

Introduction To This Guide

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Where Do I Begin?

Begin each day with the Prayer of Illumination to help, prepare your heart to hear God's word for you. Read "to be formed and transformed rather than to gather information...Read with a vulnerable heart. Expect to be blessed...Read as one awake, one waiting for the beloved. Read with reverence."*

Let us Pray a *Prayer of Illumination*:

All-Seeing One, above me, around me, within me —

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Look down upon me, look out from within me, look all around me.

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God of Wisdom, touch me where I need to be touched;

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down this Holy Book and ask significant questions:

Why has my heart been touched by you?

How am I to be changed through your touch?

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Then I can meet You face to face...when I shall be healed forever.

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Adapted from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr [As quoted in *A Guide To Prayer For All God's People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room]

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT – Day 5

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Luke 4:1-4

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

HOW DOES JESUS DO IT?

Frank G. Honeycutt^{ff}, author of *Marry a Pregnant Virgin*, asks that question as he ponders this foray of Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days where *he ate nothing at all during those days!*

While reflecting on this formative event that happens at the beginning of Jesus ministry, right after his baptism, Honeycutt recalls a childhood memory where at every family event there would be the same stories told so that those stories became the very fabric of *his* story too. He likens that to the church, where every week we gather and share these stories of the Bible: from Noah and Moses to the sons of Jacob, we hear about the law and the prophets, the promises and the prophecies, and we hear these stories about Jesus year after year. And somehow these stories, they sustain us, year after year.

The answer to how Jesus was able to do it, how Jesus was able to not only *resist* the temptations that the devil set before him but to really put the devil in his place, is that Jesus *knew* the law and the prophets! All of his life he had been brought up with the stories of his people; their struggles and their blessings, their slavery and their deliverance, their trials and their tribulations.

These stories that so molded his very being armed Jesus with a faith in God so unshakable that he could even stand before the devil - lips split and gums bleeding from lack of food and water, skin burnt and cracked from exposure to the elements, cheeks sunken into his skull and every bone in his body visible through a thin layer of skin - he could stand before the devil and say with conviction in his heart and mind, "One does not live by bread alone...Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him...Do not put the Lord your God to the test!" (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). And

Jesus returned to the Galilee full of the power of the Holy Spirit! (Luke 4:14)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, prepare me to live in this world through trust in your holy word. Strengthen me to resist temptation. Embolden me to speak your truth when lies are all around me. But most importantly: *Search me, O Lord and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* (Psalm 139:23-24) Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

How does my relationship with God help me to overcome the temptations of the world?

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Lent 2022 – Day 5

A Guide for Devotion and Prayer



Because of Your Love I Am Free!, Drawing, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

**FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT
THE IMITATION OF CHRIST**



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MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT – Day 6

TURNING TOWARD OUR NEIGHBORS

Matthew 25:31-40

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?...a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?...[or] sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

FALLING MADLY IN LOVE WITH GOD

This text is as clear as any in scripture in its description of what Jesus requires of us. One of my favorite monks: Carlo Carretto, in his book, *Why Me Lord^{ff}*, says that in order for him "to be happy on earth [he] must fall madly in love with God...Then...in time of suffering the easiest way to ally the suffering...is to get out of myself - yes, get out of myself; visit someone who is suffering worse than I am, do something to remind me of the sufferings of the world, set my heart in order if I feel a residual dislike of someone...answer a tiresome letter from someone who wants me to tell him whether hell exists, or what he should not do to leave his nasty possessive wife. In other words, perform an act of love that requires patience and honesty."

The frankness with which Carretto speaks is so sincere, there is no mistaking his misgivings at his own weakness in suffering. And in his faithfulness to the God, to whom he has pledged his life, he does what he knows God expects and requires and does not give in to his own desires. As disciples of the Christ, we have to do what is required of us, not just

what we feel like doing at the time. The Prophet Micah answers the ultimate question: *I have told you, O Mortal, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:8)

PRAYER

Loving and merciful God, help me to see when my actions are not the ones you would have of me. Help me not to take my blessings from you for granted. Forgive me Lord, for the error of my ways and increase my faithfulness to you. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

What was my last act of charity? Why did I do it?*(p. 13)

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Lent 2022 – Day 6

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Because of Your Love I Am Free!, Drawing, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

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TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK – Day 7

TURN FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD

Psalm 34:11-15

Come, O children, listen to me;

I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Which of you desires life,

and covets many days to enjoy good?

Keep your tongue from evil,

and your lips from speaking deceit.

Depart from evil, and do good;

seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,

and his ears are open to their cry.

WANTON LOVE

The Psalms provide daily prompting for the Christian searching to have revealed his/her own offense toward God. As the wayward son who squandered his inheritance before his father even lie on his death bed, we may all cry, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son [or daughter]." (Luke 15:21) The Psalms put into words timeless circumstances, human emotions, and actions that are as true today as they were 2500 years ago.

The Psalmist's cry for the children to listen is one all loving parents implore: 'Listen my children, love what is good, *seek peace and pursue it*, enjoy life and keep from doing what is wrong. It may not seem so important to you now but later on you will see the wisdom of my words, you will reap the fruits of doing good.' *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.*

Let our hearts not be deceived, God sees the actions of *all* of us. But here is what makes the difference, when we seek God's face, when we grow in our relationship to our Lord, then all we want to do is please him. And when we fail, which we all do, we realize our suffering is because of *our own* sinful ways. And then we return to the Father, in fear yes, but with the full assurance that the Father's love will far exceed any punishment we may receive. As in the case of the wayward son, the Father is already planning a feast to celebrate the son's return, barely even listening

to the son's heartfelt confession. Such is the love of God for us. Perhaps our own *fear of the Lord* is that we become so united in the Father's love, when we err we fear breaking his heart, and, as a consequence, our own may be broken as well.

PRAYER

Loving and gracious Father, keep my lips from speaking lies. Help me *do good and seek peace*, inform me of the error of my ways. Keep your eyes and ears *open to my cry* for mercy, enable me to listen well to your teaching, and let me know the fear of you for my own good, and to your glory. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Recall a time when you knew you deserved punishment but received mercy instead?

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Lent 2022 – Day 7

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WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK - Day 8

UNCOVERING OUR INNER LIGHT

Luke 11:33-36

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar, but on the lamp stand so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.

TRUTH AND LIGHT

As Christians it often appears that we are straddling two different worlds: the world of light, which Christ Jesus promoted; and the world of darkness, where evil dwells. The problem is in the grey area, where the stumbling blocks are. Most of us know pure evil when we see it, but *good* seems to be more relative. Where is the light of Christ when we must deny ourselves so that others may have a fair measure? Our life in *the world* influences how we see in the light. If the situations we face in life cause us to continually be in the darkness of pain and despair, a bright *flash* may blind us to the true light of Christ, which is always love.

When our own power or way of life is threatened, we may discern the true test of our faith in God. James C. Fenhagen, in his book *Mutual Ministry*,^t says "to become a disciple means to see for oneself the values that energized the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We must struggle with them, until that moment when, by the grace of God, they become our own. We must be committed to building an ongoing and disciplined enrichment of our relationship to God. We must affirm human need and worth in the face of the harmful 'principalities and powers' that control our lives. We need to increase our desire to serve life out of love, not to gain power or reward. We must identification with the poor and the hungry and the oppressed. These are values that we can see in the life of Jesus."

When we consider this, may we always know the difference between a blinding flash, and the enduring light of Christ, which is de-

pendable, consistent, and always true. “The Law...was given through Moses, grace and *truth* came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)

PRAYER

Almighty God, you who created light to pierce the darkness, penetrate my heart with the warmth of your mercy, illumine my life with the radiance of your compassion, surround me with the light of your presence, and enfold me in your overflowing grace. Be with me, Lord, as I grow in your love and reflect your light for all to see. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

How does your life reflect the truth and inner light of Christ?

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Lent 2022 – Day 8

A Guide for Devotion and Prayer



Because of Your Love I Am Free!, Drawing, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

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THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK - Day 9

SEEK GOOD AND YOU SHALL FIND IT

Matthew 7:7-11

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

HARVESTING THE GOOD

Seeking and serving God "is more than simply doing good...it is something *Christ does* in us, through us, and with us."¹ In this season of Lent, we seek to deepen our relationship with Jesus as the Christ through confession and repentance. But confession and repentance are only part of what makes us whole in Christ.

Jesus says when you search you find. In that process of searching and finding there is an unspoken hope that your *actions will reflect* what you claim to have found. At that point you may ask God what it is that he wants from you. Jesus says you may be assured that when you ask it will be given. You may have to listen with patience, taking into consideration where God has placed you at this point in your life—a point where you are pausing to question God's call upon your life. Listen to the whispers of your heart. Consider your surroundings and what manner of situation has God placed you in his kingdom.

You know that God has great things in store for those who believe; and so dare to ask for your heart's desire! In your wildest dreams, if you could serve God in any way that you would choose, what would it be?

The Apostle Paul encourages us: "rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known

to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I pray for your glory to be revealed in me. I pray for discernment, dear Lord, that you may show me how I may serve you. Reveal your gifts in me, and help me to use them for your glory—for doing good in the world. Let me hear your call, and with a willing heart let me walk through the open door to serve you in love and faithfulness always. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

What is a “good gift” that God has given me to be used for God’s glory?

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Adapted from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr [As quoted in *A Guide To Prayer For All God's People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room]

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK - Day 10

TURNING AWAY FROM OUR SINS

Ezekiel 18:21-24

But if the wicked turn away from all their sins that they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live; they shall not die. None of the transgressions that they have committed shall be remembered against them; for the righteousness that they have done they shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the LORD GOD, and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live? But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things that the wicked do, shall they live? None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which they are guilty and the sin they have committed, they shall die.

THE GOAL IS LIBERATION

What is God's intention? What God wants is for God's people is to live life in freedom and joy. God wants them to live both in this life and in the life to come. And so the Divine poses this scenario to the Hebrew people: If you are wicked and you turn away from your sins you will live. But if you are good and then you become wicked I won't even remember any of the good things you did, and you will die. For the believers of Ezekiel's day, there is no defense if you were once righteous and then you fall from grace. In Ezekiel's world it was from God's word to Ezekiel's lips.

God's forgiveness given through Jesus the Christ changes everything. So how then are we to understand Ezekiel's words in the light of Christ—the one who answers the question "How many times must I forgive?" with this answer: "Not 7 but 70 times 7!" (Matthew 18:21)

If you have ever been forgiven you know, the goal is freedom! There is no greater feeling on earth than having your guilt lifted, but to know that you have to have experienced it! Once that merciful forgiveness happens, you never - NEVER - want to go back! And so I wonder about *the righteous people* who *turn* from their righteousness. Is this about whether someone is good or bad, or is it about *false piety* - about those who *pretend* to be righteous? Jesus railed at the Pharisees

and scribes who positions *assumed* their righteousness, and yet Jesus called them *white-washed tombs*. (Matthew 23:27) He *saw* their pretensions, and *loathed* their hypocrisy. Those who are truly righteous confess their iniquity, and rejoice in their freedom it brings!

PRAYER

Holy One of God, help me to turn away from my sins. Reveal to me your lovingkindness and your merciful forgiveness. Let me hear you call me Beloved. Turn me toward *your* righteousness, and give me the freedom of knowing and loving you, now and forever. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Name a time when you truly felt forgiven and free?

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Visit www.HopeForNiagara.org for more spiritual resources.

Lent 2022 – Day 10

A Guide for Devotion and Prayer



Because of Your Love I Am Free!, Drawing, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK TURNING AWAY FROM OUR SINS



This week’s devotional resource was written by Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow, President of the American Baptist Churches of New York State Board of Missions, and edited by Rev. Mark H. Breese of Community Missions. The content was created specifically keeping in mind the populations served by Community Missions.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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[†] James C. Fenhagen, *Mutual Ministry*, as quoted in *A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room, pgs. 89- Quote reworded for easier reading. Ibid. ^{††} pg.88.

^{†††}Walter Russell Bowie, *The Compassionate Christ*, Abington Press, 1965, pgs. 99-100.

^{††††}Thomas Merton, *Lent & Easter, Wisdom from Thomas Merton*, Linguori Publications, pg. 28.

Introduction To This Guide

These daily devotions are provided to encourage you to listen and reflect on how God is speaking to you during this Season of Lent. The question at the end of each day's contemplation is intended to foster further reflection and prayer throughout the day. In addition, space is provided for you to document your thoughts on how you hear God speaking to you at this time. May you be blessed and transformed through the Holy Spirit as you ponder God's word during this most holy of seasons. ++ *Provided by:* Community Missions Inc., 1570 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls, NY 14303, Phone: (716) 285-3403, www.communitymissions.org

Where Do I Begin?

Begin each day with the Prayer of Illumination to help, prepare your heart to hear God's word for you. Read "to be formed and transformed rather than to gather information...Read with a vulnerable heart. Expect to be blessed...Read as one awake, one waiting for the beloved. Read with reverence."ttt

Let us Pray a *Prayer of Illumination*:

All-Seeing One, above me, around me, within me —

guide my vision as I engage with your sacred words.

Look down upon me, look out from within me, look all around me.

See through my eyes, hear through my ears, feel through my heart.

God of Wisdom, touch me where I need to be touched;

and when my heart is touched, give me the grace to lay

down this Holy Book and ask significant questions:

Why has my heart been touched by you?

How am I to be changed through your touch?

All-Seeing One, I need to change, I need to look a little more like You.

May these sacred words change and transform me.

Then I can meet You face to face...when I shall be healed forever.

Your Word and the touch of your Spirit bring healing...

a healing that will last.

O Eye of God, look not away.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and put a new and right spirit within me. Amen.

Adapted from *A Tree Full of Angels* by Macrina Wiederkehr [As quoted in *A Guide To Prayer For All God's People*, Job & Shawchuck, The Upper Room]

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK - Day 11

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Matthew 5:43-48

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

LOVING AND LETTING GO

How hard is it for us to see that God made our enemies in his image, just like God made *us* in his image? Or to put it another way, how hard is it to see *Jesus* in the face of our enemy? And yet, that is what Jesus asks us to do. What if we begin by saying, "God loves me, God loves you, God even loves _____."
[you fill in the blank].

Jesus says, *pray for those who persecute you so that YOU may be children of your Father...* So, in order to be considered God's beloved children, WE must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. In order to be God's children we MUST pray for those who hate us, those who hurt us, those who seek to destroy us.

But let us *not* misunderstand. Jesus is NOT saying that you must continue to let someone persecute or abuse you! That is *not* what this passage is saying. Jesus says *pray* for them, and do not harbor resentment against them because in the end, harboring resentment against someone only hurts you—that would be like *you* taking poison hoping the *other* person will die!

Loving and praying for your enemies allows forgiveness to seep in. Praying for those who persecute you helps to make us realize and accept that they are *also* created in God's image. Although they are not *acting* as God wishes, the proper way to keep them from hurting you

further is to *love* them, *pray* for them, and ultimately to *forgive* them and let them go. That's not easy, but it is what God calls us to do.

Jesus states a fact: God sends rain on everyone - both the righteous and the unrighteous. And the sun rises on everyone - both the evil and the good. God does not discriminate - sun and rain fall on all creation. The difference comes in how we *respond* to the truth that sun and the rain falls on *all of us*. We are called to follow God's command to Love: love your God; love your neighbor; love your enemies. When we do this, God's grace will come to bear on *all* people, and his mercy will bless us *all*.

PRAYER

Give me, O Lord, the courage to love my enemies, and the strength to pray for them. Help me to see beyond my own understanding, and reveal to me your beloved child in them. Earnestly and fervently I pray. Amen

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Name one person who has hurt you and pray for that person.

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Lent 2022 – Day 11

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Because of Your Love I Am Free!, Drawing, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China

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