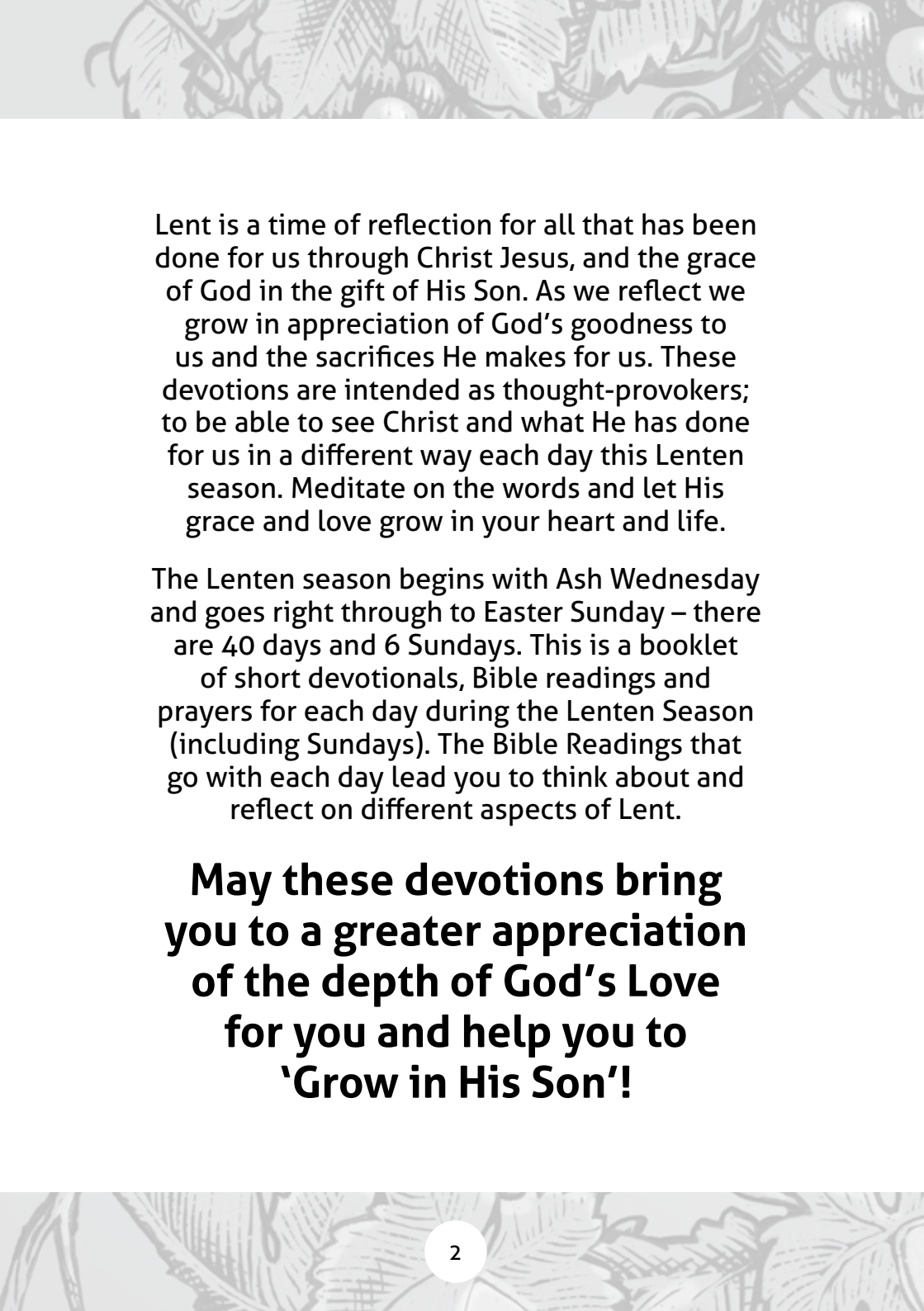


GROWING



IN THE SON

**LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL
BOOKLET**



Lent is a time of reflection for all that has been done for us through Christ Jesus, and the grace of God in the gift of His Son. As we reflect we grow in appreciation of God's goodness to us and the sacrifices He makes for us. These devotions are intended as thought-provokers; to be able to see Christ and what He has done for us in a different way each day this Lenten season. Meditate on the words and let His grace and love grow in your heart and life.

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday and goes right through to Easter Sunday – there are 40 days and 6 Sundays. This is a booklet of short devotionals, Bible readings and prayers for each day during the Lenten Season (including Sundays). The Bible Readings that go with each day lead you to think about and reflect on different aspects of Lent.

**May these devotions bring
you to a greater appreciation
of the depth of God's Love
for you and help you to
'Grow in His Son'!**

Contents

Christ, our Mediator (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).....	4	Forgive Me (Matthew 18:21-35).....	26
Our Joyful Journey (Philippians 4:1-13).....	5	Praying for You (John 17).....	27
Witnessing the Dawn (1 John 1:5-9)....	6	Conviction (1 Corinthians 15:12-23) ..	28
Belonging (Ephesians 1:3-14).....	7	Renewed (Psalm 103).....	29
Following the Son (Matthew 16:24-28).....	8	Love of God (1 John 4:7-19)	30
More to Follow (Romans 5:1-5, 18-21)	9	Dying to Sin (Romans 6).....	31
Wisdom of God (2 Timothy 3:14-17)... ..	10	By Grace (John 1:14-18).....	32
Death is Life (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)	11	Trusting Hearts (John 14:1-14).....	33
Our Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46).....	12	Suffering with Christ (Acts 5:33-42)... ..	34
Believe and Confess (Romans 10:8-13).....	13	Joy in the Sacrifice (Hebrews 12:1-11)	35
God's Broken Heart (2 Corinthians 5:14-21).....	14	Fluff or Stuff (Matthew 6:19-24)	36
Shine like the Sun (Psalm 37:1-9)	15	Agape Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) ...	37
Ransomed (1 Peter 1:18-21).....	16	Needing Everything (Matthew 5:1-12)	38
A Great Treasure (1 Peter 1:3-9).....	17	Crucify Him! (Matthew 27:32-66)	39
God's Commitment (John 12:23-28) ..	18	Real Happiness (John 16:21-33)	40
Have Comfort (Isaiah 40:1-8)	19	Human Standards (Matthew 20:20-28).....	41
Jesus is the Only Way (Matthew 7:21-29).....	20	Look Up! (Hebrews 12)	42
Amazing Love (John 3:1-21)	21	The King Comes (John 12:12-15).....	43
A Daring Adventure (Hebrews 2:1-18)	22	Remain (John 15:1-17)	44
Fullness of Joy (Luke 23:32-43).....	23	Conquerors (Romans 8:31-39)	45
Never Alone (John 16:29-33)	24	God's Will (John 6:35-40)	46
Blessedly Poor (2 Corinthians 8:1-12).....	25	Arrested and Disowned (Luke 22:47-62)	47
		Forsaken (Psalm 22:1-21)	48
		The Day After (Luke 23:44-56).....	49
		The Easter Marathon (John 20:1-31)... ..	50
		Prayer	51

Christ, our Mediator

Ash Wednesday

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

“For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all...”

1 Timothy 2:5 (NRSV)

In many situations in life we need a go-between. A federal mediator helps management and striking workers come to an agreement. A real estate agent brings the seller and the buyer together. There are three main types of mediation: Facilitative Mediation, Evaluative Mediation, and Transformative Mediation. Christ is our Transformative Mediator. He came to transform and change our lives.

The role of a go-between is especially important when people are on the 'outs'. Such was the case when the first human beings, Adam and Eve, fell into sin by disobeying God. They knew they had done wrong; their conscience accused them. Instead of welcoming the presence and friendship of God, they hid from Him. Their sin separated them from God – and so from this beginning God knew that He would need to provide and bring about reconciliation between us and God.

God sent His Son to be the mediator between us and Him. Jesus Christ became the go-between, the Reconciler, and through His death and resurrection we now have forgiveness and are the forgiven sons and daughters of God and heirs of salvation through our faith.

“We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life! But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God’s friends.”

Romans 5:10-11 (GNB)

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus to be the mediator for my sins. Help me to grow in faith to bring others to you. Amen.*

Our Joyful Journey

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Philippians 4:1-13

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

The expedition of Burke and Wills in 1860-61 was a success in what they set out to do. They were the first non-Indigenous people to cross from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria (approximately 3,250km). About 15,000 people came out to cheer the expedition on its daring, uncharted journey. Although they made the journey up to the Cape, the journey back was fraught with many obstacles, arguments, miscommunication and confusion which resulted in the deaths of Burke and Wills.

God has a goal of heaven for us, but that journey is also fraught with many difficulties. As John wrote in chapter 16:33b – *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* In this world we are given challenges, pain, sorrow, turmoil, uncertainty and, as Christ's followers, our faithfulness is challenged daily. Our joy comes in the certainty that through all of this we have the promise of eternal life. All our doubts can dissipate as we acknowledge the love and forgiveness God offers in the journey.

Once the wise men had seen the baby Jesus they went on their way rejoicing. The Ethiopian official, after being baptised by Paul, also went on his way rejoicing. Our joy comes at Easter with Christ overcoming death. So, we also can go on our way rejoicing knowing that Christ's victory is also ours and our lives can be journeys of joy.

Prayer: *My Lord Jesus, make my life one of joy as I grow and journey through my day-to-day life. Help me to be strong and faithful. Amen.*

Witnessing the Dawn

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: 1 John 1:5-9

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.” Ephesians 5:8 (NIV)

There once was a man named Henry. Henry’s schedule required him to work the midnight to 8.00am shift, alone, every week. One day, a friend asked Henry if it was a nuisance to work such a shift continuously. Henry agreed that he had to make adjustments and sometimes even sacrifices in his non-working hours. However, he added that at the end of each shift there was something that made all the sacrifices worthwhile. He got to witness the dawn and, as he said, “The sunrise is so beautiful”.

Our journey through our daily life can be somewhat like Henry’s night shift: having to make sacrifices, participate in things that we don’t necessarily like doing and working with people we don’t always get along with. Even within the church we also sometimes need to do things that are not always easy or pleasant to bring about growth in God’s people and strengthen the body of Christ. But, living as children of the Light, we know that even though we have to go through difficult times and even dark times, God’s goodness shines out through everything.

During the season of Lent we journey with Jesus through the hard times and through all the suffering He endured. We can live and grow with Him in this journey and, at the end on Easter Sunday, we can express with Henry, “The sunrise is so beautiful!”

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for creating such a beautiful dawn. Help me to continue to grow as your child and be a witness to your glory. Amen.



Belonging

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Ephesians 1:3-14

“He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Ephesians 1:5 (NRSV)

Watching the musical “Annie” the other night on TV brought to me yet again how important it is to belong and know to whom you belong. Annie was an orphan brought to an orphanage as a tiny baby and the only thing she had from her mother was a locket. She longed to know who she belonged to and why her parents left her. She needed to belong. When people came to the orphanage to choose a child to be adopted, she longed to be the ‘one’.

For us, this need has been filled and we know to whom we belong. God, through his Son Jesus, has named and claimed each one of us as His own. In our baptism we were sealed into the family of God and are heirs to the inheritance. Growing up you may have felt that you didn’t fit in and that you didn’t necessarily belong to a group of people. This can leave you feeling unwanted and unloved – just like the orphan Annie.

During this season of Lent we discover again how much we are loved and how much we are wanted. God loves us so much that He gave His only Son to die for us so that we could inherit eternal life. What incredible, unselfish and extreme love. We no longer need to try to work out who we belong to and where we fit in. God has claimed us as His loved child and we are a child of the KING.

Prayer: Thank you God for naming me and claiming me as your child with eternal life as my inheritance. Guide me and help me grow in your love. Amen.

Following the Son

1st Sunday during Lent

Read: Matthew 16:24-28

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (NIV)

I once read a poem: "Nobody said it was going to be easy. Nobody said it would always be fun. If you want to live a life that's simple and breezy, don't take up your cross, don't ever follow the Son." The poet was writing about living the Christian life and following Jesus. God will lead you to places that are scary. He will test you when you are tired, moody or mad. He will challenge you and make demands upon you. Even though you are weary, He'll change your heart. He will change your sad to glad. He'll make you work. He will make you think. He will keep you busy, telling the great stories of God reaching out to touch you and through you to touch others.

To say, 'I believe in Jesus as my Saviour!' is one thing. To walk that way and to work out that faith for the rest of your life is quite another thing. The road to Christian faith and living is not like a highway, well-marked, well lit, and carefully maintained for smooth travel. Often it turns out to be rough, dangerous and sometimes nearly impassable. The leader of our salvation, Jesus Christ, fought the battle all alone. But now the battle is done and the victory is won. Continue to follow Jesus through all the situations He places you in
FOLLOW THE SON!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help me to follow you wherever you lead me. I know it won't be easy but give me courage and faith to meet any situation with your love. Amen.

More to Follow

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Romans 5:1-5, 18-21

"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." John 1:16-17 (NIV)

The story is told of a well-to-do man who died, leaving detailed instructions on how to divide his wealth. Among other things, his wife was to give a certain amount of money to a poor minister who ministered to him during his life. The widow, in her wisdom knowing that the poor minister would be overwhelmed by such an amount, decided to mail every two weeks a cheque for \$250. A message was also placed in the envelope saying, "More to follow".

God in His ultimate wisdom does the same for us. If He gave us every blessing all at once, we wouldn't know what to do with them all and may even choose not to use them. But through Christ our lives are blessed continually with one blessing after another with 'More to Follow'. His mercies to us are new every morning and great is His faithfulness.

Christ's goodness pours in on us like the waves of the sea. As one comes, there is always another and another. God's capacity and willingness to supply all our needs are both unlimited and eternal. At Easter we remember God's love and grace to each of His beloved children. Let us pray and serve each other, sharing the hope and joy that we have in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He provides us with our every need. May we always be thankful for every blessing.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for all the blessings you shower on me every day. Help me to use these blessings to impact others' lives. Amen.

Wisdom of God

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

"How does a person become wise? The first step is to trust and revere the Lord! Only fools refuse to be taught." Proverbs 1:7 (TLB)

If you google the 10 'wisest people in history', King Solomon from the Bible will come up as the wisest of them all. He grew up in a palace as the son of King David. He had everything he ever wanted - riches, prestige, women - but still he worshipped and loved God. One of the greatest achievements attributed to Solomon was the building of the temple in Jerusalem. In 1 Kings 3, we can read the story of Solomon's faithfulness in following God's will. So, in a dream, God asked Solomon, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." (vs 5).

Solomon firstly thanked God, knowing that everything he had was a gift of God and then, being ruler and King, he wanted to be able to govern God's people well and so asked God for a 'discerning heart'. God gave him this wisdom to be a great King. Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs and it is known as the Book of Wisdom. In the verse above, Solomon attributes where true wisdom lies – it is from God and to be truly wise you must love and trust God.

How often do we acknowledge God's true wisdom? Do we ask for God's help and guidance in our daily lives? Do we seek His will when unsure of what to do? True wisdom comes only from God. In His great wisdom He gave His only Son to die and rise again as this was the only way we could come into God's presence and spend our eternity with Him. Wisdom brought about this loving act. Meditate on this act of grace and love this Lenten season and acknowledge where true wisdom reigns!

Prayer: Lord, your wisdom brought about the beginning of life. Help me to acknowledge where true wisdom lies and to seek your will. Amen.



Death is Life

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

***“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Corinthians 15:57 (NIV)***

Death is said to be a part of life, but for too many death is the end. As Christians we know that death is not the end but rather the beginning of life spent eternally with our loving heavenly Father. Having attended many funerals, it is very apparent when the person who died is Christian. At a Christian funeral there is almost joy and celebration of the person entering their eternal home; this in contrast with a non-Christian funeral where there is despair with the finality of life and the absence of hope.

In Jesus, after death comes a whole new life but without the prospect of it ever ending again. It's a life beyond this one in every way, you can't really compare it to anything. But there will be no pain, no sorrow, no tears, no giving up family or friends. It'll be like coming home at last from far away and understanding finally how many times, how many ways God was guiding us, drawing us to Himself. And then, for the first time, we will see so clearly what God intended life to be when he created it. Only this time there will be no death – not ever.

Until death comes we can live each day with the assurance that death isn't the end. It doesn't win at the end because it couldn't defeat Christ. God's Son rose from the dead and promised exactly the same kind of victory to those who believe in Him. For us, eternal life begins now because death doesn't overwhelm us. We still have to face it but we know that it can't separate us from God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have taken away the sting of death through your death and resurrection. This new life is now mine in faith. Help me live it in your love. Amen.

Our Gethsemane

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 26:36-46

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ Jesus said to his disciples. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’” Mark 14:34 (NIV)

Why was Jesus so troubled and pained? Wasn't he glad to know that soon he would be going home to be with His heavenly Father? Throughout His life on earth Jesus had experienced more of people's cruelty and attitudes in three years than we ever will in our whole life. He had been tongue lashed by the Pharisees countless times, tempted by the devil, almost stoned, abused, ridiculed and now He was to be betrayed by a friend. He had done nothing to anyone other than bring and show love. Unfortunately, Jesus also knew what lay before Him in the suffering He was yet to endure and the incredibly cruel death that was to come. I think we can understand how He felt at that moment in Gethsemane and the frustration of His friends leaving Him to pray on his own.

Do we have our own Gethsemanes? Times when we seem so alone in our troubles and pain? When nothing or no one can bring joy or fill us with confidence? There will be times when it seems that everything is futile and pointless. Our hope though lies in the one who has gone through and experienced all this before us.

Jesus knows what it is to be ridiculed, to lose friends, to be tempted. So be assured that Jesus is able to bring comfort and love to a hurting heart. When these times come, and they will, rest assured that Jesus knows your pain and sorrow and you can come to Him in prayer with all your hurts and He will take the pain away. Allow yourself to move on from Gethsemane and rest in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for knowing how I feel. Please help me to be able to come to you with all my hurts and troubles and then leave them at the cross. Amen.

Believe and Confess

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Romans 10:8-13

"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." Romans 10:10 (NIV)

Social Media is very clever in the way it operates. One person puts up a post about something that they like and then others choose to also like it. When others see it they 'share' it with others and so on. This is the way online companies make their sales and money. Basically, they use people's likes and opinions to spread the word about their products.

Paul in Romans was telling people to 'like' and believe that Jesus died for their sins and that He was raised again from the dead. Once they had believed with their hearts, Paul asked that they then 'share' it with their mouths. This can be very hard to do. I have heard that teenagers would much prefer to text and email rather than talk in person. When something is shared in person it becomes personal. Maybe that is why in Hebrews 10:25 the people are encouraged to continue meeting together. Even in times of persecution we read in the Bible that believers continued meeting to strengthen each other in their faith.

When believers meet together they strengthen and support each other and become community. Jesus did not ask us to live in isolation, texting and emailing. He encourages us to be community, to bring others to the community and to confess our faith together. In doing so, we spread the Good News about our faith in Jesus. As a body of Christ, let us stand together in our belief and confess: Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour!

Prayer: Jesus you are Lord of my life. Continue to help me strengthen my belief in you and to become bold in my spirit to share your love with those who have not heard. Amen.

God's Broken Heart

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

"But [Jesus] endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne... But the Lord made the punishment fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved." Isaiah 53:4a, 6b (GNB)

Jim sat in the pastor's office trying to reconcile and understand how it is that, given there is so much wickedness and misery in the world, the Bible and church can still talk about the love and mercy of God. "If God were really good, all the misery and wickedness in the world would surely break His heart," Jim stated.

"It did," replied the pastor, and then pointed to the crucifix hanging on the wall above the desk.

Have you ever thought about the crucifixion in this way? In a very real way, the story of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ our Lord is the story of the breaking heart of God – breaking because of all of our sin. The Bible tells us that God loved the world so much – this world of wickedness and misery – that He willingly surrendered, sacrificed, gave up, His one and only Son – to suffer and die for the sin of all the world.

During this Lenten season, we acknowledge the life and death of Jesus who carried our sins to the cross. He defeated death and rose to life so that we might have eternal life with our loving Heavenly Father. God's heart did and does break for your sins and for mine. Bring your broken heart to God and find love and acceptance in His grace and forgiveness. God's love is real!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, forgive me for taking your love and forgiveness for granted. You suffered pain with your Son all for me. Help me to grow in your love. Amen.



Shine like the sun

2nd Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 37:1-9

"May they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength."

Judges 5:31b (NIV)

The sun is an incredible source of strength to our planet. It is the source of all life on our planet. The sun is made up of hydrogen and helium gases and is about 5,500°C, with the inner core being even hotter. The 'speed of light' from the sun to the earth is 8 seconds. When we have a 40°C day, we seek shade and can feel our skin burning. God knew the exact distance from the sun that life on earth could endure and we could survive.

Just reading through all this information can boggle the mind. How can we comprehend this? But, there is someone who created this amazing sun that would give light but not burn us up and give us respite from the sun in giving us night. The sun is intense and so is the love of God.

As God's chosen people, we are also called to be like the sun to those who are living in the darkness in a vague and meaningless existence. In Psalm 37, we are called to trust the Lord and then to act on that trust and seek happiness from him. As we trust in our Lord Jesus, serve others, seek fulfilment in Him and give ourselves to Him and His will, we will shine the intense light of Christ on all those around us. This Lenten season, shine like the sun and, relying on the strength of God, bring life to those you meet.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to trust you, give myself to you and shed your light on people around me today. Amen.

Ransomed

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: 1 Peter 1:18-21

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45 (NIV)

You’ve seen it in the movies and occasionally in the news. A victim has been taken hostage by kidnapers with an agenda: they want as much money as they can get. Using the hostage’s life as bait, they wait until someone who cares enough will pay the ransom.

If this happened to you, would anyone foot the bill? If so, how high a price could they afford?

Whether you know it or not, you have been in this very situation. A sinister enemy took you captive through your own sin, holding you hostage under his tyrannical rule. The price on your head? Higher than all the money in the world. It would require a life for your life. But not just any life – the life of God Himself. God would have to agree to give up everything just to get you back.

And He did. Jesus left the comfort of heaven to live a perfect life that only He could live. Then He offered it up and paid your ransom so you could be freed. So you would be His. You are of infinite value to God. He proved it by sacrificing everything to buy you back. What more do you need to know? Enjoy your freedom, and live like you are loved.

‘We are of such value to God that He came to live among us... and to guide us home. He will go to any length to seek us, even to being lifted high upon the cross to draw us back to Himself.’ ~ Catherine of Siena

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the freedom you gave me in your death on the cross. Help me to understand the depth of your love for me. Amen.



A Great Treasure

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-9

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV)

I have many treasures in my house: photos of my grandparents, artwork and photos of my children from younger days, bowls and jugs used in past days, old furniture used by relatives, an old gramophone. The list can continue and I'm sure most of us have mementos that bring to mind the love and joy of days gone by. They can even be a precious item given by someone who has died and is considered a treasure.

Through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we worship the invisible Creator of heaven and earth. Our eyes cannot see Him; yet, we treasure His love. We have a memento that reminds us daily of Him. The memento of God's love is the cross of Jesus Christ. It reminds us that God sent His only Son to save us from sin and death. During Lent we remember His cross and that we are the sons and daughters of God through our faith. The Bible reminds us of this fact, and the Holy Spirit helps us grow in His love.

Our God may be unseen but we do see Jesus. God's love is not something to treasure and put on a shelf to dust occasionally, it is an active love to use and put into practice with those around us. Looking towards the cross we can be strengthened and encouraged in the certainty of our faith. This faith brings unspeakable joy and is a great treasure for all who believe.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to treasure my faith and your love, and to then use it continually to bring others to know you. Amen.

God's Commitment

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: John 12:23-28

"For if you live according to your human nature, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death your sinful actions, you will live. Those who are led by God's Spirit are God's children." Romans 8:13-14 (GNB)

The word is used so loosely these days. "I'd die to have a body like hers!" or "I'm dying to see what's going to happen." Maybe even, "I'd die before I'd let them do that to me!" Dying just seems to capture how passionately you feel about something, even if you really don't mean it to that degree.

Death shows God's level of commitment, too. Adam tested God's commitment to not eat anything in the garden or he would surely die. He and Eve ate of the fruit and with it came death and separation from God. Then, when God promised that He would send a Saviour to heal that separation caused in the Garden of Eden, He proved it in the death of His beloved Son, Jesus. In Jesus' resurrection God showed His supreme power over death to bring us eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

Together with God's victory over death comes our victory over a spiritual death through life in Christ. To bring God's life in Christ into us, we need to put our old self (evil thoughts and desires) to death – not physically, but in our hearts and minds to become pure in Spirit. Show your commitment to God by the way you live and act that others, too, may come to learn of Jesus and His saving grace.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father that you are so committed to us that you would have your own son die. Help me to also be committed to you. Amen.*



Have Comfort

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Isaiah 40:1-8

"For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." 2 Corinthians 1:5 (NIV)

To comfort means to give strength and hope, to ease the grief or trouble and console. The Old Testament is filled with the recurring theme of the Israelites falling away from God and having to be punished for all the sins committed. Then comes God's grace in forgiving and comforting them. In the above verses from Isaiah we come to realise that no matter how great the sin and damage there is healing and forgiveness.

Our world is full of sin and God could easily wipe us all out and dust off His hands. But through the death and resurrection of His son He brings us the hope that no matter what happens God will forgive and continue to guide us back into the way of truth and His loving arms. Every time we turn away, every time we sin, every time we reject God, He turns back to us with comfort and love, forgiving us again and again.

The source of all this forgiveness is the cross of Christ. At the cross, Christ made the complete sacrifice, once and for all time, for all the sins of the world. When we come to God admitting our wrongdoings and asking for forgiveness, we find pardon and release from the guilt that surrounds us. No matter how sin has damaged our lives, we can find comfort and be healed through Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you comfort me with your grace and love. I am sorry for turning my back on you. Please help me to come to you for forgiveness. Amen.

Jesus is the Only Way!

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Matthew 7:21-29

“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)

A little girl was pleading with her father to come to church with her. Somewhat irritated after 15 minutes of begging, the father finally said, ‘You and your mother go your way and I’ll go mine.’

The little girl then responded, ‘But Daddy, which way are you going?’

Many of us are rather enthusiastically sold on the idea that freedom includes the freedom to do as we please. Ask someone instilled with this philosophy: where are you going? In all probability they won’t really know where they are going, they are just going. This sort of aimless philosophy has provided a convenient escape hatch with the thought that all ways of life lead to heaven.

But, read the above verse from John 14:6 again. Jesus states that He is the only way to get to heaven. The way we decide to live our lives does not lead to life in heaven with our Heavenly Father. There is only one way and that is through believing that Jesus died and rose again for our sins. The rest of the ways are just blind alleys or horseshoe curves – none of which lead to heaven.

Jesus also does not ask us to earn our way to heaven by being like Him. We cannot earn our way. Jesus did that already for us by dying for our sins and defeating death by rising again. Jesus took on the sins of the world so that we can be free. Jesus is the only way to heaven and our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Dear Lord, lead me in my life to only follow you. Thank you for showing me that the way to have eternal life is through believing in you. Amen.

Amazing Love

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: John 3:1-21

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (NIV)

Here Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He had come to Jesus secretly at night probably after he had heard Jesus speak in Jerusalem at the Passover on the feast day. Nicodemus had obviously been following Jesus and hearing about all He had been doing for he mentioned the miracles Jesus had been performing: "You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." (vs 2)

Nicodemus was interested in knowing more. It was in Jesus' answer that He spoke the verse John 3:16 – giving assurance and the promise that all Christians shall inherit eternal life. We can understand why God loved the world. He created it. It is His world. Seven times the writer of Genesis in telling the creation story says, "God saw it was good" or simply "It was good". The world and all the people, animals, plants, stars, oceans – all is God's and was created as good. Therefore, doesn't it also hold that if God loves His world so much, won't he do anything for it to keep it safe? And He did!

God sent His one and only Son into the world to redeem it and to bring all His children into God's presence and love. Through sin we had become separated from God and His love. He then gave the only thing He could to bring us to Himself – God sent Jesus as the sacrifice once and for all the sins of the world. Such an incredible sacrifice, such amazing love!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your amazing love. You did the only thing you could to save me and that was to send your Son to suffer and die for me. What a blessing! Amen.

A Daring Adventure

3rd Sunday during Lent

Read: Hebrews 2:1-18

***"Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him."
Deuteronomy 30:19b-20a (NIV)***

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." ~ Helen Keller

The above quote is powerful in many ways. Helen Keller (1880-1968) lacked the senses of hearing and sight and still felt all the excitement that life has to offer. She, of all people, could have easily given up on finding the adventure in life. Instead she embraced it, graduated from university and found joy in all she did as an author, political activist and lecturer.

At Christians, it should be easy for us to look at life as one opportunity after another. Ernst G. Schmidt explains: "Salvation doesn't mean just going to heaven, being saved for the hereafter. Salvation at its root means room, freedom, the excitement of living in the now." With the Lord as our safety net, we have no excuse not to take on challenges. The interesting thing about safety nets is that they don't keep us from falling, but rather they absorb our impact and spring us back up, allowing us to learn and grow, even in our slip-ups.

As you look back on some of your experiences, do you find that most of them came out of an opportunity about which you may have held reservations? In the same respect, have you felt that you missed out on opportunities because you were unsure and so backed out? This comes down to the root of Christianity – our faith. With it we live the adventures of life, without it we miss out. That's how Christianity frees us, giving us the faith for now with the promise of the joy eternal. Who couldn't see the wisdom and adventure in that?

Prayer: Lord, help me to live my life as a great adventure in faith. With you as my safety net, there is nothing I cannot do! Amen.

Fullness of Joy

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Luke 23:32-43

***"Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'"
Luke 23:43 (NIV)***

The more we know, the more we realise how little we actually do know! For example, the more I learn about space and the universe I live in, the more I realise how little I actually do know of all that God has created. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12b – "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." We only know a small part of God and what He has in store for us at our life's end. Our happiness is only partial and always incomplete. When we enter heaven there is everlasting joy. For in God's presence is the fullness of joy.

Jesus was put on the cross as a criminal between criminals. The one criminal was not sorry at all whereas we read in the verses above that the other criminal looked to Jesus for some hope. The way Jesus answered him totally exceeded his expectations. Christ assured the forgiven criminal that he would more than remember him; he would enter the presence of God with Jesus that very day.

This can also be our hope and our joy – today! Jesus was hung on the cross so that we could enter the presence of God clean and complete, knowing that all in our life has been forgiven and washed clean with the blood of Christ. Jesus came to die for us. The Bible, His Word, prepares us to live as He wants us to live – to die as He wants us to die. He wants us to live and die with the joyful happiness of belonging – belonging to God's family as His dear children.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of eternal life that you have promised me. Help me to live my life full of joy in your promises. Amen.

Never Alone

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: John 16:29-33

"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"
Mark 15:34 (NIV)

Bruce Barton (1886-1967), an American author and politician, once said: *"It would do the world good if every person in it would compel themselves occasionally to be absolutely alone. Most of the world's progress has come out of such loneliness."* Almost two thousand years ago, our Lord and Saviour found Himself completely alone on the cross, abandoned by His Heavenly Father. He endured this abandonment to access our eternal salvation.

We are not alone. No matter how far our sins may have taken us away from God, He will never forsake us, He will never leave us. To be without God is to endure hell itself, and Jesus went through hell so that we might enter heaven. Out of Jesus' loneliness came the greatest act of love for the world.

A pastor once stood at the bedside of a dying, depressed man. While the pastor was trying to comfort him, the man asked: "Just what can you say to a dying man who feels that God has abandoned him?" The pastor responded with another question, "What happened to the Son of God who died, whom God really did abandon? Where is he now?" The dying man realised the answer and smiled, "He is in the glory of heaven, where I shall also be. For today I will be with him in Paradise!"

Prayer: Thank you Lord that you endured being abandoned on the cross for my salvation. Help me to know that I am never alone. Amen.



Blessedly Poor

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

"Looking at his disciples, [Jesus] said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'" Luke 6:20 (NIV)

'Blessed are the poor' – it seems like an oxymoron. What is the blessing in being poor? No house, job, security in the future, no hope! These are the realities of being poor, where the blessings of the rich are much easier to see and appreciate. The poor seem to have no blessings, maybe that is why Jesus concentrates on them so much. Death is much more a reality for those who have so little.

With so little to protect them from death, the poor have no illusions about the value of life. Life is precarious and therefore precious. Life is not a given, therefore it is a gift. Life is not something we can buy, or hoard, or put away for retirement, therefore it must be lived abundantly each day in gratefulness. With empty hands, the poor are able to reach out and grasp more fully God's gift offered to them. With little to hold on to, the poor are less likely to turn away from God reaching out to them. With little to count on, the poor must depend on God.

These are the lessons we learn from the poor: not that it is 'good' to be poor, but that it is 'blessed', that it is a blessing to rely only on God's grace and mercy for the peace and meaning we all seek. It is as if the Lord is saying that only when we let go of the wealth, status and possessions with which we can seek to protect ourselves from poverty and death, can we receive the riches and life which come from God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust in your grace alone for life. Give me compassion to share what you have given me with others in need. Amen.

Forgive Me

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

***“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”
Luke 23:34a (NIV)***

With one stroke of a brush, a painting which an artist has worked on for months can be spoiled. With one blow of an axe, a tree nourished and tended to for years can be destroyed. With one sin, the earthly creation – that God had planned for perfectly – was ruined.

God did not let sin pass unnoticed. He acted at once. He punished the sin and promised a Saviour. As the years went on, God’s plan of salvation unfolded. Finally, God sent His own Son to earth to lay aside His divine majesty for a time and became human. One dark day, Jesus Christ carried a heavy cross through the streets of Jerusalem and, outside the city walls, the Son of God was nailed to that piece of wood.

As His beloved Son suffered and died, the Father’s heart was overwhelmed with sorrow. In that moment, Jesus prayed: “Father, forgive them.” Through His death, Christ undid all the wrong and made it all right – and His Father forgave. How many times have we also said, “Father, forgive me”? Through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have the assurance that we are forgiven and God does not remember our sins anymore! Just as God forgives us, He has also given us the responsibility to forgive others who may have wronged us. Remember God’s forgiveness and His love this Lenten season and *‘forgive others as God has forgiven you.’*

Prayer: *My dear Heavenly Father, thank you for forgiving me all the wrong things I say, think and do. Help me to also forgive others. Amen.*

Praying for you

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: John 17

Jesus says: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Mark 11:24 (NIV)

Prayer is powerful. It is the lifeline of a Christian to gain access to our Heavenly Father. We are told to talk to God as a child talks to their earthly father. How incredible it feels when someone says they will pray for you. It is an intimate exchange to intercede to God on someone's behalf. In John 17 we read of Jesus praying for Himself, His disciples and then all believers.

He prayed for Himself that God may be glorified in what He now had to do in enduring the suffering and death on the cross. But that the glory would shine out in His resurrection. Then He prayed for protection and a steadfast spirit for His disciples so that they would have the faith to share all they had heard and been taught. Finally, how unbelievable it is that Jesus Himself is praying to our Heavenly Father on our behalf. This prayer was said only hours before He was to be arrested and crucified, but the last ones on His mind were us! Jesus prayed earnestly that the world would come to know God through Him. It was in this time that Christ went to the cross. God had worked out His great plan and made all His purposes come true.

Jesus prayed in John 17:20-21 "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Jesus loves you so much that He longs to give us the world. Live in this love.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray and then keep me praying for others that they may also learn the inexhaustible love that you have for your world. Amen.

Conviction

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:12-23

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3 (NIV)

From the day Jesus was born until now, He has been loved by some, despised by others, revered and denounced, praised and cursed. The reason so many fear the name of Jesus is because they do not know Him and reject the intimate relationship He wants to have with all His children. He has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and His actions mistaken.

Jesus did not live for Himself in his lifetime. He lived for us. His life was a daily challenge to succeed in holiness for our sake. God had given us the chance to live perfect lives in Adam and Eve. Having failed to remain perfect because of sin and mistrust of God, our world needed a redeemer, someone to live a life of holiness in line with God’s commands. Christ suffered daily. He died horribly on the cross. We often allow His suffering on the cross to overshadow His daily suffering. Jesus’ life was a struggle in every small and large event. He did not give in to temptation and sin. Like us, He was tempted to lie, steal, cheat, hate and fight. Yet He did not sin.

Jesus did not seem to have the characteristics that mark a man as important, influential or special by today’s standards. But, Jesus is the most important man in the entire course of history. He is the Christ, the Promised One, and the Redeemer. To say this takes conviction and faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God. May my life reflect your love so that others may come to know you. Amen.



Renewed

4th Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 103

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV)

The destruction of our bodies begins long before our death. Physiologists tell us that after the age of 25, we are already 'going downhill' physically. Getting older and wondering about what will happen to our bodies when we die is not very encouraging or comforting. In fact, in a society which has made youth and beauty into gods, the prospect of old age can be depressing. Some people become obsessed with their desire to stay young spending thousands on Botox, face-lifts, body transformations, diet programmes and extreme exercise regimes.

Even though our outward, physical appearance is wasting away, the promises of hope and a future can renew our spirits. Jesus gives us the hope of the resurrection. We can hold on to these promises like an anchor for our restless souls. The wonderful resurrection promises of Jesus can drive away all fears of aging and death. Jesus said that all people will be raised on the last day and those who believe and are baptised will be welcomed into His heavenly home.

We don't need to worry or be obsessed with growing old. God has all our days numbered and we have freedom from the fear of death. Rest securely on God's promises that are recorded in the Bible. Read the hope and the assurances that He offers to us every day, knowing that our *"youth is renewed like the eagle's."* (Psalm 103:5b) In Jesus we have the promise of eternal life.

Prayer: Lord, I give my life to you and ask you to help me use it to fulfil your purpose. Amen.

Love of God

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: 1 John 4:7-19

"...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..."
Ephesians 3:17-18 (NIV)

How do we know we are loved? A small child knows the love of parents through the tenderness shown in taking attentive care of their needs. As the child grows, it knows where to go for love and comfort – into the arms of loving parents. Love is a noun, a verb and also an adjective. It can be seen, felt and displayed in action.

Reading through many of the Psalms we experience the love of God in all His creation, in His deep love for all His people, in sending His one and only Son into the world to die a horrible death. This is true love, when someone lays down their life that others may live. This is a sacrificial love and, when done willingly, has even more impact on the souls that have been saved through this action. In the history of wars, we read of one soldier taking a bullet for a friend or dying that a mate may live.

Relate this to 1 John 4:10, *"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* God's love is immense. It is hard to grasp how much He loves us. What we can grasp is the love of a parent and how they would do anything for their children, even die for them. This is what God did for us in Jesus - He gave up His one and only Son to die not for only one person but for the world throughout history. Now, that is Love!

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for loving me and giving up your Son to save me. Grow your love in my heart that I may share it willingly with those around me. Amen.*

Dying to Sin

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Romans 6

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." Mark 14:65 (NIV)

The time of Lent is when we contemplate the cross and what Jesus endured in the lead up to his resurrection. Crucifixion had been perfected by the Romans, designed to inflict the most amount of pain on the victim. The act of crucifixion wasn't so much in the killing, rather being the most horrible and disgraceful form of execution. This was usually reserved for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries and vile criminals.

So why do we want to remember and contemplate the terrible acts inflicted on Jesus before he died? It was here that God revealed His great love for you, me and the world. In Jesus dying, our sin died. Sin is all the bad things we think, say and do. They are not easy to kill. That is why Jesus became a human being born of a woman and lived as we do, but sinless. He took all the sins from us to the cross where they died and were forgiven by God. This is why Jesus' death on the cross is so vital. Here God took the agony of sin and suffered through it for all humankind. Christ died for our sins.

Our Saviour's crucifixion about 2000 years ago only accomplishes its purpose when we are crucified with him. Not that we go to the cross physically, but that we must die as far as our sins are concerned. We admit this every Sunday in church when we confess that we are sinful, but then we receive the complete forgiveness of our sins. This is sharing in Christ's resurrection when we are absolved and are given a new life.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for dying for me and for taking all my sins upon you. Amen.

By Grace

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: John 1:14-18

***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."
Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)***

Paul wrote these profound words to a Christian church in Ephesus to help them understand more fully the gift of God's grace. Paul wanted them to appreciate the high goals that God has for the church. We need to hear and understand the limitless nature of God's love and grace to an undeserving world. There is so much God has done for us without us deserving it. Luther discovered this 500 years ago which began his reform of the church which expected people to pay for what God was giving for free.

But there it is – God says so – Paul wrote it – Luther believed it and it has the power to change the world. We are saved for a purpose. Our salvation secured, we are now free to serve our community and church. This concept, to be free, is confusing! Aren't we obligated to serve God in return for all He has done? Shouldn't we try to be as good as possible, to prove how much we love Him? Some noble thoughts, but impossible to do. We can never be good enough, but God's grace covers all this with the sending of His beloved Son into a sin-filled world to be the scapegoat for all of us. The death and resurrection of Jesus is God's gift to us to cover all the sin we have done and will do in the future. The acronym for GRACE helps us understand the limitless love of God: God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

Prayer: *I thank you, Lord Jesus that you chose to go to the cross to show the love your Father has for the world. Help me to appreciate the gift of your Father's grace. Amen.*



Trusting Hearts

26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: John 14:1-14

***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)***

In my younger days I remember going to many youth camps. Often at these camps they had ‘trust’ games. One was closing your eyes and leaning backwards trusting that the person behind would catch you and stop you from falling. Another was being lifted over a line of people and being passed along the line, all the while ‘trusting’ that you wouldn’t be dropped. I’m sure you also can remember these and probably many other times when you have been called upon to put your faith in someone else and ‘trust’ that you wouldn’t be let down or fall.

To trust is to confidently rely upon someone or something else. Other definitions are to have faith, belief, hope, conviction, confidence and dependence. All of these definitions point directly to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in whom we can trust perfectly. If we think about the ‘trust’ games above we can directly apply them to our faith and the passage in Proverbs. We are not to rely upon ourselves or others, but on Jesus who will never let us fall and who will direct us in the right way. The thing with God, is that we never need question His judgements for our lives. They are always correct and will never harm us. In the passage in John 14, Jesus is assuring His disciples to trust that He has all things ready and prepared for them in heaven. We can trust Him at His Word. God has a place for us – let us trust Him with our whole life.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you for giving me the confidence to rely on you, knowing you will direct my path to the abundant life planned for me. Amen.*

Suffering with Christ

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Acts 5:33-42

"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.... If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." 1 Peter 4:13, 16 (NIV)

The Boxer Uprising, or Yihetuan Movement (1899-1901), was an attempt to expel any foreigners or foreign influence from China. The Boxers were a secret society ("Righteous and Harmonious Fists") who resented missionaries and Chinese Christians. During this uprising, more than 100,000 civilians and Chinese converts died. Many Christians chose death rather than to deny their Lord and Saviour.

One story relates that the Boxers sent an edict to a missionary school that anyone who trampled on the cross would be set free, and that those who did not would be killed. The first seven children coming out the school trampled the cross to save themselves. The eighth to come out, a girl, knelt before the cross... and was shot. Everyone else in a line of 100 students followed her example. Before the blood-bath was over in the schools, 30,000 young people had died for Christ.

The disciples too endured pain and suffering. Many were put in prison, flogged, some martyred, and others persecuted in other ways. But these inflictions never stopped them sharing the love of Jesus with all who would hear them. The Word and freedom of Christ was so compelling that even Jesus said that if He stopped declaring God's mercy, the stones would have to cry out. In the story in Acts, the disciples were beaten and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus, and as they left they were "...rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." (Acts 5:41) Could we do this?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, so many have suffered for the sake of sharing your love. Help me to not be frightened, but bold in declaring that you are the Christ, the Son of God. Amen.

Joy in the Sacrifice

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Hebrews 12:1-11

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame," Hebrews 12:2a (NIV)

A dream for most Australians is to own their own home. A place they can call their own. So many times it takes many struggles and sacrifices to make the down payment and then even greater sacrifices as the loan is paid off. Many couples have to do without many things, but in the long run after 25 – 30 years it is owned by them. So many say the joy of finally owning their own home was definitely worth the sacrifice.

Jesus could sense the joy of finishing the task set before Him, the task of serving people through the ordeal of death by crucifixion. Jesus had his struggles, too: in the Garden of Gethsemane, confronting His accuser (a disciple of His), being denied by a friend, being abandoned at the very end by His Father. Yet we read in the Hebrews text that Jesus considered it 'joy' and willingly endured the cross on our behalf. Trusting in Him, we have forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. We have the reason to sacrifice things for Jesus and follow Him. We have the confidence to cast all our cares on Him knowing that He cares deeply for us.

Many have gone before us in this confidence and they already know the 'joy' that Jesus has prepared for each of us. So let us also set our hearts and minds on Jesus and run the race that He has set before us with joy and anticipation of the eternal life to come.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to know the joy that brings my salvation. You endured so much for me. Open my heart to help me understand this amazing love. Amen.

Fluff or Stuff

5th Sunday during Lent

Read: Matthew 6:19-24

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Luke 12:34 (NIV)

Don't be taken in by the fluff, forgetting about the stuff of life. Fluff may be alright until it is mistaken for the stuff. 'Fluff' can be defined as something of little consequence, the ephemeral, something that only lasts for a short time, the trivial, the inconsequential. All of us get caught up in the fluff of life at some time or another. At these times we lose sight of the 'stuff' in life, most of which has been put together for us by God to realise the joy of life.

Jesus came to deal with the stuff of life. He came to bring life and to rescue us from the darkness of our sins. That doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't interested in 'things' or 'fluff'. In fact, God made all things: *"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."* (John 1:3) Jesus/God had a respect for things, even those things made by human ingenuity, but none of this brings life.

The biggest thing God did, was to send His Son Jesus to earth to die for the sins of the world. He died not just an ordinary death but an extraordinary one. He shouldered the shame of dying on a cross and the pain of his mother watching him die. He died for the sins of the whole world. He died for the people who crucified Him. Jesus died for you and me. So, it brings the question: are we going to major in the minor things of life, or revel in the power of God? This is God's stuff and God's stuff is not fluff.

Prayer: Lord God, give me the insight to keep my values straight and to be able to see the stuff from you and not just settle with the fluff of life. Amen.

Agape Love

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"
John 15:12-13 (NRSV)***

Many stories come out of wars. Stories of bravery and the selfless action of those saving others but losing their own life. Many movies have been made about this 'agape' love between soldiers. One story is set in ANZAC Cove in Gallipoli and tells of John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey. According to legend, he saved the lives of 300 men even though he was only there for 24 days until he was killed without ever firing a single bullet.

True love is agape love. It is the love of God for humankind and the Christian love we show to our neighbour. It is not a romantic or passionate love, rather an unselfish, thinking of others before yourself kind of love. It is an inner feeling for one another, not sympathy. It is helping or doing something for somebody without the thought of receiving. Agape is being kind and charitable, sacrificing of yourself, even inconvenience for the benefit of others. It is going that extra mile without prejudice or thought of receiving honour or a monetary gain. It is the act of the 'Good Samaritan'.

Jesus is the Good Samaritan. He selflessly allowed Himself to be taken to be whipped, ridiculed and die on the cross. As all this was happening He didn't think of Himself but rather thought of you and me and the gift He was giving all humankind – salvation in heaven forever. Just as God loves us and we love God, so we are to love each other.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for your selfless love for me. Help me to show that same love to my neighbours. Amen.

Needing Everything

30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Matthew 5:1-12

"Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Mark 2:17 (NIV)

Last Father's Day I saw a sign: 'For the Man who has everything!' This sign was over an object costing \$300. Thinking about it, why would you spend \$300 on something that was not really needed or wanted? The craftiness of sales pitches continue to get people to purchase things not needed for someone who has everything.

The gift of Christ is not for the person who has everything, but rather for the person who has nothing. Jesus did not come to call the righteous to repentance, but the sinners... and we are all sinners! A sinner needs everything from God, including the greatest gifts He could give - forgiveness and life eternal. A sinner forgiven by God has everything. They have Christ and Christ is everything.

Mary Magdalene needed Christ. She poured precious ointment on His feet several days before His death and wiped His feet with her hair. In her humility and great need she found happiness in Jesus. This was her gift to the One in whom she had found a new hope for living, in fact, in whom she had found a new life. In her, we see someone poor in spirit and who knew God's gift to the poor in spirit. (Read Matthew 5:3) We find God at the foot of the cross of Jesus where our humble spirit leads us to the forgiveness of God which in turn satisfies all our needs.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, without you I cannot do anything. I need you every day to guide me, forgive me and love me. Amen.*

Crucify Him!

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Matthew 27:32-66

“What shall I do then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’” Matthew 27:22 (NIV)

Try to answer the following questions about Crucifixion:

1. Being put to death on the cross was:
 - a. A very cruel and harsh way to die.
 - b. A way to die very honourably.
 - c. A less painful way to die than by any other method.

Answer: a. Death by crucifixion was excruciating and humiliating. It was very cruel and one of the harshest ways to die. It was a popular method of execution by the Romans.

2. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?
 - a. Only the people who shouted that He should be put to death on the cross.
 - b. Only Pilate, because he was the Roman governor responsible for such things.
 - c. All people who have ever sinned.
 - d. Jesus willingly went to the cross for you and me.

Answer: This is a very difficult question to answer. The focus in the answers **a.** and **b.** is the word ‘ONLY’. Were the people responsible for the death of Jesus ONLY those who shouted that He should be crucified? Was it ONLY Pilate who was responsible because he was the official in charge? Both the people who shouted for Jesus to be put to death and Pilate himself were jointly responsible, for if they were not on the side of Jesus, they were against Him (Matthew 12:30). But, it was the sin of every person on earth that Jesus was carrying to the cross, so that He might pay the price of salvation for everyone who believes in Him.

Some may say then that the answer is ‘c’, but our sin is covered by the love God had for all humankind. If you said the answer is ‘d’, you would be correct. God allowed His only Son to suffer the painful death on the cross so that all may be forgiven and live eternally with Him. There is no responsibility held for Jesus’ death – He willingly died for you and me!

Prayer: *My dear Saviour, thank you for suffering the horrible death on the cross for my sake. I am thankful that your love for me is so great! Amen.*

Real Happiness

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: John 16:21-33

***"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."
1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV)***

Where do you find real happiness? In your family, work, sport, recreation and relaxation times... where is your 'joy' found? Jesus tells us that real happiness is found in staying close to God – staying close to Him in prayer. At some stage, we have all underestimated the power of prayer in our lives to bring relief, comfort and joy knowing that our Heavenly Father hears and answers our prayers.

When joy is sought in the wrong places, the wrong sort of joy is found. There are many misleading influences in our world - the challenge is to listen to the right one. Christ came to earth where He suffered and died to bring us the joy of eternal life. To know and have God in our lives is to know real happiness. It is joy to be a forgiven child of God, to have the saving work of Jesus permeate our whole being, and to know that the Holy Spirit now lives in our lives filling our heart and soul with God's love. Real happiness is accompanied by all the gifts of God: love, joy, peace, hope and contentment.

Jesus has made all this 'real happiness' a reality. Now it is up to us to live in it and revel in the freedom and forgiveness that Jesus offers us in His sacrifice at Easter. May your lives be washed clean by the blood of the lamb and filled with real joy.

Prayer: *Lord, fill my life with the real happiness that can only be found in you. Guide me in your ways and lead me to eternal life with you. Amen.*



Human Standards

33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Matthew 20:20-28

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48 (NIV)

As my children grew, I made sure I measured them every birthday. Each of them loved to see how much they had grown from the last birthday on the chart. They were excited if they overtook a sibling in the height they were at the same age. This was one way we could measure their physical growth. But how do we measure our spiritual growth? We may use human standards by how many times we attend church, go to Bible studies, read the Bible or how much offering we give.

The trouble is that our standards are not God’s standards. In the Matthew 5 verse above, God sets His standards and they are pretty high: perfection! The Bible also states in Romans 3:23... *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”* So, how do we have any chance of attaining God’s standards?

Though our standards are not God’s standards, God can make us perfect. He laid all our sins on Jesus and took them away from us. God made Jesus small so that we could be made big in God’s sight. We have been made the sons and daughters of God through the saving action of Jesus on the cross. In God’s eyes we are now perfect – let’s try living at God’s standards!

Prayer: *Lord, help me to live my life according to your standards and not try to measure up with human standards, for your love is greater than anything else. Amen.*

Look Up!

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Hebrews 12

"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." Psalm 105:4 (NIV)

Sailing ships have always fascinated me, especially the older ones with all the ropes and sails that have to be trimmed and set to gain the most from the winds. Travelling with only the wind requires tactical knowledge by the captain and knowing the role that each sailor plays. One very important position, sometimes overlooked, is that of the sailor in the crow's nest. In earlier times, the person in this position was charged with scanning the horizon for sight of another ship or land. However, to get to the crow's nest required extreme bravery as the sailor had to climb a small rope ladder to the top of the main mast.

On a rough sea the ship would heave and sway so much that an apprentice seaman could carelessly look down while climbing and become dizzy. They could lose their grip and fall into the sea. For this reason, veteran seamen would advise the younger sailors: "Always keep your eyes toward Heaven; keep looking up and you will be safe – look down, and you will be lost."

As Christians we are to obey this guidance for our own lives. We are to keep our eyes fastened on Jesus for guidance asking the Holy Spirit to guide us safely through the uncharted waters of life. Lives can easily be shipwrecked by removing the focus from God, who is the giver of all good things in life. Let us keep our eyes firmly fixed on the goodness that comes from above as He knows what we need even before we ask of it. God will guide us with the expertise of a veteran sailor through this life and into life eternal.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for showing me how to live according to your guidelines. Help me to keep my focus on you to bring me to the goal of eternal life with you. Amen.*

The King Comes

Palm / Passion Sunday

Read: John 12:12-15

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah 9:9 (NIV)

Many years ago while walking through the city of Luxembourg, I heard music and drums and shouts from people. So I ran to the source of the noise and, low and behold, it was a parade for the Grand Ducal family of Luxembourg (the royal family). How surprised I was and I soon joined in the waving and the shouting of welcome as the limousines and bands passed by. Even though I didn't know them, I joined in the celebrations welcoming the King and Queen into the hearts and lives of their people.

Our King also entered the city of Jerusalem in a similar way. Though there wasn't music, there were the shouts from the people and the excitement of all, even though some probably didn't even know who Jesus was. Anything was used to wave in celebration - clothes, branches from the trees. Emotion-packed is the only way to describe the first Palm Sunday celebration. Crowds were singing, children caught up in the excitement were skipping and dancing. Even the disciples, uncertain of what was happening, were caught up in the enthusiasm.

The misguided crowd apparently desired a king who would bring peace through warfare but they received one who offered total peace with God through faith in the sin-cleansing blood of our Redeemer. Jesus comes to bring comfort, not fear. He comes to bring hope and drive away your anxieties. By faith, live with joy in His kingdom.

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for coming into my life to bring hope, love and especially the forgiveness of all my sins. Amen.

Remain

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: John 15:1-17

"In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain."

Psalm 102:25-26a (NIV)

As a young child looking at the world, it seems that everything will always be as it has been. Mum and Dad will always do what they have done, brothers and sisters will always be there to play with, and teachers and school will always be the same. Everything will remain as it is! As we grow we realise that things do indeed change: brothers and sisters leave home, Mum and Dad grow older, friends change - in fact everything seems to change! Can we rely on anything to remain the same?

Jesus is explaining this very fact to His disciples in John 15 and He asks them to make sure that they are grafted onto God's vine. He uses the word 'remain' eleven times in the first 10 verses. If we remain connected to God, He promises to give us whatever we require to bear fruit for Him. Being connected to God brings the constancy of His love, forgiveness and eternal life. Even in the Psalms verse above, 'remain' is used to explain the constancy of God compared to the changeability of our lives and even the physical world.

Even though the world and our lives change, God's love remains. He sent His Son Jesus to make sure of this for us and our salvation. Live in the love of God and pass on this love to others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, connect me to your love. Remain in my life so that I can remain in you to share this gift of life with others around me. Amen.



Conquerors

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Romans 8:31-39

***"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."
Romans 8:37 (NIV)***

We live in a world tormented by things that draw our attention away from God - unrest of nations, natural disasters, politics, climate change and these are just a few. Our comfortable beliefs in society are shaken by the apparent triumph of evil and the seeming defeat of everything that is good. In the latter days of His life on earth, Jesus predicted that evil would appear to be triumphant. He told us this to give us hope in the promises God gives throughout the Bible. In the death of His Son, evil would be destroyed and His love will conquer. God does not leave us to fend for ourselves. He gives us means to fend off evil. Paul explains that Christians need to clothe themselves with armour to stand up against all the evil of the world (Ephesians 6:10-18).

When Christ died, evil was forever conquered. It is still dangerous, but it has no more power. When we trust in Christ's promises, we can walk confidently knowing that we cannot be harmed. God's purposes cannot be frustrated. They will be carried out in spite of every effort to defeat them. With joy, Christ went to the cross – for it was through His cross that God worked out His great plan. The cross and death could not hold Him for on the third day Jesus rose again and conquered all that is evil. This was so that God's promises can also be ours. Our joy is confidence in knowing that God is mightier and stronger than anything else in this world.

Prayer: Lord, give me the faith to trust in your Word and promises. You are the conqueror of all evil. Help me to live in the joy you have given me. Amen.

God's Will

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: John 6:35-40

Jesus said: "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." John 6:38 (NIV)

This statement from Jesus tells the whole story of His coming - where He came from and why He came. Jesus knew why He had come to earth. At the age of twelve, He said to His parents, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49b). Years later, after performing the miracle of feeding the five thousand, certain people asked Him why He did such things. His answer is given in the above verse in John 6.

This great purpose can be clearly seen during Holy Week (the last week of Jesus' life on earth). In the Garden of Gethsemane, with all of His humanity shrinking from the great task to which His great purpose had carried Him, Jesus prayed: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) Jesus knew the will of His Father but the human side of Him did not want to suffer.

As Jesus walked the way of the cross, He knew that He was doing His Father's will. As He walked the road of suffering, Jesus could remember that God's will was being done on earth as it is in heaven. He acknowledged His Father's will and complied with it willingly. There is joy and always purpose in doing God's will. God's forgiveness and love is always present to help us when we act in a way contrary to His will. But God is always able to work good for those who love Him. Knowing and doing the perfect will of God leads to peace and contentment.

Prayer: *Lead me, Lord, to do your will. Help me know and act according to your will so that my life will be filled with your love and peace. Amen.*

Arrested And Disowned

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Read: Luke 22:47-62

"He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account." Isaiah 53:3 (NRSV)

In 1952, Adlai Stevenson, a US Democratic presidential nominee known for his wit, stated: "You know how it is in an election year. They pick a president and then for four years they pick on him."

It almost seems that this is what happened to Jesus during His last week on earth. He was celebrated and greeted as a King on Palm Sunday and then, on Maundy Thursday, He was arrested, beaten, whipped, starved and disowned by His closest friends. Could anything get worse for the man who preached only love and forgiveness to the world? As we know, things did get worse, as tomorrow we read the story of His unimaginable suffering and death on a cross.

There are times when each of us may feel rejected, despised and disowned, sometimes by our closest friends. Things are not necessarily as bad as it got for Jesus, but still it feels a lonely and unloved existence. During such times, remember there is someone who knows and understands all we are going through. We can find comfort in the arms of our Saviour who is ready to present us with His love, peace and acceptance. Ups and downs will happen throughout our lives. Who you turn to will make all the difference. Find love in our Heavenly Father, understanding in the arms of our Saviour, and comfort in the Holy Spirit to bring us forgiveness and joy in knowing that there is someone who knows, understands and cares.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you know and understand all my joys and sad times. Help me to appreciate the amazing love you have for me. Amen.

Forsaken

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Read: Psalm 22:1-21

"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"
Mark 15:34 (NIV)

This is where our sin and rebellion leads! This is where our spite, jealousy, envy, greed, immorality, lovelessness, self-centred pride, and all the other things that are anti-God, are concentrated – weighing on the heart and soul of this holy, caring, and dying Son of God. If you think your struggle hard, then consider the struggle for Him as He bears the sin and guilt of the world.

Reading the death and crucifixion story, it is all too easy to get lost in the pain He is suffering, in the agony of the cross and the tearing of the flesh caused by the nails, in the mind-bending agony of muscles, nerves and fibres stretched to the limit – and to overlook what is really happening on the hill at Calvary. It is all too easy to stand off and view these events in a detached and off-hand way, not really being involved in them. But you were involved, you really were. Your sin was there on Calvary. He paid the full price for you there.

This all happened two thousand years ago. It is indeed in the past, but it is also now, eternally now. All that you see and hear happening there culminates in death, Jesus' death, over which He breathes the triumphant: "It is finished." So, what is it that has finished? His life? His association with the disciples? His friendships? His love? No! God's plan for our redemption was finished. Our salvation is now certain and sure. His suffering and death is not the end. It is only the beginning.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving yourself as a sacrifice for me on the cross. This was only the beginning for my life with you. Amen.

The Day After

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday)

Read: Luke 23:44-56

***"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."
Psalm 48:14 (NIV)***

The commotion connected with Jesus' death on the cross had died away by the following day. The shouts for blood, like the protestations of loyalty forever, had turned into embarrassed silence. After the joy of seeing the enemy of the people hanging on the cross, dying like the 'traitor' He was, triumph didn't seem so sweet to His enemies. The previous day's eerie darkness, the shaking of the earth, the splitting of the rocks, the bursting of graves, and then the awesome tearing from top to bottom of the great curtain in the temple, revealing the Holy of Holies to all eyes, had shaken their ease. Perhaps, after all, the centurion and those with him were right when they said: *"Surely this was a righteous man."* Luke 23:47b

So, where were the disciples? On the previous day, some were out under the cross but the next day they were nowhere to be seen. Both sides seemed to be stunned by the outcome of the previous day's happenings. It must have been hard in those days for our brothers and sisters in the faith. No doubt, they were asking: 'What's happening? Where's this all going to end?'

On the cross Jesus assured us that our redemption was completed. In the following days, God's plan was building up to its finale, to showing the world the crashing crescendo of victory. This Lord is God and greatly to be praised. Easter suddenly reveals that this Jesus, whose body slept in the grave, is God. We have a living Lord and Saviour!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to find joy, comfort and freedom in the victory that Jesus won for me on the cross. Amen.

The Easter Marathon

Easter Sunday

Read: John 20:1-31

“Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.” John 20:4 (NIV)

It was early in the morning. Mary Magdalene had been to the tomb and had seen the stone rolled away. She ran and came to Simon Peter and the other disciples whom Jesus loved. Peter and John went to find out what was happening. Together, the two of them ran to the tomb. Three times in the Gospel of John we are told that people ran that day. They ran until they were out of breath. They were that excited – it was the beginning of the Easter Marathon.

Simon Peter came puffing along behind John and went right into the tomb. He looked at the grave clothes lying there. It was an exciting moment! As long as the world stands, that moment will never be forgotten. This is the finish line. The long race seems to be over. The glory of the Lord shines upon the whole world. Those first women and disciples would have been so excited, especially when they became sure of the Resurrection! They are not the only ones. Multitudes of people have come to believe in Jesus because of their witness, God’s Word to humanity.

The excitement of Easter is believing in Jesus – trusting Him, having all your confidence in Him, loving Him as He loved you, and following Him on the road, the long road, to glory. It is running the race – which can properly be called the Easter Marathon – in complete contentment, total fulfilment, and perfect peace – in the excitement of joy that Easter brings - living with Him, in Him, and for Him. Like Him, we shall live forever.

Prayer: Lord, prepare my heart to be able follow in the joy of the first disciples and run the Easter Marathon of your resurrection this Easter day. Amen.



Prayer:

Lord God, Thank you for the gift of eternal life that you so willingly gave me in the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus.

Your love lights my path and brings hope and peace to my life.

Shine into my heart with the flame of faith in your Son and our Saviour

to share the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and bring others who don't know of your love into your Kingdom.

Help me to continue to study your Word and learn about the depth of love you have for me.

Give me your comfort, grace and strength.

In your name, Amen.



Lutheran Tract Mission

175 Archer Street North Adelaide SA 5006

Phone: (08) 8360 7222

Web: www.ltm.org.au

Written by: Anne Hansen

Artist: Clint Hansen

39156

