

REFLECTIONS FOR LENT ON PONTIUS PILATE AND JESUS THE KING



INTRODUCTORY WEEK

WHAT DO I DO WITH JESUS?

When my wife and I were expecting our first child, we attended a birthing class to prepare ourselves for the delivery. I remember the first class well, and not simply because it was my first crash course in childbirth. It's because our instructor began the class by giving us an interesting assignment. She gave us two questions we were to carry through each of the remaining sessions - "What information have you received?" and secondly, "What are you going to do with that information?"

The class was less about the mechanics of childbirth and more about the power of information - to educate ourselves on the various methods of delivery so that we can make an informed decision on how we would like to bring our baby into the world.

It was those two questions, though, that stayed with me, even to this day.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ walked the earth, performing miracles and proclaiming the good news of salvation. Each person whose life he touched faced the same two questions I faced sitting in that birthing class: what information were they getting, in their case, about this man Jesus, and what were they going to do with that information?

We can simplify the second question like this: "What is this information worth to you?"

We have prepared this Lent Devotional Guide to explore that very question. Moving through the story of Pontius Pilate and his examination of Jesus in the four Gospels, we will explore six different responses that are common to us all. From shifting the responsibility of evaluating who Jesus truly is onto others, to compromising, mocking, and retreating, our prayer is that each of us will be freed from the burden of these responses in order that we can stand before the cross, fully vulnerable, fully loved, and fully guided by truth.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Selah - the word is used over seventy times throughout the Bible and carries a powerful instruction: pause and consider. The season of Lent embodies the very heart of this word; a time for us to pause and realign our hearts, our minds, and our souls with the purposes of God. Today in prayer, dedicate these next forty days for his glory, that you would set yourself apart each day for a time of thoughtful reflection and be refreshed in his presence.

Candlelight Prayer: "I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land." Psalm 143:6 ESV Father, I pray for thirst, that the attention of my heart would be solely fixed upon you and nothing else. Prepare my heart in this season, that I would be sanctified through your Spirit and renewed in your Word.

INTRODUCTION INTRO WEEK DAY ONE

"Our prayer is that each of us will be freed to stand before the cross, fully vulnerable, fully loved, and fully guided by truth."

Devotional Writing Team

Katie Copeland
Julia Culbertson
Katy Culbertson
Nathan Riddle
Brian Somma
Emily Thomas

INTRODUCTION

We have prepared this Lent Devotional Guide around the Gospel accounts of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Jerusalem on whose word INTROWEEK of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Jerusalem on whose word Christ was sentenced to execution. Shortly after Jesus's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and the religious trials before Annas and Caiaphas that followed. Jesus was led before Pilate for his civil trial.

> "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor" (Matthew 27:1-2).

> Pilate had been installed as the prefect, or governor, of Jerusalem several years before this encounter. He was a lower ranking military officer, namely responsible for keeping order in the city (Encyclopedia Britannica). As the historian Josephus records, he was not highly regarded by the Jewish people who were wary of Roman occupation, and he furthered this unrest by openly mocking their customs (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews - Book XVIII). He was not very good in his primary role of peacekeeping and Pilate likely knew that if he were recalled to Rome, his position, and ultimately his life, would be in grave jeopardy.

"We must evaluate Jesus, and with the information we receive. decide, is he worthy?"

Enter Jesus. Unrest had once again found its way to Pilate's doorstep as a group of men escorted a bruised and bound man to his residence, demanding he be executed for blasphemy. Pilate is tasked with determining the truth of Jesus's character. Was he indeed a blasphemer? Was he inciting an overthrow of Roman occupation in Jerusalem as they claimed? If so, were these actions worthy of death?

In the climax of this remarkable story, Pilate is finally brought to the end of himself, and he exclaims in great desperation, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matthew 27:22).

The profound nature of this question cannot be overstated. It is a question that has echoed the halls of human history for two thousand years since. Indeed, there is no more important a question a person can ask, and there is no more important an answer a person must give. What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Christ?

Like the birthing class from yesterday's introduction, the journey to this answer will be unique for each one of us, but the method to arrive at this answer will be common to us all, simply this: we must evaluate Jesus, and with the information we receive, decide, is he worthy?

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Consider why you believe. What first drew you to Christ? Are you drawn to Christ? Examining our faith can be scary, but it is needful, biblical even. Pray today for the courage and willingness to examine your faith as you move through this Devotional Guide, identifying the ways in which you respond like Pilate and finding courage to move beyond those responses into deeper faith.

Candlelight Prayer: "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." 2 Corinthians 13:5a ESV Father, today, I pray for the courage to examine my faith. Look upon me in grace as I travel through times of weakness or doubt, that I would be rooted and grounded in love.

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

INTRODUCTION INTRO WEEK DAY THREE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Psalm 62:5-8

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah Psalm 62:5-8 ESV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading

WEEK ONE

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.

Luke 23:6-7 ESV

Read Spotlight Passage: Luke 23:1-7

Pilate gathers information about Jesus and from what he has learned, announces that he finds "no basis for a charge against this man" (Luke 23:4). When he is met with opposition, rather than stand firm to his conviction, Pilate chooses to shift responsibility for this decision onto Herod.

Every day, we are confronted with information and must decide what to do with it. Our sinful nature often causes us to avoid opportunities for failure or blame. If we are honest with ourselves and with God, we can acknowledge that responsibility may be hard for us to accept, especially when the outcome is risky or uncertain.

When we shift responsibility, we may feel a sense of relief knowing that the burden will be carried by someone else. Pilate was likely relieved as Jesus was led away to Herod's palace.

But his relief was short-lived as "Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked [Jesus]. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate" (Luke 23:11).

We face the same eternal decision as Pilate. But try as we might to avoid this responsibility, we each must own this decision by ourselves. Who do I believe Jesus is? What do I do with Jesus?

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Spend time reflecting on what you know about Jesus. Seek the Spirit's guidance to grow you in your faith journey.

Candlelight Prayer: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23-24 NIV

Heavenly Father, search my heart and mind. Show me the ways that I try to shift responsibility in my every day. Lead me to follow your ways, not my own.

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY
WEEK ONE DAY ONE

"We each must make our own decision about Jesus."

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY WEEK ONE DAY TWO

"God saw in them what they couldn't see in themselves, and worked through them to accomplish remarkable things."

Read Spotlight Passage: Judges 6:12-40

The desire to shift responsibility is universal, even for those who have demonstrated great faith.

God's request to Gideon was dangerous and difficult. Likely, to Gideon, it seemed impossible. Gideon looked to his past (where has God been throughout their troubles?) and his present (who was he, the least in the weakest family?) and he hesitated.

We see similar hesitation in Barak, a military commander in the time of the judges, when Deborah, a prophetess and judge, gave him God's message to attack Sisera. Barak's response to Deborah was, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Judges 4:6-8).

Similarly, we see Moses attempt to shift responsibility of rescuing the Israelites from Pharoah's oppression when he gives God a range of excuses why it shouldn't be him: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).

These three men attempted to shift the responsibility of the task God had given them, or at least, they could not see themselves as capable of moving forward. But God saw in them what they couldn't see in themselves, and worked through them to accomplish remarkable things.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Do you have doubt or fear that is causing you to hesitate in following what God is calling you to do? When we, like Gideon, Barak and Moses, respond to God's call with "Who am I...?", God's answer is always the same - it doesn't matter who we are, it only matters that he is with us. Ask the Lord for courage and to be reminded that he promises to be with you.

Candlelight Prayer:

"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:26 NIV

Lord, guide me in moments of doubt. Give me the courage to follow your will with the reassurance of your promise that you will be with me.

Read Spotlight Passage: Deuteronomy 3:21-26

We can seek to shift responsibility not only in what we are being asked to do, but also in the accountability of what we have already done.

In this passage, Moses is recounting to the Israelites how he will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land.

In the Book of Numbers, the Lord gave Moses a clear command to bring forth water from a rock. He was to gather the people and speak to the rock. In doing so, water would pour from it. Instead, in that critical moment, Moses speaks in anger to the people, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" and strikes it twice with his staff (Numbers 20:10-11).

In response to Moses's clear disobedience, the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Numbers 20:12).

Rather than take responsibility for his own disobedience, Moses in this moment blames the people. "Because of you..."

The actions of others are never an excuse for disobedience. When we fail to honor God in our actions, let us approach our fault before God and others with a heart of honesty, taking responsibility for our wrongs and seeking forgiveness from those we have hurt.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Confess with a sincere heart the ways that you have shifted responsibility, asking God to forgive you. Accept accountability and seek forgiveness for actions that may have hurt others or for moments of disobedience. Ask the Lord to make your paths straight.

Candlelight Prayer:

"But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Psalm 19:12-14 NIV

Dear God, I live in victory over sin only through your son, Jesus. Convict me, Lord. In Jesus's name, amen.



"The actions of others are never an excuse for disobedience."

SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY WEEK ONE DAY FOUR

"Let the glory of Calvary and the preciousness of Jesus overwhelm you, that you too can answer in full surrender: he is worthy."

Read Spotlight Passage: Genesis 3:8-13

This scene is familiar in so many ways - one finger pointing the blame to the next person, and so on; no one accepting accountability for the wrongs that have taken place. Our own sin blinds us to where the blame truly lies: within us.

Both Adam and Eve were presented with a choice, and they chose to put themselves before God - perhaps the simplest definition of sin - and by doing so, broke the perfect relationship he created us to have with him.

But at the cross, responsibility was shifted in a *different* direction. Rather than deflect blame, of which he had every right, being blameless, Jesus willingly shifted the responsibility of our sin onto himself, so that we could stand blameless before God.

Before we try to shift the responsibility of what to do with Jesus onto someone else, we must understand that our evaluation of Christ's worth can never be solely dependent upon another person's appraisal of Christ. This is a decision we cannot escape or delegate to another; we all must give an account. Therefore, let the glory of Calvary and the preciousness of Jesus overwhelm you, that you too can answer in full surrender: he is worthy.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Consider the ways you may have tried to shift the responsibility of determining Christ's worth onto others. Perhaps you are following Jesus only because your family or your spouse is following him. Or perhaps you are hesitant to follow Jesus because someone you respect does not. Today, in quiet reflection, identify ways that you can make your faith your own, and renew a willingness of your heart to be awed by his grace.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long." Psalm 25:5 ESV

Lord, help me to draw near to your truth with a sincere heart, knowing that by your grace I have been saved.

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Psalm 86:8-13

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

Among the gods there is none like you, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.
All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.
For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

Teach me your way, Lord,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.
I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever.
For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.
Psalm 86:8-13 NIV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

SHIFTING
RESPONSIBILITY
WEEK ONE
DAY FIVE

Spiritual Reading

WEEK TWO

COMPROMISE

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him."

Luke 23:13-16 ESV

Read Spotlight Passage: Luke 23:3-4, 22-25

In Luke's Gospel, Pilate "finds no basis for charge" against Jesus, but the shouts of the crowd prevailed. Look at the power of the crowd loud, insistent, demanding, ultimately convincing Pilate to "grant their demand" even against his conviction that Jesus was innocent.

"Therefore I will have him punished and then release him," Pilate says, seeking compromise. If Jesus was truly innocent as Pilate concluded, there should be no reason for him to endure an awful scourging. But Pilate hoped this would be enough to quell the unrest.

Compromise is not always a negative response. Sometimes it is a helpful tool for generating agreement or understanding. But here, compromise caused Pilate to waver and ultimately act against what he believed to be true

If we examine our life, we likely will find many ways that we compromise our own belief as well. Perhaps we compromise by offering just as much of ourselves and our time in order to satisfy the spiritual guilt we feel. Perhaps we attend church or pray only out of a sense of obligation. If so, we are no better than Pilate, declaring Jesus innocent while sending him to the stocks.

If you truly believe that Christ is the Son of God, there is no room for compromise. He is either all or he is nothing. The gospel leaves us no middle ground.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Ask for the Lord to renew a steadfastness in your convictions, being confident to act in the way that is right even when it is hard - especially when it is hard. Confess times you have sought to appease others when doing so is in contrast to Jesus' character.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Psalm 51:10 NIV

God, I confess my heart is not pure. My desire for approval and comfort impact my decisions and actions. I ask for your steadfast Spirit to guide my steps. Help me, Lord.



"If you truly believe that Christ is the Son of God, there is no room for compromise."

COMPROMISE WEEK TWO DAY TWO

"What voices are you listening to? Are they motivated by selfinterest?"

Read Spotlight Passage: Mark 15:9-11

In Mark's Gospel, we learn that Pilate had knowledge of the chief priest's motive: self-interest. Self-interest becomes another voice that prevails in the narrative and drives Pilate toward compromise.

The very first sin in the Garden of Eden was driven by the voice of self-interest as well. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" the serpent asks Eve (Genesis 3:1).

When Eve relates what God had instructed to the serpent, he responds, "You will not certainly die. For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5).

This offer proves too compelling for Eve to resist- being like God, knowing good and evil. She, like Pilate, allowed the voice of others to create in her a void- a void that could temporarily be filled by her own self-interest and to her own benefit.

What voices are you listening to? Are they motivated by self-interest? Lent is a time to repent from our sin and consecrate, or set apart, ourselves to God. It is vital that we recognize the limitations of our flesh, to anticipate and confess our self-interests, and to let the humility of Christ be our source and guide (Philippians 2:3-5).

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Ask God to reveal areas where self-interest is a motivation. Confess times that you have allowed self-interest to lead you to compromise. Ask the Lord to help you live in humility.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." Isaiah 40:30-31a NIV

God, I confess that my flesh and my heart fail. I pray that you would be the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Read Spotlight Passages: John 18:37, John 1:10-11, James 1:2-7

John's Gospel provides more of Jesus's dialogue with Pilate than any of the other parallel accounts. Jesus is on trial. Pilate is trying to determine what to do with him. The situation is quickly escalating.

This is not the first "trial" we have seen Jesus walk through. The Gospels are full of the challenges and difficulties Jesus faced: poverty, natural disasters, disease, chronic illness, mental health, injustice, death. Through each, Jesus was measured and full of grace. Here, on trial before Pilate, he is no different.

Pilate, on the other hand, is almost erratic, oscillating between conclusions like a wave of the sea tossed by the wind of public opinion and his own fears as he seeks compromise.

How would you describe your character under trial? Are you measured? Steadfast and persevering, not losing sight of God and his sovereignty and character?

Even in the anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus surrendered to the Father's will (Luke 22:42). When we are facing difficulties or uncertainty, we would do well to remember the grace of Christ, measuring our words and seeking always to be aware of his presence with us.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. What trial are you facing right now? Ask Jesus to help you, knowing he has gone before you. Whatever the trial, be reminded that Jesus conquered death. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:38-39). Rest in Jesus' proximity to suffering and believe he is Immanuel, God with us.

Candlelight Prayer: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2 NIV

God, help me to fix my eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.



"When we are facing difficulties or uncertainty, we would do well to remember the grace of Christ."

Read Spotlight Passage: Daniel 6:4-5, 10

The book of Daniel provides remarkable examples of not compromising on our convictions, even in the face of fear and social pressure. Daniel, like Pilate, was in a position of authority; he could have compromised to maintain his power. And like Pilate, who likely faced death if the riot continued, Daniel would be thrown to the lions for not conforming.

Earlier in the book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego also faced death if they refused to follow the order of worshiping a false god. But rather than compromise, they held fast to their faith, telling King Nebuchadnezzar, "We do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

When fear is a factor, especially when it threatens our well-being or the well-being of others, it is often tempting to compromise. But in Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we find excellent models of steadfast faith. They called to mind the faithfulness of God and held fast to their conviction that he is forever worthy, even if.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Confess times that fear has driven a response from you rather than a conviction or belief. Ask for the Lord to strengthen you and help you.

Candlelight Prayer:

"They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord." Psalm 112:7 NIV

God, even when the fear of bad news is present, help my heart to be steadfast, trusting in you.



"They called to mind the faithfulness of God and held fast to their conviction that he is forever worthy, even if."

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

WEEK TWO DAY FIVE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: 1 Peter 5:8-11

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:8-11 NIV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading



Intermission

Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.'"

Matthew 27:19 ESV

Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" *John 18:38a ESV*

WEEK THREE DAY ONE

Read Spotlight Passage: Matthew 27:17-19

In the last two weeks, we've explored how often we shift responsibility and/or compromise to avoid making decisions or coming down on one side of an argument. But what do we do when that isn't an option?

Given the choice of releasing Jesus, with whom no one could find guilt, or Barabbas, a well-known criminal, the crowd asks for Barabbas's release. Pilate is aware that this is for their own self-interest.

But Pilate's wife sends him a message. Think about that for a moment. We don't know whether she often spoke into his leadership, but it stands to reason that she felt strongly about what she was sharing. In a dream, she had suffered much because of this righteous man. She had nothing to gain by telling him this, other than the conviction that she felt to uphold the truth.

Although this message from his wife causes Pilate to pause, the roar of the crowd prevails. He releases Barabbas.

How often is it easier for us to follow the crowd rather than listen to the one voice of wisdom pushing us in the opposite direction? As you walk through this week, pay attention to those speaking godly wisdom into your life.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Consider the times that you have preferred to take the easy way out. Do you surround yourself with wise and godly people, and seek their input when decisions need to be made? If not, pray that the Lord would fill your life with strong counsel and good friends. Pray for the courage to choose the right path even when it is difficult to do so.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'" 1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV

Father, let the advice that I follow keep in line with the good morals of Jesus. When bad company is louder than godly wisdom, may your Spirit guide me so that I'm not deceived. Amen.

"How often is it easier for us to follow the crowd rather than listen to the one voice of wisdom pushing us in the opposite direction?"

Read Spotlight Passages: Matthew 27:24-26, 1 John 2:6, 1 Corinthians 11:1

As the confrontation escalated and a riot began to form, Pilate washed his hands of the entire situation. When I read Matthew 27, I see myself. Sometimes it is easier for me to emotionally separate from a difficult situation than see it through to the end.

The physical act of washing his hands shows us that he did not want the blame for what was about to happen. Have you ever washed your hands of something because it was easier than persevering?

Times of crisis are crucibles for our faith. Consider an olive. When it is pressed and crushed, the olive is destroyed, but what comes from it is a beautiful oil. It yields something good. Consider Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony before his crucifixion. The very name Gethsemane means "oil press." That night, Jesus, under the immense pressure of the cross, surrendered to the will of his Father, and claimed victory over sin through his death and resurrection.

But when Pilate was under pressure, he crumbled, sending Jesus to be crucified even though he could find no guilt in him.

As Christians, we should regularly be asking ourselves if our actions make us look *more* or *less* like Jesus. By doing so, we will be better prepared to persevere in our own times of crisis.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. How are you under pressure? Pray for the Spirit to illuminate areas of weakness in your character, and for the strength, wisdom, and good counsel to prepare ourselves for times of trial and difficulty.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 NIV

God, as I walk through trials, may I persevere. As times are challenging, may I persevere. When I feel like giving up and washing my hands of a situation, let me persevere. I know you will never leave me or forsake me, and I can find the strength to persevere through you. Amen.

WEEK THREE DAY TWO

> "We should regularly be asking ourselves if our actions make us look *more* or *less* like Jesus."

Read Spotlight Passages: John 18:38a, Hebrews 4:12

How do you decide what is true and right? What measure do you $WEEK\ THREE$ use to discern solutions to the big situations (or the small ones!) in vour life?

INTERMISSION DAY THREE

As Pilate questions Jesus, trying to determine if there is any guilt in him, Jesus explains that his kingdom is "not of this world." Jesus explains to Pilate that, "everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." To that, Pilate asks Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:36-38).

The sheep know the voice of their shepherd. We, too, should recognize the voice of our Good Shepherd, Jesus. But how do we do that?

Throughout the Bible, we see men and women who endured great trials by recalling the goodness and faithfulness of God in the midst of their troubles. Therefore, we know the voice of Jesus by being in God's Word and meditating on it, learning the character of Christ, and becoming familiar with the stories of God's faithfulness. When challenges do come, we then have a storehouse of his promises from which to draw our strength.

Familiarizing ourselves with God's Word equips us for life here on earth.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Pray that your time in the Word is fruitful, both for knowledge of God and for relationship with God. Pray this week for an opportunity to encourage someone in their faith.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 NIV

Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. Thank you for bridging the gap between God and me. Father, thank you for your Word that provides guidance for my life. Amen.

"Familiarizing ourselves with God's Word equips us for life here on earth."

WEEK THREE DAY FOUR

"Who are the spiritual leaders in your life?"

Read Spotlight Passages: John 18:38b-40, Proverbs 15:22, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Are you a shotgun decision maker or do you take time before making decisions? If you take time, what does the process for determining your next step look like?

1 Corinthians tells us to do everything in love. Proverbs 15 tells us there is safety in the multitude of counselors. Pilate's decision-making process is not only void of love, it is also void of counsel. Pastor Justin Kendrick once shared four filters through which to run decisions before coming to a conclusion:

- 1. The Doctrine Test Does what I'm about to do align with God's Word? (See yesterday's devotional for the importance of being in God's Word.)
- 2. The Disciple Test Does what I'm about to do make me look more like Jesus? (See Tuesday's devotional for the importance of looking more like Jesus.)
- 3. The DNA Test Does what I'm about to do align with who God made me to be?
- 4. The Discernment Test Have I talked this through with the Lord? What do my spiritual leaders advise I do?

Do you bring your issues to God? Who are the spiritual leaders in your life? By seeking wise counsel and by seeking the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, our decisions will conform more and more to the will of Christ, and we will conform more and more to Christ's image. There is no higher calling.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Whether you make quick decisions or tend to deliberate on them for some time, pray that all your decisions would be done in love. If big decisions need to be made, consider people in your life whose discernment you trust and seek their input.

Candlelight Prayer:

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope." Psalm 130:5 ESV

Father, I confess that I'm often eager to solve a problem rather than wait on your timing and counsel. I confess I often make decisions without talking them through with people I trust to lead me with godly wisdom. I pray that your Spirit would prompt me to engage you in my times of discernment, and that I'd be faithful to follow your leading. Amen.

1. Readv

1. Ready
Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual WEEK THREE reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with DAY FIVE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Psalm 121

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip he who watches over you will not slumber: indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day. nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Psalm 121 NIV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading



And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" *John 19:2-5 ESV*

MOCKERY WEEK FOUR DAY ONE

"Mockery is a devious weapon."

Read Spotlight Passage: John 19:2-5

As a believer, reading this passage is painful. I have felt the sting of mockery in my life as I'm sure many have, but never to this degree. This is our Savior. This is our God - the one that knows each hair on our head. And here he is, mocked for being exactly who he said he was.

Mockery is a devious weapon. It is a blade that cuts both the victim and the attacker, and yet it's still so common in our day-to-day lives. Why? Why are people still mocked if it doesn't help anyone involved?

It's because of our flesh, and the jealousy and anger that flow from our sinful nature. And with this jealousy comes a desire for vengeance, humiliation, and mockery, all in an attempt to strip someone of the power they hold.

Pilate attempted to remove the power that Jesus held for the sake of appeasing the crowd. But the crowd wasn't satisfied.

Even today, Jesus is still the object of ridicule. For many in the world, his name is both a punchline and a vulgarity. But the purpose of this ridicule is the same as it was on the threshold of Pilate's doorstep - people looking to remove the power that God has so richly afforded Jesus. Their sword of mockery has no power against him and his holy name.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Consider ways that you mock God or others. Identify the insecurities within you that lead you to do this. Pray for the Spirit to sanctify your speech, that it would be "good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

Candlelight Prayer:

"Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."
Psalm 139:7-8 NIV

Father, thank you for being with me even in times where I may have felt lost or abandoned. You are always in pursuit of me. Thank you for loving me so much that you gave your only Son.

As humans, we often choose to mock ideas or abilities that surpass our understanding. Take this passage in Acts, for example. As the people believed, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and were given the gift of speaking in other languages. This miracle must have been astonishing to witness, and indeed it was, because Luke tells us that all were "amazed and perplexed" (Acts 2:12).

But while some asked "What does this mean?," others mocked and said, "They have had too much wine" (Acts 2:12-13).

When we are faced with something we cannot understand, we may feel drawn to make light of it. If we can laugh at it, we have the upper hand, or at least, it feels like we do. But in an age where nearly nothing goes unexplained or undocumented, we may lose sight of one of God's greatest gifts to our human experience: the feeling of awe and wonder.

When it comes to the magnificence of God, often the best thing we can do is to simply accept that we don't know, and can't know, everything. Only then, in our humility, can we rest, knowing that behind what we can't understand is a God who we can trust. A God who redeemed us to himself through the cross. *That* should leave us all in awe.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. This week, enjoy the pure beauty of his creation and let it lead you into worship. Reflect on the beauty in both knowing and not knowing.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright." Proverbs 14:9 NIV

God, stir a movement in my heart so that when I am faced with things I can't understand, I simply lay down my questions and turn to you.

WEEK FOUR DAY TWO

"When we are faced with something we cannot understand, we may feel drawn to make light of it."

MOCKERY

WEEK FOUR DAY THREE

"When we face mockery or humiliation, recall the meekness of Nehemiah and Jesus."

Read Spotlight Passage: Nehemiah 4:1-5

Nehemiah's restraint in this moment is remarkable. Sanballat and the other officials mocked his work rebuilding the wall and sought to intimidate the builders who were working tirelessly to complete it. This project was deeply personal to Nehemiah. So often when we are humiliated, especially in front of our peers, we may become angry or try to "save face."

But that isn't at all what Nehemiah does. Instead, he goes to the Lord with his issues. He pleads for God to see what they've done to his children and asks for righteousness and justice to prevail.

Humiliation cuts at our very identity. The pain it inflicts has been shown to be as real as physical assault. Both Nehemiah in this moment and the Lord Jesus standing before Pilate were likely in great agony. But as Paul would write in his letter to the Romans, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Romans 12:19).

When we face mockery or humiliation, recall the meekness of Nehemiah and Jesus. Take courage in Jesus's words when he says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45a).

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Reflect and appreciate the timing that God has set for your life. Think about situations in which God might be wanting you to grow in patience. Ask God to teach you through these trials.

Candlelight Prayer:

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9 NIV

Father, I thank you for your timing. May the path you have planned for me lead me into deeper fellowship with you.

Even in the final days, God is mocked.

This passage contains both a warning and a charge. Mockery will remain until the final days, and we are reminded to remain steadfast until those days come.

Look how effective mockery is. Their arguments are tempting, enticing us to use our experiences to turn us away from our faith. This language and this rhetoric is a sword that has been swung since the day of Jesus' trial—and long before—and will continue to be swung until the earth's final days.

We can combat these fiery arrows by putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6), both to bring light to mockery and to avoid becoming the mockers ourselves.

But as much as this passage is a warning, it is also comforting. We are reminded of so much that God has done for us. I'm reminded of just how much God has done for me. He loved me so much that he gave his only Son so that I might be saved. Wherever you are in your journey, remember God's great love for you.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Be comforted in the inheritance we have in his kingdom. Ask God to convict you of the sin in your life so that you may glorify his kingdom. Ask him to help you remain steadfast in the knowledge of his love.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Ephesians 6:10-11 NIV

Father, thank you for the promises that you have given us and for your mighty power. May I find comfort in the inheritance that we have in your kingdom.

WEEK FOUR DAY FOUR

"Mockery
will remain
until the
final days,
and we are
reminded
to remain
steadfast
until those
days come."

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

MOCKERY WEEK FOUR DAY FIVE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Ephesians 4:29-32

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:29-32 NIV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading



When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" John 19:8-10 ESV

PRIDE

WEEK FIVE DAY ONE

"You would have no power if it were not given to you from God."

Read Spotlight Passage: John 19:8-10

I have a young, strong-willed child. Sometimes after I've asked her a question or given an instruction, she refuses to respond. Her silence bruises my pride and baits me for a power struggle. In my frustration, I respond, "Don't you realize I am your mother, the one with authority over you?"

In John 19, Pilate heard that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Fearful, he asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" Jesus was silent. This was not a power-play; Christ had no need to defend himself. Pilate's bruised pride swelled into a struggle for power: "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

In his pride, Pilate lacked perspective on the true origin of power. "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above," Jesus said (John 19:11a).

Often our attitudes towards God and other people pulse with pride. We say (with or without words), "Don't you realize I have the power?" If you find yourself puffed up like Pilate, recall this reality: you would have no power if it were not given to you from God. Perhaps we need to regularly remind ourselves, "Don't you realize Jesus is the one with the power?" and resubmit ourselves to him as our Lord and King.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Reflect on where God has given you authority and power. Are you stewarding your authority with humility? Are you grasping for power, desperate for recognition? Pray about whatever the Holy Spirit brings to mind, and submit yourself again today to King Jesus and his lordship over your life.

Candlelight Prayer:

"I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." Psalm 16:2 NIV

Jesus, you are my Lord and all authority and power is yours. Keep me from pride in my places of power as I submit to your lordship today. Amen. Imagine yourself as a dinner guest at Simon the Pharisee's house. Let the evening unfold in your imagination despite the cultural hurdles. Be honest about what your reaction would have been to witness this interaction between Simon, Jesus, and the "woman who had lived a sinful life."

Whom in the story do you identify with? Whom would you have talked with afterwards, saying "Did you see that? Can you believe what just happened?" Perhaps, if you're honest, you'd answer like I do: Simon.

As a Pharisee, Simon was a respected community leader. He fostered his reputation like us all: through education, connections, religious acts, good works, and respectable behavior. In this scene, Jesus, Simon, and the woman *all* had an accurate view of her sin. However, instead of extending grace to a fellow sinner, Simon placed himself in the position of judge, full of pride, lacking love.

If we identify more with the Judge than with other sinners, we have forgotten God's grace and fallen into pride. Simon invited Jesus into his home. The woman invited Jesus into her heart, and he changed her life.

Jesus is the only one who can change our lives and forgive our many sins. So, what do we do with Jesus? Let's approach him humbly and love him lavishly.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Jesus said, "her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). Reflect on your sins and spend time in repentance. Express your love and gratitude to Jesus. Ask him to grow love and humility in your heart.

Candlelight Prayer:

"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" James 4:12 NIV

Lord, I confess I lose sight of my own sin and judge others so often. You are the only Judge. Give me a clear view of my own sin and your great grace. May I love you lavishly for I have been forgiven much.

WEEK FIVE DAY TWO

"So, what do we do with Jesus? Let's approach him humbly and love him lavishly."

PRIDE

WEEK FIVE DAY THREE

"When we're pressured, seek his heart, not just his blessing."

Read Spotlight Passage: 1 Samuel 13:7b-14

When we're pressured, especially when people are counting on us or our reputation or safety is involved, we switch into control mode. Our brain panel processes options and emotions, tracks time running out, deploys problem solving skills, and seeks past experience to select a path forward. Our spirit often lights up too, seeking wisdom, blessing, or guidance from God in prayer.

King Saul was under pressure. The situation was critical, his army was hard pressed, and the soldiers were scattering (1 Samuel 13:6-7). The weight of responsibility on the new king was crushing. He had been instructed to wait seven days for the prophet Samuel, who would offer sacrifices to the Lord and tell Saul what to do next (1 Samuel 10:8). However, when Samuel seemed delayed, Saul took matters into his own hands.

Saul recognized his need to seek God's favor. However, rather than obey God's command to wait, which would have shown faith, he disobeyed, offered the sacrifice, and seized control. He sought God's blessing rather than God's heart. This disobedience, this desire for control, cost Saul the kingdom. When we seek control and utter perfunctory prayers for God's blessing on our own plans, we dethrone the Lord in our hearts. Pressure often reveals our pride.

If you find yourself shifting into control mode, pause, surrender your plans and wait on the Lord. Seek his heart, not just his blessing.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Ask the Lord to show you what situations you are currently trying to control. Do you seek God's blessing on your plans more than you seek God's heart and relationship with him? Confess your pride. Ask God to meet you as you wait on him.

Candlelight Prayer:

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Psalm 37:7 ESV

Lord, I'm the one fretting and planning, but you're the one in control. I turn my heart to seek you today instead of seeking control of my life. Humble me and help me wait patiently for you.

PRIDE

WEEK FIVE DAY FOUR

"'Woe is me!' must come before 'Here I am. Send me!'"

Read Spotlight Passage: Isaiah 6:1-8

Think back to a time when you were starting a new job or volunteer position and felt inadequate for what God had called you to do. These moments push us to pray, Lord, there's no way I can do this without your help. However, as time passes, our confidence grows and pride may begin to take root. I'm pretty good at this. I'm needed. Look at all the good fruit I've accomplished.

When Isaiah saw the Lord seated on his throne, he had already been established as a prophet. Perhaps God saw pride creeping like poison ivy in Isaiah's heart. While Scripture doesn't describe Isaiah's pride, it does record the moment of his humbling: "Woe is me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips..." (Isaiah 6:5). A glimpse of God's glory gave Isaiah an accurate perspective. His lips, the very tools of his calling and work, were unclean! He needed the Lord's cleansing and help.

After the humbling, after God's cleansing, Isaiah was ready to continue in his calling. If you have become self-confident in your calling and pride has taken root, ask God to show you his glory and an accurate glimpse of your own helplessness. "Woe is me!" must come before "Here I am. Send me!"

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Consider reading the other accounts of God's throne room in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7 and Revelation 4-5. If you struggle with pride (we all do!), ask God to take you back to "Woe is me!" so you are ready to say, "Here I am, send me."

Candlelight Prayer:

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." Romans 12:3 NIV

O God, open my eyes to glimpse your glory and simultaneously my own desperate dependence on you. Let me not be self-confident. Increase my faith and confidence in you to equip me for what you've called me to do.

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

WEEK FIVE DAY FIVE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Psalm 130

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.
I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Psalm 130 NIV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading



From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." ... Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. *John 19:12, 15b-16 ESV*

FEAR

WEEK SIX Day One

"Courage begins, not by what we do, but rather, how we choose to see."

Read Spotlight Passage: John 19:12, 15-16

Throughout Scripture, we are continually reminded not to fear. Though our lives may not be immediately threatened by our decision about Jesus, we may fear losing the approval of those we love.

Or perhaps, like me, you may fear the cost of truly following Jesus when he says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23b-24).

How, then, do we begin to have the courage to move through the fears of following Christ in full surrender, no matter the cost?

In Psalm 27:4, David writes, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."

From this prayer to gaze upon his beauty, we begin to see the fruits of courage, as he writes, "The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be a fraid?" (Psalm 27:1b).

Courage begins, not by what we do, but rather, how we choose to see.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. In quiet reflection, let the Spirit reveal an area of fear that has control in your life. Pray for the sight that David asked of the Lord, to see your fear in light of his marvelous glory and to find rest in the strength of his presence.

Candlelight Prayer:

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed." Psalm 34:4-5 ESV

Father, I see in myself a willingness to make decisions based upon my fear more than abiding in your presence. I pray for your Spirit to lead me in awareness of these moments that I might have a proper perspective over what is truly important. The disciples wondered if they would be the one to betray Jesus while also arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest. Only hours later, they fled in terror from his side during his arrest.

If you have placed your faith in Christ and have received eternal life, then all of heaven rejoiced with you in your redemption. But if what propels you to continue following Christ comes from an unhealthy motivation, then your *fellowship* with him is in danger. Is it a family expectation? Fear of eternal death? Fear of losing God's favor?

While we don't know the motive that drove each disciple to follow Jesus, we can see that a wrong motive ultimately collapses in the face of fear, like a house built on sand.

But what is the right motive to follow Jesus? The right motive has nothing to do with you, and everything to do with Christ. The right motive is a position of the heart that says, like John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). It is not a goal we achieve, nor an option we choose. It is a willingness of the soul to be searched and known, and searched again (Psalm 139:23-24).

The right motive in following Jesus emanates from a humble spirit that sees itself properly small before the immeasurable magnitude of God.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Is your desire to follow Jesus lukewarm? Confess to him that your flesh is weak. Ask God to help you continually pursue him and maintain your fellowship with him.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." John 14:27 ESV

God, you give to me a peace which I cannot understand, that breaks through my deepest fears. Lord, meet me today in my troubled heart, that I may know you are near.

WEEK SIX DAY TWO

"The right motive in following Christ is a willingness of the soul to be searched and known, and searched again."

FEAR

WEEK SIX Day Three

"Our worth does not rest on the opinions of others."

Read Spotlight Passage: Judges 6:25-27, 29-32

Gideon has been given a tremendously difficult task: tear down his father's treasured grove and build in its place an altar for the Lord. Despite his family's poverty, this small, sacred cluster of trees was likely a source of great pride.

Every single one of us has at least one grove, one idol, that we run to. To spiritualize this concept for a moment, a grove would be anything that gives you a sense of significance apart from God. Perhaps it's your career, a talent, your intellect, or a personal possession. Our worldview and our sense of self is heavily influenced by this grove. Sometimes we even worship from within it (Luke 18:11-12).

It is no wonder that Gideon is fearful. God is asking him to remove perhaps his only sense of worth, and further, that of his family's. But unlike Pilate, Gideon presses forward through fear. What propels someone forward even in the face of great loss?

It is understanding that our worth does not rest on the opinions of others. The affirmation of your spirit and your drive and your strength lies not in man's opinion of you, whether good, bad, or indifferent, or in what we possess, but entirely in what God thinks of you.

And this is good, because he thinks the world of you.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Seek to fill today with an atmosphere of prayer, an awareness of God's presence with you, even if you aren't saying a word. Be enraptured in the knowledge that he knows everything about you, and longs to commune with you.

Candlelight Prayer:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Matthew 10:29-31 ESV

Father, you are here with me. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14).

FEAR

WEEK SIX Day Four

What sends an innocent man to his death?

The fear of facing my own.

Before we condemn Pilate for cowing to fear, we must confront Jesus's call to love others as he has loved us—a willingness to lay down our life for another.

The thought of losing a future of memories with my wife and kids is too much for me to bear, but God's standard of love is just that, to love others more than my own life. Anything less falls short of the glory of God.

And for this reason, Jesus died. Because I cannot measure up. Because I treasure the kingdom of this world more than the kingdom that he promises.

What shall I do then with Jesus? I must do what I am able to do. That is,

To understand how he sees me, because he loved me enough to give his life that I might live.

To watch him carry the cross to the hill of Calvary to die for me, because the cross was too heavy for me.

And finally this, to love and follow him as he has asked of me, because he is worthy.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence. Today, reflect on the gift of the cross. Despite all of our attempts at righteousness, we fall short of God's immeasurable glory. But Christ died for us so that we might "have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Rejoice! He has loved us "to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

Candlelight Prayer:

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." Romans 3:23-24 ESV

By faith, I come to you Lord. I thank you for the gift of salvation that Christ purchased on the cross for me, and sealed by his resurrection. It is too wonderful for me to comprehend. May my life look more and more like Christ's every day. May I bring you honor and glory in everything I do.

"What sends an innocent man to his death?

The fear of facing my own."

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

WEEK SIX DAY FIVE

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Psalm 27:1-5

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible. Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.
Psalm 27:1-5 ESV

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Spiritual Reading