My throat got so bad I couldn't swallow or eat. The doctors insisted they wouldn't prescribe antibiotics unless absolutely necessary. Why didn't they see it was necessary? As I continued to get sicker, I started thinking, "Where are you God? Why can't you get these doctors to give me something for the infection?" In my illness, with no relief in sight, I felt the furthest I have ever felt from God.

About a day later, I received a care package from my parents. Much

to my surprise, in the box was a package of tetracycline, which Mom had gotten for me from our family doctor back home. Praise the Lord! My prayers had been answered. I started on the medicine and began feeling better in just a couple of days, though it took the full prescription to get me over the infection.

When I recall that time, I remember feeling forgotten and believing that no one cared. I know I was wrong. God had made sure that Mom and Dad knew I needed help. To this day I don't remember telling them how sick I was. I may have mentioned it in a letter, but I certainly did not ask them to do what they did. But I am glad God did. God found me in my greatest need that snowy winter.

Prayer: Thank you God for showing us your unfailing love when we need you most. Amen.

Jack Davis
Bedford, VA

Sunday, February 14

Lost

Scripture: Romans 5:8-11

I was the prodigal son. I totally bought into the '60s culture and wanted nothing to do with anyone who looked like a "Jesus Freak." I will not take you too deeply into my darkness, but suffice it to say I was lost—totally and completely lost.

When I did actually begin to seek God, I was amazed at the idea that Jesus Christ would go to a cross to pay the price for sin. The words of Paul to the Romans were unimaginable to me! I knew the depth of my sin and could not believe that the creator of the universe could love me enough to lay down his life for me.

Several years into my journey, I met the woman who would eventually become my wife. I remember the point in our relationship when I realized that she loved me. Me! I couldn't understand it, but I also could not deny it—she actually loved me. That epiphany helped me to see that I don't have to understand God's love for me—I simply have to accept it. Not only did this passage in Romans begin to make sense to me, but I also came to understand that when God sees us through the eyes of Christ, God sees, not the person we think we are, but the perfect creation God intended from the beginning. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old is gone, the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17) Our task now is to live as the new creation we are in Christ.

Prayer: Creator God, the idea that you would die on a cross for our sins while we were your enemies is more than we can understand. We are thankful that your love for us is greater than anything we can imagine. We pray that in our gratitude we will seek to live in such a way that others will see the joy and peace that we have in you. Help us to be your lights in the darkness. Amen.

Johnnie Draughon
Virginia Beach, VA

Monday, February 15

God's Everlasting Love

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:3

As I look back over the eight decades of my life, God's love is evidenced by so many examples of God's direction and involvement. When I was only a month old, my family saw to it that I was baptized, at Monumental Methodist Church, in Portsmouth, Virginia. God spoke love for me through family and church.

God's love was there through childhood and numerous family moves. That love led me to Wesley Foundation while a student at William and Mary. God was there on a Sunday morning at First Methodist Church in Norfolk, when The Rev. Doug Newman said to me, "Why don't you consider going into the field of Christian Education?" God was there when the late Rev. Edgar Potts, on learning of my interest in Christian Education, recommended me for a job at Centenary Methodist Church in Lynchburg.

Very soon after moving to Lynchburg, God was there as I met, and eventually married the husband with whom I have shared life and love for over 57 years. God's love has been a vitally significant factor in shaping my life, for which I am eternally thankful.

God is there in your life too: loving, blessing, guiding, shaping... Look for God and be open to God's everlasting love!

Prayer: Our Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your everlasting love for us. Enable us to be aware of your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dodie Fauber
Lynchburg, VA

Never Lost From God

Scripture: Romans 8:28

Our son was born in 1969. Seven years later, I was finally pregnant again, but it was a difficult pregnancy, that ended in miscarriage. Two years after that, I was again pregnant. Everything was going so well, and then just into my fifth month, we lost her. It was a devastating experience. All I'd ever wanted was to be a mother. Our son Bill was always a joy to raise, which only made me want another child more. But that was not to be. After that late miscarriage, we decided not to try again. Miscarriages hurt too much, and I reasoned that my husband and son didn't deserve what they had to go through when I lost the pregnancy.

It was hard, that second time. I thought I'd never recover emotionally. Then one day I was rounding a bend in the road near our home, and I heard someone say to me, "Nothing is wasted." There was no one else in the car, but that voice was outside my head. I know it was God. It meant to me that my daughter's life wasn't for nothing. Somehow, God would use her life, lost before it began, for good.

It wasn't a quick emotional fix, but I began to heal. God reached down to me when I couldn't reach him. Fifteen years later God blessed me with a granddaughter, and later, three more grandchildren. All I can do is thank him.

Prayer: Thank you God for seeking us when we cannot seek you. Amen.

Ginny Greer
Bedford, VA

In a Dark Place

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20

Daniel's hands shook his steering wheel, as he sobbed in despair. His wife had died of cancer four months earlier and now his disability check had been withheld due to a false report about his income. He had to place his daughter with relatives and move out of the motel where they had been living. He was sleeping in his truck. The despair was so deep he talked of suicide.

I bought him a tank of gas, and we talked for an hour. He asked me to pray with him. We talked some more. His frame of mind was much better when he drove away.

At that point, God raised up other people to come into Daniel's life. They helped him financially where they could, encouraged him, and prayed with him. Daniel's hope was re-ignited, and his resolve returned.

Three weeks later I received a call from him. The issue with his disability check was resolved, and he had found an affordable apartment for his daughter and himself. As he spoke, I heard a different man. The despair was gone, and he rejoiced in God's faithfulness.

In 28 years working with the poor, I have seen God reach out to them in their darkest times. Often I have been part of that, but God used many others as well. It reminds me that when we follow Jesus, He truly is "with us always." He comes running to us in our despair.

Prayer: Lord, help us to remember in our darkest times that you are always seeking us, offering comfort and hope. Amen.

Steve Jennings
Bluemont, VA

Thursday, February 18

Blessed by the Poor

Scripture: James 2:5

Logic would say that I feel far away from God when I'm struggling, but I've found that's not so. At least then I'm engaging with God. Like so many of the psalmists, I may be crying out to God in anger or sorrow, but I am crying out!

It's when all is well that I back off from the relationship. It's as if I wave God off, saying, "I've got this. No need to bother yourself on my account." No wonder Jesus appealed to the poor and marginalized! They were ready to hear his message.

I have been blessed to work with Teens Opposing Poverty, an organization that helps youth groups forge meaningful relationships with homeless people. And it has been those people struggling on the street who have brought me back to God again and again. I've been humbled when a person who doesn't know if they will eat the next day tells me how good God has been in their life. I find perspective in their trust and faith and am

reminded not only of how deeply God loves me, but of my responsibilities toward others, if I am to claim the title of disciple. The friends that I made on the streets have given me so much more than I could ever give them in return.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the people you have placed in my life who, through their faith, grace, and gratitude, remind me what it means to be your disciple. Amen.

Sue Mink
Leesburg, VA

Friday, February 19

Sold!

Scripture: Luke 12:27-31

When I accepted my second church call—to southwest Michigan—my wife and I had to hold onto that information for three weeks until a congregational meeting could be properly called to make the announcement. This also meant that, though a realtor had looked at the house, our home could not be “officially” listed for sale until just a month before we were to relocate. In that rural Idaho town of 2,200 souls, the housing market was never booming, so we were nervous about the prospect of still owning a home in one state while living 1,300 miles away.

O, we of little faith! God was already working on our behalf, even before we were able to make the announcement of our impending move. On the Monday following the congregational meeting, our realtor put a “For Sale” sign up in our yard and then promptly attached a “Sold” label to the front of it. The buyers even offered slightly more than our asking price!

The old cliché is that “God never shuts a door, that He doesn’t open a window.” My experience has long been that God opens the window well before the door begins to close. I’m embarrassed that I have been such a slow learner of this truth.

Prayer: Loving Father, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief. Amen.

Joseph Phipps
Fairfield, IA

God loves you first, best, and most!

Saturday, February 20

A Prodigal Daughter and Prevenient Grace

Scripture: Genesis 50:19-20

As a six year old, I had never attended church nor discussed God with anyone. Yet, one day my friend and I sat in the back of our first-grade class and argued. She said there was no God and I said, “Yes, there is a God.” We got so loud we had to stay after school!

Eight years later, at fourteen, I attended my first Sunday School class and came to believe in Jesus Christ that very day. I later understood that God’s prevenient grace, back in that first-grade classroom, reached out to me and loved me even before I knew him, preparing me to accept his Son in Sunday School.

Accepting Jesus did not immediately make my life rosy. It did not immediately heal all my relationships. I still didn’t get along with my father, but I did stop wanting to run away from home.

Just as Joseph believed God’s prevenient grace would care for him, even in prison far from home, I knew that God’s grace was at work in me. Years later, I went away to college, and that first Christmas vacation I went home with great anticipation and enjoyed that time with my whole family, including my father. God’s grace had prepared my heart.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your prevenient grace that prepares our hearts to recognize and believe in your Son, Jesus, when we are ready to reach out to you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Nora Ramirez
Winter Haven, FL

Sunday, February 21

God’s Work of Art

Scripture: Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Although I greatly admire and appreciate others’ artistic talents and accomplishments, as far as I can tell, God gave me no talent with brush and palette. I have acquired a good number of paintings that I proudly display for my own enjoyment, as well as that of my family and friends. These paintings are all very different, and each one has its own unique style, texture, and coloring. Each has its own manner of captivating its

audience. Each masterpiece is the work of some artist's hands and displays someone's time, talent, and energy. Someone is proud of each piece of art. Even though the artists may sell or give their paintings to others, each artist wants their paintings to be placed where they will be cared for, admired, and continue to bring pleasure and joy to their viewers.

The writer of Ephesians tells us that we are God's work of art. Will you agree with me that we are God's work of art? If we treasure the artistic work of a friend, or unknown artist, how much more should we treasure the works of God? We must prepare and present ourselves so that others will know that we are the handiworks of God. Our behavior and our actions must demonstrate God within us. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23) must be our style, texture, and coloring. Others will imitate us when they know that we are the works of God's hands.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us realize that we are the works of your hand. We give thanks for your involvement in our lives, and we pray that our lives will be beautiful to you. Amen.

Fred Fauber
Lynchburg, VA

Monday, February 22

When God Shows Up

Scripture: Isaiah 41:13

My seminary experience was difficult because of situations mostly outside my control. Broke, carless, even broken myself, I had a negative experience more days in seminary than I can count. But my better angels showed me that God was there in ways I wouldn't have known otherwise.

There was the time I broke my leg and a group of friends put me up on their couch because I couldn't take the stairs in my dormitory. There was the time a graduated friend sent money back so that another friend would buy me groceries. There was the time that a near-stranger loaned their car to me so that I could visit my fiancée three states away.

Even when I wanted to be upset, even when I felt like I'd hit rock bottom, God sent someone my way. It's remarkable really, that every time I thought I might give up, God showed up. Not in a burning bush or with a glowing finger writing on the wall, but in a friend, in the whisper of encouragement.

This is why I wonder, who do I know that needs to hear from God? Who needs to know they are loved and not forgotten? I look for those moments when I can pay it forward, when I can be Jesus' hands and feet, when I can show up to help and to drive back the fear.

Prayer: Holy God, you have been with us again and again. Help us to recognize those moments, and to use them to propel us toward helping others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jacob Sahms
Midlothian, VA

Tuesday, February 23

Gum on My Nose

Scripture: Psalm 66:18-20 (NIV)

When I was a child, my mama took me to a very small Methodist church near our home in rural Mississippi. The preachers, being disposed to hellfire and damnation sermons, ferociously punished children misbehaving during service. Being the pig-headed, willful child that I was, I sat on the front row, many times sitting on the edge of the pew with my toes on the floor, clasped hands in my lap, and chewing gum on my nose.

The Sunday school teachers, however, were the very breath of love that planted a mustard seed of faith within my child's heart. They were always loving and patient and tender in their actions. And very gentle getting gum off little noses.

When I was ten, we moved to Florida but we never seemed to find a church. Mama went to be with the Lord a few years later and I, still the pig-headed, willful child, turned my attentions to the world.

On one particular day, I was looking for answers to the unquenchable hunger I had for decades. I had not found myself sated with any worldly endeavors. That day, I started reading the Psalms and praying; then I

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looked inside myself. I can never forget my heart-breaking sobs when I realized God had been there with me all along. He had not abandoned me, I had abandoned Him.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for your eternal love for your children. Please bless all who plant mustard seeds of faith and all who receive them.

Georgia Sizemore
Gulfport, MS

Wednesday, February 24

God's Plans are Best

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11

When I was a young man, I was greatly influenced by M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Traveled*. The memorable beginning simply stated, "Life is difficult." I could see the wisdom of that statement then, as I had grown up in a home that was often in turmoil due to my father's drinking and depression. Yet, as my mother steadfastly encouraged us to attend church regularly and participate in a community of faith, I came to realize that my Heavenly Father was never far from me.

Over the ensuing years, I have faced other difficult challenges. When I received my graduate degree, the country was in a recession, and I struggled to find a job. There were the years my wife and I struggled to have children. In later years, I have experienced the pain of loss of beloved family members and dear friends in our faith fellowship.

I have had times of wandering in the wilderness, yet I have felt God walking beside me, always. The words of the prophet Jeremiah sustain and comfort me. I have been able to help others in my work as a counselor; and my wife and I raised two beautiful children in a church where we have loved and been loved.

But the greatest love has come from God, my Father, who has showered me with blessings here, and the assurance of eternal life with him in heaven.

Prayer: My Father, thank you for your wondrous love and marvelous plans! Amen.

Bob Brooks
Fredericksburg, VA

Love Leads the Way

Scripture: John 15:9

Knowing that God loves me gives me a desire to greet each day with joy and to pass on God's love. When love leads the way, I find myself experiencing God moments, every day:

- Talking with the woman who hadn't planned on going to worship that day, but who came anyway and said the message was just what she needed.
- Telling the widow facing knee surgery she'll be in my prayers, and seeing the hope in her eyes.
- Leading Vacation Bible School, and then learning that one little boy asked to be baptized, along with his mother.
- Being somewhere at just the right moment to open a door, or to help carry something, or to say a word of encouragement.

Like the loving father of the prodigal son, God runs toward me when I confess that I've messed things up. When I humble myself to seek God's grace, God's Holy Spirit is quick to assure and comfort and guide—which gives me a desire to pass on that grace, and exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

Prayer: Loving God, please help me let your love lead the way, so people who are poor, or poor in spirit, may be uplifted and recognize you in their midst today. Amen.

Katy Yates Brungraber
Akron, OH

God Is Always There

Scripture: Luke 15:23-24

Growing up in a rural community in Southwestern Virginia in the 1960s, my social life was the church youth group. Church was a very important part of my life. But as happens to so many young adults, I grew up and moved away from home and from my church family. Finding a new church in a new community seemed to take a backseat to establishing a home and then starting a family. I did join a church but I was not a faithful

member. Other things always seemed to be more important than going to church. God had not moved away from me; rather, like the prodigal son, I had moved away from God.

A very wise pastor invited me to go on a short-term mission trip. God used this team of twelve Christian people, and the people that we had come to serve, to make me realize that God still loved me and that God was waiting for me to return to the family. My life changed, and the blessings that I received were beyond measure, as I accepted God's love and grace that had been there for me all along.

When we move away, God will reclaim us. We just need to open our hearts and realize that God is always waiting for God's children to return.

Prayer: Loving God, I thank you that you are always there even when we move away. Renew our Spirits and show us your love when we turn back to you. Amen.

Doris Hedrick
Natural Bridge, VA

Saturday, February 27

Just As I Am

Scripture: John 12:32

My sister raises chickens. In addition to watching my niece and nephew's delightful interactions with chickens named Stripe, McNugget, etc... I am reminded of the all-encompassing love and protection of a parent when I see chicks snuggled under the wing of a mother hen. She draws her chicks in for protection and warmth, but she also simply desires for them to be close to her. The warm shelter and embrace of the mother hen is how I imagine God seeking to draw us near.

Just as I Am is one of my favorite hymns. It almost always urges me toward the altar for prayer when I hear it. "*Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*" (Words by Charlotte Elliott) What a wonderful vision: God drawing all people near. Like a mother hen, bidding us to the sheltering arms where we know we are loved and accepted.

What a glorious thing! God wants to draw us near. We can have a personal relationship. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we don't have to be

separated from God. All we have to do is turn toward God, who is waiting to wrap us in his love.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for wanting me. Help me to turn to you. Let me always desire to be in the sheltering love of your powerful wing. Amen.

Chris Howell
Lynchburg, VA

Sunday, February 28

Windows

Scripture: Psalm 52:9 (NEV)

God loves me first, best, and most! What a concept! God loves me enough to plan things that are good for me and will make me happy, which, in turn, will make Him happy.

The trouble is that I don't always recognize God's plans. When a door closes, I yell and beat upon that door, and don't even see the open window next to it.

Truth is, sometimes the best way into an adventure is through a window! Windows are usually smaller than doors, causing us to narrow our focus and leave unnecessary baggage behind. Then, we are ready to enjoy all that God has planned for us.

Such joy cannot possibly be contained. It just spills over, into plain view, where everyone can see and know that something extraordinary is happening. And maybe, just maybe, some of them will long to be part of that extraordinary happening.

And, who knows? The Kingdom of God may grow, by one or two, because of an open window!

Prayer: Lord, when all we can see are closed doors, make us aware of open windows, and the wonders they reveal. Amen.

Carolyn Maness
Lynchburg, VA



Will you be fasting with us between Good Friday and Easter? There's still time to order or download your Good Friday Fast prayer booklet. endhunger.org

Always Near To God

Scripture: Genesis 28:10-22

I suspect I am not the only person who gets frustrated at work, but when you work in a church, it can be quite a predicament. God is all around, both in the church where I work and the church where I worship, but still there are times that God seems far away. I find that when that happens, God sends someone to gently guide me and help me along. It doesn't have to be a special or momentous event to get me back on track; it can be something simple as a compliment or a word of encouragement. But, at the right moment, that means a lot!

I also try to remember to do this for others: to be the one who helps someone else when they may need a boost. We never know what a difference it could make in someone's life!

Prayer: Dear God, Guide us when we are frustrated, and help us show your light to others. Amen.

Doris Page
McLean, VA

So That All Have What they Need

Scripture: Acts 4:32-37 (NIV)

This text describes characteristics of a *Paraklete*, literally meaning, "one called alongside." A Paraklete shares selflessly, and functions as a helper, comforter, advocate, teacher, or friend. Jesus is often referred to as the original Paraklete. Barnabas exemplifies these characteristics, too. As Christians we are all called to be Parakletes. Do you know one?

SoSA comes across one almost daily. It is the farmer that opens his fields to volunteers and shares his good food. It is the 500 volunteers that come out before dawn on a Saturday to labor in the heat or cold so that children in their community can go to bed with full tummies. It is the individual, church, or organization that gives sacrificially to share nutritious food with the hungry. Acts 4:27 tells us that Barnabas sold a field and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. The money was divided among those who had a need. A widow was able to feed her children

because of Barnabas. Barnabas chose to do these things because this is what God expected of him. He didn't consider them sacrifices, but a calling. During this season of Lent, what are you called to sacrifice? What does God expect of you? For whom are you called to be a Paraklete?

Prayer: God thank you for calling us to be your hands, feet, and voices in the world. Guide us to give sacrificially, so that all have what they need and no one must go hungry. Amen.

Barbara Sayles
Orlando, FL

Wednesday, March 2

How Far?

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:17

I recall a time many years ago when God seemed so far off that I could barely discern any clues of the divine presence in my life. I felt all alone in that dark valley. I felt that way for many months, before slowly I became aware of signs—small signs at first—that God was not just there, but close by, that whole, horrendous time.

In the Parable of the Lost Sons, the father sees the returning younger son, while he is still far off. How far will God's love go? God's love is a love that stretches beyond a son's preference for inheritance over relationship; a love that endures my foolishness; a love that patiently waits to bear great fruit. Yet despite the distance we create, God is never further than arm's length. Never. For the father was with the son even in that distant country (and with me, in mine), nudging him to turn homeward. The Father walks that broken road arm-in-arm, even if unbeknownst to the beloved child. For arm's length is the furthest we can push away a love that strong, a love that cannot—will not—stop pursuing us, the object of that love, to the ends of the earth, and beyond. Forever.

Prayer: May our time of Lenten reflection bear much fruit, as we walk with God along the roads we travel. Amen.

Charlie Stribula
Woodbridge, VA

The Best Food to Those Who Need it Most

SoSA began in 1979 in the hills of Virginia and has grown into the largest field gleaning organization in the country. Working in a collaborative effort with thousands of farmers, tens of thousands of volunteers, and thousands of feeding programs in all 48 contiguous states, SoSA provides healthy food to those who have little or no access to it.

This nutritious, but excess, bounty is sent directly from the point of surplus (field or packing facility) to food banks or feeding programs that will share it directly with people in greatest need. The Society of St. Andrew's remarkable and efficient programs have proven extremely successful at providing nutritious food to those who need it most.

2014 STATISTICS

Pounds Saved: 28,852,322

Events Held: 5,686

Volunteers: 35,399

**2.32 billion servings total
in our 36 year history.**

7.2¢ a pound

3.21% overhead





Preventing Waste, Feeding the Hungry

With your help, the Society of St. Andrew (SoSA) addresses this crucial issue in two ways. In each, SoSA gathers up food that would otherwise be wasted. This fresh and nutritious food is then provided, at no cost, to food banks, pantries, and programs that feed or provide food to those most in need:

In the fields – SoSA mobilizes 30,000 to 40,000 volunteers each year to glean fields and orchards for remaining fruits and vegetables. Volunteers from all faith groups, civic organizations, schools, and universities gather food remaining after the harvest. In 2014, the *Gleaning Network* collected more than 18 million pounds.

At the packing houses – food that is surplus, inconveniently-sized, or cosmetically imperfect, is transported by SoSA to agencies that feed the hungry. Otherwise, this food would likely have been dumped in a landfill as waste. The *Potato & Produce Project* rescued almost 10 million pounds of this food in 2014.



Society of St. Andrew

GLEANING AMERICA'S FIELDS ~ FEEDING AMERICA'S HUNGRY

www.EndHunger.org

Grace Awaits!

Scripture: Romans 5:8

In 1748, John Newton's ship returned to England. On March 9 the violent sea awakened him from sleep. The storm tore away the hull's timbers, and water poured into the hold. Many provisions were lost. Riding down each wave, Newton expected to rise no more.

John Newton was a hard-drinking, filthy-talking, licentious seafarer caught in an epic storm. "I dreaded death now," he said. Newton thought the Gospel was a joke, and even if it wasn't, he was certain his sins couldn't be forgiven.

Reaching port weeks later, he realized he was an example of the biblical prodigal son. Saved from catastrophe by the Lord's goodness, like the prodigal he found the gracious Savior's welcoming arms. Newton renounced his sins and began a return to the Almighty Savior.

In the parable of the prodigal son, there are two critical movements: the son's change of heart and direction, and his father's warm welcome. Squandering his inheritance on wayward living, the son repents of his sin and returns to his father.

One expects a father nursing hurt and resentment to meet him with condemnation. With a twist, his father, instead, runs to meet him with pity and a loving embrace. Where rejection, sin, and condemnation were expected, welcome, love, and joy abound.

This is the timeless invitation to outcasts and sinners. 'Amazing grace' and pardoning love await our return to the Savior Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I turn away from my sin and run to your open arms. Amen.

Tom Thomas
Forest, VA

Nothing Can Stop God's Love

1 Chronicles 17:16-27

In 1973 our then three-year old son Michael hijacked a neighbor child's tricycle and took off down the sidewalk of the small German town

where we had just moved. I did not realize what happened until I heard his playmate crying outside. I went to investigate, and when I didn't see Michael, I asked the playmate's mother to help me find him. You see, I couldn't speak German at all, and since she was German, she could ask the other neighbors if they had seen a little American boy riding a tricycle. A short time later she found him crying and slightly bruised. He had fallen, along with the tricycle, into a ditch near the main road of our village. When I scooped him up in my arms I was still upset, but very grateful, too.

In some ways, Michael could be considered a prodigal son. Like the younger son in Jesus' parable, he had taken something he shouldn't have and suffered the consequences. He isn't unique though. Probably all of us have done something foolish in our younger years. If we are honest, we know we don't always do what is right as adults, either. We want more than what we have, and, unthinking, make choices hurtful to others, and ultimately ourselves. In other words, each of us is a "prodigal."

Yet while the parable offers a wonderful message about God's forgiveness and mercy, it also reveals God's amazing grace. Despite this son's demand for his inheritance which he promptly squandered, his father never stops loving him. Likewise, we may believe we sin a little or we may know we sin a lot, but no sin can stop God from loving us.

I think when the so-called prodigal son came to his senses, God was already prompting him to risk going home to face his father. Indeed, God's grace, ever present, always surrounds us. And just like the father opened his arms to welcome his wayward son, God welcomes us. All we have to do is turn around and start toward home.

Prayer: God, your boundless, immeasurable love overwhelms and amazes me. Help me see where I have sinned and fallen short that I may, without fear, return to you, repentant and assured of your forgiveness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Chris Suerdieck
Emmitsburg, MD

Saturday, March 5

No Cold Call

Scripture: John 1:10 (NKJV)

Did you ever have your supper interrupted by a phone call, and when you answered the phone you heard a person you'd never met trying to sell endhunger.org

you something you didn't need? That's an approach known as a "cold call."

It was such a blessing and relief for me when I learned the doctrine of prevenient grace—the grace of God that “goes before.” Prevenient grace means that, long before you or I ever say a word to someone about Jesus, God has already been there in that person's life, from conception. Our witness to others is never a “cold call”.

It is even more freeing to know that, although scripture encourages us to be prepared to do our best, it is the Holy Spirit who is the Advocate, the Persuader, who touches and convicts a person's heart. All that we are called to do is to be a faithful witness of what God has done for us and proclaim the Good News of God's love in Christ Jesus to all.

Prayer: Lord, take away my fear of failure and rejection by others as I seek to bear witness to your love. Let me know that I am never called to go alone where you have not already gone before or to any situation where you are absent. Known or unknown you are there. In Jesus' name. Amen.

William Nash Wade
Strasburg, Virginia

Sunday, March 6

Sometimes a U-Turn is Needed

Scripture: Psalm 63:1

Over the years my wife and I moved to numerous new places which necessitated traveling in unfamiliar territory—new streets and highways, new landmarks, new destinations, new maps. We often became lost and needed to turn around. We still refer to our “famous U-turns.”

In Jesus' parable, when the prodigal son headed home from his philandering sojourn, he questioned what awaited him there. He made a U-turn, but what could he expect at home? He had wasted his father's resources and disgraced his name. Happily, before he arrived, his father saw him from a distance and ran out to him, embracing him with loving arms of welcome.

Many people know the experience of becoming lost spiritually—lost from God. At times God may seem unreal. Maybe illness or loss has eclipsed their awareness of God's presence and love. Sometimes other demands, pressures, or interests have distracted them, leading them in false paths. They may regret this lost-ness, and come to “thirst for God,” like the

psalmist. In seeking God anew they discover God has been there all along, searching for them, hoping they would make a U-turn and come home.

Prayer: O God, during this sacred season of Lent, as you seek to find us, grant that we may also be seeking you. Amen.

Hasbrouck Hughes
Williamsburg VA

Monday, March 7

Reckless Love

Scripture: John 6:1-13

In *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller, Keller expounds on the story of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke. The familiar story, of the wayward son who returns to his father and the elder son who sulks at the rejoicing, is one we can all identify with. We are wayward, we repent, and we do it again and again. We also have a place in our hearts for resentment when others don't measure up to our standards, to our beliefs, to our ethics.

How great it is that God in his abundant love embraces us in our smallness and in our returning to him. Keller begins his book with a definition of the word "prodigal." Prodigal doesn't mean "lost" or "wayward" or "wasteful;" rather, it means "recklessly extravagant."

In John 6:1-13 there is an abundance of loaves and fish to feed the multitudes of people. What might have been long day with no food turns out to be enough for everyone, with plenty left over! As he feeds thousands with a miraculous abundance of food, Christ fills us with abundant love. Our God is recklessly extravagant in his mercy and grace. His joy when we return to him must be unfathomable!

Prayer: God of extravagance, we ask your mercy on us as we repent and return to you. Help us to love our neighbors and you with the same joyous grace that you give to us. Amen.

Anne Wood
Charlotte, NC

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Who's Got Whom?

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Peter. You've got to love him. Blurting out, jumping in, impulsive, Peter. Peter was one of Jesus' inner circle: praised for his insight; reprimanded for his doubts; remembered for his denial. Impetuous Peter.

I can be so like Peter. Sometimes I'm the defender of the faith, fearless to proclaim the Gospel. Other times I'm tempted to avoid the pain and difficulties of this life to which God has called me. Frequently, I climb out of the boat, with my eye focused on Jesus—just to be distracted by the wind and the waves, the trouble and the turmoil, the many things that pummel my faith. I begin to sink. Left to myself, I would drown.

But Jesus, sweet, sweet Jesus, looks at me, answers my plea, takes hold of me, and pulls me out. Again. I am saved, not by my faith, but by his steadfast, reliable love.

If my salvation depended on me being faithful, firm, and resolute, I would die. I would be sucked under the waves. But the God who began a good work in me will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6) because Jesus loses none whom the Father has given him. (John 17:12)

People sometimes say, "Have you got Jesus?" I like to say, "No, but he's got me, and that's so much better."

Prayer: Loving Father, help me remember that, even when I forget, even when my faith stumbles, you hold me and pull me up. Thank you for never letting me go. Amen.

Suzanne Zampella
Connellsville, PA

Jesus Screamed for You

Scripture: Luke 23:46

You may never have screamed, but you may at times have felt abandoned by God. It is a frightening feeling to believe that there is no God, or that there is a God but that God has abandoned you. Loneliness and depression are nothing more than the stages your soul goes through on its way to screaming.

Anger directed at others, or addictions meant to silence our souls, are ways we use to keep ourselves from screaming at God. At some point, however, we all have to face the truth. We may have followed a course in life that has led us far from God. Our lives may have been one long nose-dive into a deserted hillside. We must inevitably come to that moment of judgment. And when we do, we find ourselves totally unworthy of God's concern, certain that we have been abandoned by God.

Jesus felt totally abandoned by God in the moments before he died on the cross. He felt that way because sin separates us from God and Jesus had the sins of all people on his shoulders. His scream saved us, because it was a scream that indicated a complete and total surrender to God. We don't have to scream, even though our sins have taken us far from God. We can let Jesus' scream be our scream. We can let his abandonment be our abandonment. We can let his surrender be our surrender. We can let his death for sin be our death for sin.

Prayer: God, give us the courage to surrender ourselves completely to your love. Amen.

Norman Tippens
Lexington, VA

Thursday, March 10

Who Moved?

Scripture: Psalm 139 (The Message)

There is a story, in a time before bucket seats and seat belts, of an older married couple, driving down the road, when the wife becomes rather sullen. The husband asks what is on her mind, and she responds that her husband must no longer love her. She declares that when they were young and in love, they would sit close beside one another, he with his arm around her as they drove down the street. "Now look at us!" she cries from the far side of the car, emphasizing the distance between them. Her husband, being a man of few words, responds simply, "Who moved?"

I have often chuckled at myself because of that story. So many times I come to a point in my life when I question the presence and proximity of God in my life, and I can almost hear God say with a grin, "Who moved?" The good news is that God is present wherever we are. Even when we move away, God is there. As the verse today says, "I look behind me and you're

there, then up ahead and you're there too—your reassuring presence, coming and going.”

Prayer: Loving God, even though we sometimes feel distant from your presence, you promise that you are nearer than we realize. You are closer than our next breath. So, today, may our breathing be a prayer, filling us with that overwhelming assurance that you are here with us now, and nothing can separate us from you, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Jim Tinkey
Orlando, FL

Friday, March 11

One of Those Weeks

Scripture: Isaiah 40:30-31

It was one of those weeks. I knew it would be, when my car wouldn't start. The severe cold spell had zapped all the power from the battery. Little did I know that the events yet to come would zap most of my strength, too.

The call came. A beloved member of the church had died. I went and met with the family, and we began making plans to celebrate her life. Hardly had I gotten back to church, when another call came—another member had died, and yet another had had a heart attack.

By the end of that week, with so much still to be done, I was feeling absolutely drained physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. I remember so clearly praying, “God, where are you? I need you. These families need you. I, we, can't go on without you.” My spiritual battery was dead. It needed a jump start—or maybe a replacement!

Then, though I really can't explain or adequately describe it, this surge of strength began to build inside me. It was as if I were Lazarus and suddenly heard my name called out and the words, “Come forth!” I know beyond any doubt that the God I thought so distant had done this. The “battery” was glowing with energy. The “engine” roared to life! I went out



with renewed energy and carried out the ministry that God had called me to do, knowing that for these suffering friends, God would do the same.

Prayer: So, Lord, I'm not going to worry anymore when my engine is slow to start or won't at all. Whenever you call, you empower. Amen.

Bass Mitchell
Salem, VA

Saturday, March 12

Waiting for Harmony

Scripture: Luke 15:20b

My sister and I grew apart through the years although we kept in touch and, whenever possible, visited each other. In her last few years, she struggled with a number of serious health problems—diabetes, kidney issues, leg amputations, and, finally, dementia. She had nine children, including one who felt “far off” from the others.

When my niece, who was taking care of her mother, communicated to all of her siblings their mother's decline, the family nearby surrounded her with love and care. In her delirium, my sister clearly said, “harmony.” This puzzled them. But the family took this admonition to heart and worked to bring about harmony in the family, asking even those far away to at least call their mom. Late one evening, after all nine of her children had visited or called her, she passed away. She had been waiting, holding on, for her family to come together in harmony.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving to us the ability to be in harmony with one another and with you. Amen.

Sam Ramirez
Lakeland, FL

Sunday, March 13

Not a Failure

Scripture: Luke 23:39-43

All of us have situations in our past we regret, just like the prodigal son. He turned his back on his father and his heritage to follow a path of wild

living and what he thought was happiness. As the money ran out, so did his friends. He began to realize that real happiness is not of this earth.

Can you imagine the shame he must have felt going home a failure? It took a lot of courage for him to return, knowing he would be working alongside his father's servants.

As his father saw him approach, he called for a celebration and welcomed the son home. No condemnation, no questions...just, "Welcome home, my child."

Jesus is waiting for you, too. Do you find yourself in a situation that you think you are beyond forgiveness? Are you afraid you will never regain the relationship you once had with your heavenly Father? Just as the sinner on the cross asked to be remembered, so Jesus will remember you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is waiting for you. Jesus is calling you home. Turn and walk away from this sinful world, and follow His call.

Prayer: Father, no matter what troubles we bring on ourselves, thank you for always welcoming us home. Amen.

Barbara Lipford
Bedford, VA

Monday, March 14

Confirmation

Scripture: Acts 10:39-43

For the past few years, I have felt very disconnected from the teenagers in our area. My son was my bridge to connecting with the local community. Once he died, a deep trench surrounded my spirit, and I stopped helping at youth group.

But last spring, I was asked to assist with Confirmation Class at our church. Half-heartedly, I agreed to serve, feeling a sense of duty, but no joy in the task. After the first two weeks, my perception changed dramatically. One of the confirmands asked me to be her mentor!

For over a month, we met for breakfast each Saturday. As we discussed sin, repentance, and sacraments, I was reminded of the early church. In Acts, Peter shares how he was chosen as God's witness to Jesus, and commanded to preach the Good News. This same person, who denied Jesus three times, accepted forgiveness from Jesus and built the church. Here I was—a "childless mother"—supporting a young lady, on her faith

journey. God chose me as a witness, to share the Good News with her.
Only God creates such miracles!

Prayer: Thank you Lord for using our spiritual gifts to draw others to you, as we come closer to you. Help us this Lenten season to confirm your glory in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Kelly Desclos-Estes
Montross, VA

Tuesday, March 15

Incomprehensible

Scripture: Romans 3:23-24

Today found me as Wednesday usually does, in a Bible study with other members of my church. We were discussing the Book of Romans and in particular, how Paul explains his struggle within himself to do what is right, yet sometimes his actions fall short of that desire to do right. Paul assures readers in Romans 7-8 that God sent his son, Jesus to provide grace and mercy for all who believe.

I find myself amazed at the love God shows me even when I do not feel I deserve such love. On a day in which I know I have failed in some way, I am encouraged by this grace God freely pours out on my life. To realize that God loves me first, best, and most is in some ways beyond my comprehension. And yet, it is what drives me to make an effort to become more like Christ each day.

I love my Wednesday morning Bible study! I am surrounded by many who know and understand the same struggles I experience, and I am lifted up by their testimonies of how grace has acted within their lives. This is the difference God's love makes in my life: I make a daily effort to surround myself with my faith community, so that I can be reminded of that great love.

Prayer: Dear God, even on days when I struggle to choose your way, I know for certain that you have freely given grace and love to me. Help me to lean upon my faith community and realize your grace in my life so that I may share your love with others today. Amen.

Tianna Durbin
Dulles, VA

Foundation in Christ

Scripture: John 6:44

During a small group Bible study several years ago, the leader asked us to talk about our faith journey and how it started. One member of my group said, “I was lucky, my parents took me to church.” I thought, “That is my story as well.” My parents took me to church.

Of course, there were many times when I didn’t want to go, particularly during my teenage years. But as is often the case, I grew to realize what a gift I had been given. What a wonderful gift it was to go to church as a family each Sunday. (In those days, as a one-car family, everyone had to be ready and on time for both Sunday School and church!)

My parents were helping me build a foundation of faith, that I can stand on, even when I run into problems or tragedy enters my life. There have been many times when I was faced with a situation I didn’t think I could handle alone. But by having Christ as my foundation, knowing that he wants to be a part of my life, knowing that he reaches out to me, I could pray for guidance and ask him to help me through the troubled times.

I know that Christ loves me and wants the best for me, if I will just walk humbly with him and remember to keep him at the center of my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we believe that you loved us so much that you gave your Son to die for our sins. Help us to listen for your call and always respond, “Here I am Lord.” Amen.

Robert Forrest
Charlottesville, VA

Divine Love and Grace: At God’s Initiation

Scripture: Luke 15:20

I have always been struck by the similarities between the seasons of Advent and Lent. While certainly distinct from one another, both seasons are characterized by the call for introspection, repentance, and expectation. These seasons prepare us as Christians to usher in the two most momentous days of the liturgical calendar: Christmas and Easter.

One of the things I am particularly reminded of during Lent is that it is God who first reaches out to us. In Lent, I recall that the Christian story is fundamentally one of rescue: of God extending grace to us in spite of our utter helplessness and undeserving. In the impending darkness of Good Friday and the waxing light of Easter, I am challenged to acknowledge the full extent of humanity's pre-Easter plight. Amid the introspection and repentance of Lent, I see more clearly that it is God who loves us first, best, and most.

While the following lyrics were written primarily for Advent and Christmas, they also capture this Lenten theme of God's love and grace, extended to us first:

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
The thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks the new and glorious morn!*
(Placide Cappeau, *O Holy Night*, 1847)

Prayer: This Lent, may we penitently confess our brokenness, and offer God our thanksgiving for God's response to us in the grace and love of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matt Hoehn
Durham, NC

Friday, March 18

I am worthy, I am worthy!

Scripture: Mark 1:2-6

In the Gospel of Mark we learn that as people were being baptized, they were also confessing their sins! Of course, we each remember times we have sinned, and we know all too well how we felt afterward. But how does forgiveness feel?

What if we could use this season of Lent to let go of our mistakes, to release our guilt and dread over our sins and shortcomings? What if we could allow God's love to take root in our hearts?

We are often impatient and demanding. We are often quick to anger and fall short of God's intentions. We build walls between ourselves and others, exercising judgment instead of mercy.

What if we could connect with one another in such a way that we

forgive each other and allow Christ's love to enter our conversation and our thought process? What if we resolved to act differently... you and me together! What if we lived in light of Christ's resurrection that we know is coming? What if we really believed the risen Christ is in our midst? Right there between you and me. Right there in the midst of pain and hurt. Right there in the middle of recrimination and talking ourselves down. Right in the middle of feeling unworthy and undeserving.

Right then. Right at that moment! When Christ's love is resurrected in us, we can become new beings. Over and over again. We are encouraged and given the opportunity to become renewed. When we feel forgiven, we speak forgiveness, and we live into forgiveness. God moves in us, and our spirits become a little more loving, a little more forgiving, and we begin to allow ourselves to feel worthy of God's love.

The promise of Lent and the joy of Easter is that we, frail and flawed as we are, have the chance to die to our shortcomings and be resurrected in God's great love!

Prayer: God of our separate selves, thank you for forgiving us. Thank you for the opportunities to forgive each other. Thank you for a love that is "poured out for us," over and over again. Thank you for making us new. Hold us close to live out that kind of love that renews us, holds us close as though we are worthy, and allows us to forgive ourselves and others without hesitation. In the name of the One who lived out that love, so that we may do the same. Amen.

Lesley Huffaker
Coronado, CA

Saturday, March 19

Lent, a Time of Renewal and Grace

Scripture: Mark 6:31

It is finally spring! Flowers and trees are blooming, and the mountains are turning green here in Virginia. Yet, with the beauty and new life of nature come allergies and pollen which have me laid low with a sinus infection, feeling impatient and anxious, far away from God. I have too much to do to be sick! There is gardening, washing, painting, work, family, friends, church, and Easter preparations.

I lie in bed, depleted, and finally cry out to God for healing. I pick up

my devotional and read of our Savior's resurrection, and there I receive him, the one who waits for me with outstretched arms and infinite love. He offers comfort, guidance, renewal, and grace—gifts that were mine for the asking, all along.

Why do I make much so much of my busy-ness? Why do I let impatience and exhaustion define my life? Lent offers us all time to step back from busy-ness, to reflect on what is most important, to simply observe, and to allow God to intervene in our lives—a discernable resurrection of sorts from our distractions of the day.

Prayer: God, bring us closer to you during this season of Lent. Make us aware and thankful for all that we have through you. Keep us mindful and help us reach out to those who do not have enough. Heal our hurts, we pray. For it is your Son who said, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find...” May we rest and retreat in you, for by your grace we are renewed. Amen.

Stella Carson
Big Island, VA

Sunday, March 20

Amazing Love

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30

As humans, we all fail each other sometimes. We try our best to be good friends, parents, spouses, and children, but no matter how much we love others, sometimes we fall short of providing what they need. We listen with human ears and respond with human words. We forgive with human hearts and try to forget with human brains. There's no fault in this—after all, God made us this way. Yet at times we feel guilty that we can't show grace as completely as we'd like.

The beauty of God's love is that it is an all-encompassing, unfathomable, beyond-human love. Where we fall short, He makes our cup overflow. Where our words leave hurt, He brings the balm of Gilead. Where we turn away, He says, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” God loves us more than we can understand and better than we can understand. Sending Jesus to die for our sins was not a re-action but a pro-action: God knew the flaws of humanity past, present, and future, so God offered grace without measure.

God's grace is an undeserved gift that we receive anew each day. What amazing love God has for us!

Prayer: God, thank you for your grace. Help us walk through this day knowing your love for us exceeds all bounds. Help us to show that love to others in the best ways we can. Amen.

Lauren Holcomb
Richmond, VA

Monday, March 21

Just Because

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4-5

I remember as a child being asked why I did something. I would often answer, "Just because," meaning that I did it, for no other reason than I wanted to. Can you believe God acts that way too?

In today's scripture, we read that God chose us—just because God wanted to. What an awesome thought! Before the beginning of creation, God chose us to be his very own, to adopt us as his children—just because God wanted to.

Sometimes we may think we are unlovable, perhaps because of our actions or choices or even our appearance or disability. But scripture tells us otherwise: God chooses to love every one of us, without exception or condition. In Romans 8:38-39, we are reminded that nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

This Lenten season, as we remember how God showed that great love through the death and resurrection of his only son, Jesus, may we all realize how much it cost God to prove his love for us—and know that God did this for us, "just because" God wanted to.

Prayer: Gracious Loving God, thank you for choosing to love every one of us, even when we may feel unlovable. You showed us that love by giving your only son to save us. May we always remember there is nothing that can separate us from your love. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Joyce Duncan
Forest, VA

A Provident Hand

Scripture: Matthew 10:30,31

All of my grandchildren have grown past the toddler stage. Yet, I continue to remember how much I loved to watch them first lift themselves on their unsure but willing legs to stand erect like those in their adult world, and then take a few brief steps, wobbling and swaying. It is always a magical time for any parent or grandparent to witness!

I also remember how we watched with a wary eye, mindful of their safety. First steps, even later steps, present not only excitement, but danger as well. Cliffs, like staircases, are near. Hardwood furniture offers potential for bruises, pain, and tears.

How well do they know that there is someone nearby who loves them and is ready to intercede on their behalf if danger comes too near?

What we call prevenient grace is much like that: God loves us first, best, and most. God watches as we grow, with our first few steps toward young adulthood, and into our mature years. Most of the time, we don't even think about it. We go through our days unaware that God watches with a wary eye, willing to reach out a provident hand for our protection.

Prayer: Lord God, we thank you this day for that provident hand that is always ready to prop us up, to nudge us, to push us forward in your grace. Amen.

Andy Brock
Winchester, VA

Tending to Wander

Scripture: James 5:19-20

I have always had a tendency to wander. When I was four years old, I wandered off while shopping with my mom. I found a nice college student to bring me home, while my mom had the entire store searching for me. My ride took me to the home of a neighbor, who called the store, and my mom rushed back home, glad to find me safe.

As I got older, my wanderings got bigger. After college, I took a job halfway across the country from anywhere I had ever been, as much as

anything, because I wanted to explore. During that time in my voluntary wilderness, I visited a couple of churches, but never felt comfortable. I started spending time with people who did not care about me. I became disconnected from my family, from my church, and eventually even felt disconnected from God. I have never, before or since, felt so alone or so lost!

After a year in the wilderness, a friend from church, who had always taken interest in me called and told me it was time to come home. He had found a job at a nearby church and had gotten me an interview. God worked through my friend to bring me back when I was most lost. It is through my friend that I learned how God works through us, to bring others back home to the love of God.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us recognize and listen to your messengers in our lives. Help us also to be faithful followers, helping bring those who are lost back home to you. Amen.

Michael Binger
Durham, NC

Thursday, March 24

Draw Me Nearer

Scripture: Hebrews 10:12-18

I felt far from God in my late childhood and early adult years. Convinced that I was worthless, unloved, untalented, and lost, I had no sense of God's presence, nor any hope for a better life. I filled my leisure hours with alcohol, the only way I knew to escape the condemner deep within me.

In these same years, people in my childhood church continued to contact me, to welcome me, to ask me to take part in projects, to display a trust in my talents and abilities. Through the years of my young adulthood, I started to really feel their trust, and to see that God was calling me to celebrate myself as a gift of God.



Harvest of Hope work/study mission retreats offer young people opportunities to learn about hunger, to work to alleviate hunger, and to develop leadership skills to take action against hunger in their own communities. **endhunger.org**

When my first wife died in 2005, I was again lost, despairing, and separated from hope and from God. With an empty heart I attended the community Thanksgiving service. There the lead pastor had me kneel at the altar while everyone laid hands on my head, my shoulders, my hands. Once again, God's people helped me feel God's presence, love, and Spirit.

Prayer: Loving God, may I know your presence throughout this Lenten season. When I feel far off from you, come to me in your people, your creation, your forgiveness, your Spirit. May we draw closer, throughout all time; through Christ our Savior. Amen.

William Olewiler
Fleming Island, FL

Friday, March 25

Singing from the Cross

Scripture: Luke 23:46

This scripture recounts Jesus' final words from the cross. So many times I have heard people give accounts of the last of words of Jesus from the cross. They get to this last phrase and comment on how wonderful it was for Jesus to give up his own spirit to be reunited with the Spirit of God.

I find not only wonder in these words, but also comfort. I believe that these words, the last words, are the most comforting of all, as Jesus spoke to all humanity from that cruel cross. They should be comforting to us, because they were comforting to Jesus. This phrase actually comes from Psalm 31:5, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God."

Think about it! Jesus learned this wonderful verse as a hymn from the Songs of David contained in the Psalms. As Jesus was suffering and completing the great work of atonement for all of humanity for all time, Jesus remembered this hymn that he had learned as a child and most likely sang many times during his life. What does this say to me? It says that Jesus was singing from the cross! He recalled this comforting song and sang as he spoke his last words!

Do you remember songs and hymns that you learned as a child? Do you find yourself humming and singing tunes and words that have brought you comfort in your life during times of trial and trouble? Like Jesus, this Lent, call upon those songs and comforting words and speak them, sing

them and hum them to God once again—and be comforted.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Lord and Savior God, once again I call out to you in song. Hear my words and let my spirit unite with your Spirit. May I know comfort from my Lord and Savior as I sing about Jesus, my Christ. Amen.

Mark Mangum
Birmingham, AL

Saturday, March 26

In the Face of That

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:18-4:1 (CEV)

Our youth group had gone to a nursing home to visit. It was not considered one of the “good” ones; it was an old building, in need of considerable rehab. The patients were poor and old and sick and, I think, mostly alone. Memory is sometimes strange, but I think the rooms were more wards, with several beds, perhaps three or four in each. As we made our rounds we, children of plenty and of privilege we did not comprehend, came across one small, confused woman lying in a bed. She was picking at her covers and had done this so much and so forcefully that she had pulled them all askew. She had twisted around so much that her gown was wrapped around her, and her bare backside had become exposed. All the time she cried out for someone, “Mama?” or perhaps someone else; she was hard to understand.

An aide appeared and covered her again, speaking calming words, straightening the gown and the blanket, swaddling her in a way that calmed her, for a moment anyway.

I remember, all these years later, feeling so helpless in the face of such need, such likely injustice of resources, and such poverty of relationships. How could I possibly be called to offer hope or love or service in the face of all that?

Prayer: O holy God; we thank you for loving and embracing those who cry out in need, those who serve, those who struggle to know what to do. In Christ, Amen.

Kathleen Overby Webster
Roanoke, VA

First Love

Scripture: Romans 5:8

Far beyond human ability to understand is the truth of God's love. He loved me before I knew of or acknowledged his existence. That love is never-changing, as constant as if I alone were its object. The great Creator of everything in heaven and on earth cares so much for me that he sacrificed his only Son.

My children and grandchildren are more valuable to me than any amount of money or material possession. I cannot imagine giving one of them to save another person's life, even if that child was willing to do so. Yet that is exactly what happened. With the Father's blessing, Christ freely gave his own life to show the magnitude of God's love.

All the words in every language on earth are inadequate to express what that means. He did not demand I first become righteous or that I first plead forgiveness. While I was still a sinner—rebellious, self-absorbed, unworthy—he proved God's love. Then he rose to give hope that I, too, will one day rise to live with him in eternity. I am still a sinner, but now a sinner saved by God's love and grace. No wonder the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner comes home. They have witnessed how much God cares for each of his children.

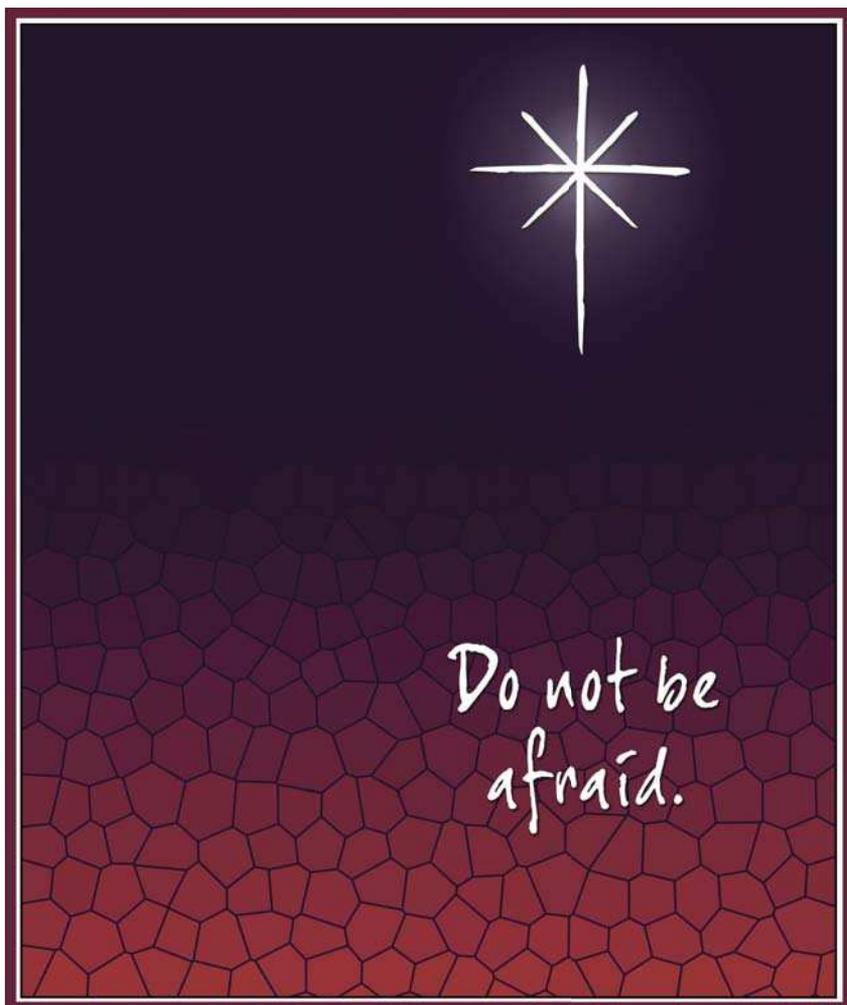
Prayer: Holy God, on this holiest of days, remind me again of your love and help me never to doubt or forget. Amen.

Anne Ownbey
Black Mountain, NC

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Hunger Relief Ministries of the Society of St. Andrew

Gleaning Network—A hands-on mission program for all ages, getting healthy food directly from fields and markets to the hungry people who need it most. The *Gleaning Network* brings together farmers with excess produce, volunteers to glean (pick, dig, or gather) that produce, and agencies feeding the hungry. People in need glean alongside people with plenty in this community-based program, that engages individuals, congregations, and civic organizations in service.

Potato & Produce Project—A produce salvage program, providing direct food relief to our nation's poor, while addressing one of the major causes of hunger: food waste. The *Potato & Produce Project* salvages and distributes hundreds of tractor-trailer loads of fresh fruits and vegetables to food banks, soup kitchens, and other feeding agencies each year.

Seed Potato Project—A self-help program, providing seed potatoes purchased by Society of St. Andrew to impoverished rural communities, where people have access to land for gardening. Families plant, cultivate, and harvest their own crops, realizing a yield of about eight pounds of potatoes per pound planted.

Harvest of Hope—A hunger-focused work/study mission program. Participants glean and distribute produce remaining in fields after harvest each morning and learn about the realities of hunger each evening. Bible study and dynamic worship round out days of Christian community and service, providing a basis for on-going commitment to ending hunger. *Harvest of Hope* offers middle school, high school, and intergenerational events throughout the summer and fall, as well as *Alternative Spring Break* programs for college students.

Each year, the Society of St. Andrew distributes more than 85 million servings of nourishing food to hungry people throughout the United States.

Society of St. Andrew, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, a grassroots, ecumenical and interfaith ministry, has been working toward a world without hunger since 1979.

www.endhunger.org