



A DEVOTION FOR
FASTING AND FEASTING
THROUGH THE EASTER SEASON

Consider the Cross: A Devotion for Fasting and Feasting Through the Easter Season

Introduction

At Easter, we remember, confess, celebrate, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ—his life, death, and resurrection. We remember his perfection, loving sacrifice, and glorious eternal life. We confess all the ways we pursue our own way, instead of his. We celebrate the abundant life we have in him—free from the tyranny of sin and death. We proclaim him to the world, that all might hear the good news of Jesus and believe.

As a people who prioritize the gospel above all, it's good for us to make time at Easter to remember Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. So as a church, we are setting aside a season for confessing, celebrating, and proclaiming Jesus Christ. We designed this guide to support you during these weeks to grow as a disciple-making disciple.

Before Easter, we will spend two weeks [fasting](#) and reading the Gospel of Luke to remember Christ, confess the ways we disobey him, and share the gospel with people around us.

On and after Easter, we will feast to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, our new life in him, and the opportunity for life for all who would believe—like a churchwide (Holy) Spirit week! We will do this in dialogue with the first seven chapters of Acts.

Each day has a one-page devotion that follows the [Bible reading plan](#) and Daily Revival, and then, we've provided some space for you to respond on the page (or in your own journal).¹

¹ All verses in this guide are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

This Easter, we wait in eager expectation for God to act—making Jesus Christ known in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are praying that you will grow to be more like Jesus, and that God would use you to bring more people into his resurrected life.

A Quick Word About Fasting

Why do we fast? Fasting is a way to deepen our hunger for God and to grow in holiness. More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.² And so it confronts us with our need to surrender to God. It is not a way to manipulate God or coerce him to hear and answer our prayers; rather, it acknowledges our complete dependence upon him. It humbles us and awakens us to our great need for and reliance on God. As you consider fasting, we want to encourage you to listen to the Holy Spirit. Ask God to lead you in this time of seeking his face. Whether you choose to fast for one day, several days, or the entire 21 days, the point is to humble yourself in a new way and draw near to God. Here are some ideas of what you could choose:

- You might choose a selective fast, eliminating certain things from your diet. Eating only fruits and vegetables, what some might call a “Daniel fast,” is an example of this type of fasting.
- Another option is a partial fast, which is refraining from eating for a set period of time each day. You could choose to fast from a single meal or from sunup to sundown.
- Some of you may feel led to engage in a complete fast, refraining from eating and only drinking liquids for particular days or even an extended period of time.
- If, for some reason, fasting from food is not possible for you, you may want to consider other ways to capture time in this season to focus and pray. While abstaining from things like social media and television are not the same as fasting from food, they might allow you some dedicated time to pray.

² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (HarperCollins, 1978).

Day 1: April 7

“Remember, Confess, and Proclaim”

Christy Thornton

“Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” - Luke 1:78–79

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the sunrise of God’s presence and grace has visited us “from on high.” The light has come. The kingdom of God is here, and we are filled with joy!

Yet, the darkness persists—in our world and in our hearts.

We dwell among people sitting in darkness because they don’t know Jesus. In our neighborhoods, jobs, coffee shops, and gyms, we encounter people who dwell in the shadows—living in fear of death and condemnation.

And even though the light of Jesus has shone in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6), we still act like we are in darkness. John warns us that “if we say we have fellowship with him [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6). But “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Confessing sin can feel unnerving. It’s never fun to acknowledge the things you’ve done wrong! But confession is not about condemnation (John 3:17; Romans 8:1). Condemnation oppresses and hinders us from walking faithful and free in Christ. Through confession, we take the burden of sin off our shoulders, receive forgiveness, and delight in Christ’s resurrected life.

So it’s good for us to take a season to remember the gospel, to confess the ways we sin in the shadows, and to proclaim him to those around us living in the shadow of death. We ask for God to lead us to be in the light as he is in the light (1 John 1:7), and to use us to shine his light into the lives of those around us.

Respond: Ask God how he would have you fast during these two weeks. Write out the ways you want to see God move in this season of fasting and feasting, confessing and celebrating, and pray, asking God to do those works. Consider using a journal to respond each day, in order to look back and see how God is working.

Day 2: April 8

“I’m Just Not ...”

Kristy Wallace

“And the crowds asked him [John the Baptist], ‘What then shall we do?’ And he answered them, ‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.’ ... And he said to them, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.’” - Luke 3:10–11, 14b

“I’ll never be able to do this. I’m just not crafty!” My friend drops the yarn and crochet hook, collapsing her arms over them. The ladies with us in the coffee shop glance at their lopsided loops and grumble in agreement. I’ve only shown them how to make a chain and a single crochet. They haven’t made much progress. I assure them my first project was ugly too, and if they keep going, they’ll get it. Soon, conversation and pastries replace all pretense of trying.

How quick are we all to give up on something that seems out of reach? How much more if we didn’t believe we would succeed to start with?

When crowds gathered around John to hear about the Savior and to be baptized in his name, they wanted to know, “What next, John? What do we do now that we’ve trusted in Jesus?” His answers were pretty simple: Be generous. Don’t mistreat others. Be content with what God gives you.

When it comes to following Jesus, we can complicate it by expecting things of ourselves that God never does. Like my friends who judged their capacity by those fledgling attempts at crochet, we can judge our sanctification by our failures. Or worse, we think we can’t be like Jesus at all. *We’re just not ~~crafty~~ redeemable.* Just not good enough. Just not _____. We throw our hands up and grumble, “I’ll never be able to do this.” But that isn’t what God wants. He says all people can be redeemed. Not because we are able, but because *he* is.

Ephesians 2:8–10 tells us,

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Works don't save us; they are outward expressions of the saving work that Jesus has already done. And our works of faith in Christ are pretty simple: be generous, don't mistreat others, be content with what God gives you.

Respond: Confess to God where you throw your hands up, rather than putting them together in prayer. Write them down, and then, write out Ephesians 2:8 to remind you where your salvation comes from, and start to memorize it today.

Day 3: April 9

“Jesus Led Into the Wilderness”

Taylor Liles

“And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” - Luke 4:1

Why does the end of this verse sit uneasy with me? Jesus, the perfect Son of God, led by the Spirit into ... joy? comfort? peace? security? Nope. “Led by the Spirit in the wilderness.”

The wilderness is all too familiar for us. It's filled with drought and need, a place where our faith is tested to its core. Whether physical lack or spiritual depression, the wilderness is a reality for most of us. The Christian life consists of long wilderness seasons interrupted by short times of abundance. We live every day in need of God to act in our lives.

So why did Jesus go into the wilderness? Because he was human, like us. For Jesus to have a life without temptation and lack wouldn't have been truly human at all. Because of this, Jesus experienced one of the most basic needs shared by everyone: hunger (Luke 4:2). Rich or poor, everyone has been hungry. So Jesus subjected himself to hunger so that he would share in what it is to be human—to be in need.

The gospel offers a God who has suffered. We have a Savior who knows what it is like to be hungry, a Savior who has been tempted in every way (Hebrews 4:15), a Savior who has felt isolation from his friends and family. The gospel offers a Savior who has suffered in every way, even to the point of death, and through his death, Jesus leads his people out of the wilderness.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness because the wilderness is where his people reside. From the Israelites in the desert, to Israel in exile, to the church in waiting, God's people are a people of the wilderness.

Just like in the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, God is the God over the wilderness. Jesus is God over the wilderness. Jesus not only endured the pains of the wilderness, but he transforms

deserts into fruitful gardens (Isaiah 51:3)—for Jesus meets and redeems his people in the wilderness. Only Jesus can turn seasons of drought into seasons of abundance!

Respond: Where do you need to remember God's provision in the midst of difficult seasons? Reflect on God's faithfulness in your wilderness. In your journal, describe the circumstance(s) where you feel suffering. Then write, "Jesus is God of the wilderness. He can redeem."

Day 4: April 10

“With the Measure You Use ...”

Michal Rudolph

“He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.” - Luke 6:35b

How often do we categorize people as “deserving” or “undeserving” of our effort? We don’t want to be exploited or waste our effort. We glance to the right and left, measuring how we line up in comparison to others. Someone’s recent success may cause your heart to sink. You might have a list rapidly forming in your mind of the reasons they didn’t deserve the honor (or why *you* did).

But Jesus holds up a mirror to our measurement of deserving or undeserving. “How about we take the system of measurement you use with others, and I’ll use it toward you?” he says. *You judge and condemn others?* You will be judged and condemned. *You refuse to forgive?* You will not be forgiven (Luke 6:37–38). With this system, who could possibly enter his kingdom?

But what if we truly understood that he is “kind to the ungrateful and evil” (6:35)? Think about it. The *ungrateful*? They probably won’t know the value of the kindness being shown to them! (Again, here we are deciding who is “deserving.”) Thankfully, the kingdom of God does not operate by our system of measurement.

Simon the Pharisee measured the woman washing Jesus’ feet as “undeserving” (Luke 7:39), proving he didn’t understand the kingdom (7:47). Meanwhile, the Jewish elders pleaded with Jesus that the centurion “deserved” to have Jesus heal his servant because he loved their nation and had built their synagogue (7:4–5). But that’s not how the kingdom of God works.

The woman and the centurion saw clearly. They didn’t consider themselves deserving (7:6–8), but they knew Jesus was willing. They trusted him to measure them on the basis of their *need*, and like a good physician, he did (Luke 5:31–32).

Love those who love you? Lend to those who will repay you? Anyone can do that. Love your enemies? Lend, expecting nothing in return? *That’s* how to be like him (6:35, 40). We enter his

kingdom receiving forgiveness and righteousness that we don't deserve. Why? Because we needed it, and our Father is *kind* (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 2:4). Let's recognize his kindness and be more like him.

Respond: Make a list of the ways God gives you what you do not deserve. Pray through Luke 6:27–31, confessing, repenting, and asking the Lord to help you desire to do what is right in his eyes:

Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36)

Day 5: April 11

“The Most Important Story in the Bible”

Chris Pappalardo

“As [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly, two men were talking with him—Moses and Elijah. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.” - Luke 9:29–31 (CSB)

What is the most important story in the Bible?

If you were to ask a Jewish believer that question, odds are, you’d get one answer—God saving his people from slavery in Egypt.

This story, found in the book of Exodus, is referenced more than any other story in the Old Testament. It was God’s preferred way of referring to salvation (“I am the one who brought you out of Egypt”), as well as God’s primary way of identifying his people (“You are the ones I redeemed from slavery”). There’s no getting around it. The Exodus is the towering mountain of the Old Testament: Every other story either leads up to it or flows down from its summit.

Which raises the question: Is there a New Testament version of the Exodus?

Tucked into Luke’s Gospel, ever so subtly, is a phrase meant to point to the Exodus. It’s in the story of Jesus’ transfiguration: Jesus climbs a mountain, bursts into bright light, and meets with Moses and Elijah, two other prophets who met God on the top of mountains. We don’t know much about their conversation, but we are told this: “They were speaking of his *departure* ...”

Want to guess what the Greek word for “departure” is? You guessed it: *exodus*.

Jesus was intentionally re-creating the Exodus story. Moses led God’s people out of physical slavery under a tyrant king, redeemed by a sacrificial lamb, so that they could become a new

nation. Jesus does one better: He leads us out of our slavery to sin and death, redeeming us by his sacrifice on the cross, so that he could bring life and hope to *all* nations in his kingdom.

As pastor Andrew Wilson puts it, “The whole story of the Christian life is effectively an exodus story in a different key.”³ Like ancient Israel, this new exodus becomes not only the way of salvation, but the very bedrock of our new identity. Christians are—and always will be—defined by the tremendous grace of our miracle-working God. We are an exodus people.

Respond: What do you consider your core identity, your *real* self? Make a list of descriptions or draw a picture. Are there ways your list or picture should change in order for you to show (and live) your primary identity as an “*exodus person*”—more than anything, saved by grace?

³ Andrew Wilson, “How the Exodus Shapes the Whole Bible,” *Crossway*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-the-exodus-shapes-the-whole-bible/>.

Day 6: April 12

“Near to You, Near to Them”

Richard Marshall

“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them ... ‘Heal the sick in it and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”’” - Luke 10:1, 9

When the disciples arrived in the town, they met people from many walks of life, filled with countless experiences of brokenness—people who were hurting, abused, lonely, and discouraged. Some of them were frustrated and angry with God. Others were hardened against him, refusing to believe.

Imagine what it must have been like for the people in those towns to hear a stranger utter these words: “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

How would you have responded to those words? Would you have believed? Would you have rejected them? Would you have laughed or mocked them? Would you have wanted to believe, but felt it just couldn’t be true?

“The kingdom of God has come near to me?” some might have responded. “Maybe to other people, but not to me. I’m too broken. I’ve made too many mistakes. God has forsaken me.” The disciples were privileged to carry the good news of God’s nearness in the midst of suffering and tell people—for the first time—that God was close and accessible to them. God wanted to heal them. All they had to do was receive the healing work of Jesus.

What the disciples proclaimed back then, we still proclaim today—that God has come near in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The kingdom of God has come and King Jesus has sent us to be his ambassadors until the whole world knows the good news of his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus brought the kingdom of God to you, and you get the privilege and joy to be a part of Jesus bringing it to others.

Jesus is near to you, and he is near to them. Who will you tell about the good news of Jesus?

Respond: Write down the names of three people you know who are suffering or in need of Jesus, and describe their need. This week, how can you share with them the hope they can have in Christ in the midst of their suffering? When will you proclaim Christ to them in word and deed? Ask God to give you the boldness to do this.

Day 7: April 13

“Consider the Lilies”

Mike Passaro

“And he said to his disciples, ‘Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ... Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’” - Luke 12:22, 27

Jesus teaches that prayer and fasting are normal. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said “when you pray” and “when you fast” (Matthew 6:5, 16). *When*, not *if*. In fact, at least 43 times in the Gospels, Jesus is either praying or teaching his disciples to pray. He teaches us to pray about everything from our enemies (Matthew 5:44) to protection from the evil one (John 17:15), daily bread (Matthew 6:11), and the harvest of the lost (Matthew 9:38).

And yet, even with so much clear teaching on prayer and the encouraging example of Jesus’ prayers (John 17), we so often find it difficult to pray. As J.C. Ryle once wrote, “I have come to the conclusion that the great majority of professing Christians do not pray at all.”⁴

Could it be that one of the greatest obstacles to prayer and fasting is our own anxiety and worry? We are often so preoccupied with our own lives, providing for our own needs, and running at an unsustainable pace, that we fail to see that our God *knows* what we need (Luke 12:30), and he delights to provide it for us (Luke 12:31).

We worry ourselves into prayerlessness and self-dependence.

So what do we do? How do we worry less and pray more? How do we stop “worrying in God’s direction,” and instead pray to find peace in communion with God? Jesus tells us to consider the lilies. He tells us to look at the flowers. Be honest: When was the last time you slowed down

⁴ J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, 64.

enough to *consider the lilies*—to meditate and be captivated by the beauty of God’s creation and how he always provides?

Slow down to consider God’s provision in Jesus. See Jesus providing for you at the cross. See him clothing you with the robe of his righteousness—with more glory than the lilies of the field!

Respond: Take time to confess your anxiety to God. Write three to five things that cause you to worry. Ask God to replace your worry with worship. For each worry, consider the lilies, and write a reminder to yourself for how God is good and able to provide. Ask God to show you how he cares for *you* more than flowers. As you fast and “go without,” ask God to show you how, in Christ, you have no lack.

Day 8: April 14

“Discipleship and Public Accounting”

Josh Joyner

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

- Luke 14:27–30

Nothing frustrates a budding young LEGO engineer more than realizing that he doesn’t have the pieces he needs to finish the metroplex sprawling across his living room floor. Now, instead of a series of towers, streets, and houses, he has a maze of half-finished frames and nowhere good for his LEGO folk to hide. It’s a small-scale failure.

Following Jesus and becoming his disciple requires a degree of prep work that we may overlook. If we had spoken these verses, we might say that following Jesus is responding immediately to God in light of what we have right now. Jesus, however, says that life as his disciple requires making sure you have the resources to follow him until the very end, both on paper and in actuality.

Failing to count the cost of a life dedicated to following Jesus has a few different direct implications in light of Jesus’ analogy. First, you don’t get to enjoy the completed design. A disciple that fails to fully follow Jesus misses out on the life of flourishing that God designed for us. Second, the half-built house of a life brings public shame on the God we set out to glorify. To the lost world, your life is a gospel witness, and a life that lacks full commitment to Christ declares something to others about Christ himself. Lastly, poor accounting as you follow Jesus will lead to drastic consequences both for the planner and for those who are in relationship with them (Luke 14:31–33).

Following Jesus requires counting the cost for the sake of your flourishing, the sake of the gospel's public reputation, and for the sake of others in your life. Praise Jesus that he's worthy of the cost!

Respond: Think of all the significant spaces (physical or otherwise) where you live your life (e.g., home, work, gym, neighborhood, digital spaces, etc.). Draw a circle for each one, and in the circle, write out the cost of following Christ there. Then, pray over each circle and ask God to help you rightly represent him and his gospel as you endure in your faith there. Ask for opportunities to love and serve those around you well through your faith in Jesus in every area of your life.

Day 9: April 15

“The Kingdom of God—Here and Now”

Eric Gravelle

“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, “Look, here it is!” or “There!” for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” - Luke 17:20–21

Remember: Easter reminds us that the kingdom of God has arrived. Jesus didn’t come simply to encourage us to follow moral teachings, or for us to sit on the sidelines and go through the motions of faith. Jesus had a bigger and more glorious plan. He planned for all of his followers to play an active role in bringing the kingdom of God to every sphere of life. How amazing!

In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees inquired when the kingdom of God would come. They wanted Jesus to show them miraculous signs and wonders. But Jesus tells them that this new kingdom won’t arrive through a divine display of cosmic fireworks. The kingdom they were looking for had already come through the person standing right in front of them. Jesus brought the reign and rule of God to earth. In Jesus, the kingdom arrived.

The kingdom of God is not primarily a place or future event, but the active rule of God right now.⁵ Being part of God’s kingdom means aligning with his loving values and living his will in everyday life. Jesus challenges people not to wait around for a future heaven, but to live according to God’s will and power today. The power of God’s kingdom is available to us now!

Confess: The kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of self. The kingdom of God is an upside-down reality where power is expressed through humility, and greatness comes by service and sacrifice. In the kingdom of self, people live under the authority of their own desires, ambitions, and self-centeredness. Take time to confess the ways you’re building your own kingdom. How do you use God’s gifts—time, talent, relationships, and money? Do you use them

⁵ A special thanks to Dallas Willard for teaching me this.

for self-gain or for God's kingdom? Don't just confess; turn back to Jesus with joy in heart and mind. He is ready to forgive, restore, and transform.

Respond: Around Easter, people are more open to gospel conversations. How can you proclaim Christ in word and deed this week? Pray for a neighbor, love a colleague sacrificially, pursue justice and not personal gain, tell a friend about Jesus, or forgive a family member that has wronged you. Write down what God is asking you to do, and pray for his help.

Pause, spend time with Jesus, and be excited to play your role in helping others to see and experience the kingdom of God here and now. Proclaiming the kingdom isn't our duty. It's our joy in Christ!

Day 10: April 16

“Remember”

Ashley Reffit

“They understood none of these things. The meaning of the saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” - Luke 18:34 (CSB)

They were called, and they followed. In obedience, they left it all behind. They sat at his feet, served, healed, taught, doubted, obeyed, believed, questioned—and yet, they persisted. And through it all, he remained consistent.

Jesus saw in the Twelve what they could not see, what most could not see. He saw his plan, his power, and his purpose being fulfilled in and through them. He believed in them, even when they did not believe in themselves.

For three years, they followed their Rabbi—listening, learning, and growing in knowledge and power. They studied God’s Word. They studied God’s Son. They saw God’s kingdom come. They witnessed God’s power at work. It was a lot to take in, a lot to begin to understand. Even then, they didn’t fully grasp it. They knew the prophecies. They heard his message, saw his power, and trusted his promises, and yet, they struggled to comprehend.

How could they miss it? By the third time he told them, all roads pointed to him, but they still didn’t see. We wonder how they could be so blind, but we read this story from a different perspective. We know the full story—his story—played out across all of history. We remember. But why didn’t they?

It’s easy for us to question, because questioning is simpler than remembering. It’s easier to ask, wonder, or doubt than to reflect, ponder, or search. But that’s exactly what we are called to do: remember.

When life doesn’t make sense, when you’ve given your all and it still isn’t lining up the way you hoped—sit with Jesus and remember. Remember the goodness of the Lord. Recall the truth of his Word, the power of his presence, and his faithfulness in your life. Know that he has already done it all. He fulfilled these verses. He fulfilled the law. And he paid our debt on the cross. Remember.

Respond: Take time to reflect on what God has done for you. Write out a time he was faithful in your past. Then, confess the ways you doubt in your current circumstances. Surrender your need for control, and ask God to guide you in walking in obedience to his calling. Listen to “Better” by Summit Worship wherever you stream music, and share what God is showing you with someone who will keep you accountable and pray alongside you.

Day 11: April 17

“The Chief Cornerstone”

Jessica Williams

“But he looked directly at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?”’” - Luke 20:17

I don’t know a lot about construction. (OK, I don’t know *anything* about construction. Give me a LEGO set and I’m as lost as a sheep in a blizzard.) But I do know that in times past, the cornerstone was essential. My architecturally savvy friends tell me that before modern construction came about, the cornerstone was traditionally the first stone laid for a structure. All other stones after that were laid in reference to *this one stone*. Pretty important, I’d say.

Luke 20:17 comes at the tail end of a parable that Jesus told right after the religious elite of his day had the audacity to challenge his authority. In the parable, he compares Israel to a vineyard—an image that would’ve been immediately recognizable, as it hearkened back to Isaiah 5:1–7, the original place where God describes his people as a vineyard he cared for, but which did not produce fruit.

The parable in Luke 20 is actually pretty violent (if you haven’t read it, it involves the murder of the vineyard owner’s son), but what it illustrates is breathtakingly beautiful. In fact, if you zero in on what the vineyard owner (who represents God) says, you get a picture of the lengths that God was willing to go to in order to save us: “What shall I [now] do? I will send my beloved son” (Luke 20:13).

This beloved Son, as we know, was ultimately rejected and killed. Jesus was, in fact, the “stone that the builders rejected.” *He* is the chief cornerstone of our faith, and it is during this season that we remember not only his rejection and crucifixion, but his decisive defeat of sin and death at his resurrection.

What does this mean for us? If we are followers of Jesus, we (as individuals and as the church) ought to orient every aspect of our lives around him—the one steady and sure foundation. We

ought to build the tower of our discipleship on him. If we don't—if we try to live without the chief cornerstone—we're at risk of the entire building collapsing.

Respond: Are there areas of your life where you find yourself unwilling to submit to Jesus' authority as the chief cornerstone? Write these out as a way of confessing them to the Lord. For each one, write out your repentance—how you will turn back to Jesus. Ask God to align your heart toward his purposes and his ways, keeping you far from sin and close to him.

Day 12: April 18

“Good Friday”

Marsela Marshall

“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.’” - Luke 22:7–8

The Passover tradition stretches all the way back to the Exodus, when God delivered his people from their slavery and captivity in Egypt. He liberated his people after a series of 10 plagues that magnified his majesty as the one true God over all the earth. As the last of these plagues, God struck down every firstborn child of the Egyptians.

But God had mercy on his covenant people and provided protection from his wrath. He told them to prepare a Passover lamb, a lamb without blemish, as a spotless sacrifice for a people stained by their sin. They ate from its body and smeared its blood across the doorposts as protection. That night, as God struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians, he passed over the houses which were covered by the blood of the lamb. When morning came, the Egyptians wailed at the death reigning in their homes, but God’s people rejoiced for the life remaining in theirs.

You see, the Passover was a picture of a greater deliverance to come. God would liberate his people once and for all from their slavery to sin and captivity to death. And how would God accomplish this deliverance? By sending his firstborn Son to be the Passover Lamb.

As Jesus’ disciples prepared the Passover, they didn’t know they were beholding the true Lamb on the eve of his sacrifice. As he ate that Passover meal, he prepared his own body to be broken as bread, his own blood to be poured out like wine. His suffering was the price for us to feast and have life through his death.

Today, we remember that the blood-stained cross serves as the doorpost of our homes. God struck down his Son to cover us with his blood so that his wrath for sin would pass over us and

onto Jesus. Because we have faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we find hope, security, and freedom in Jesus' sacrifice for us.

By his stripes we are healed. By his death we live.

Respond: Draw a cross in the middle of the page. On the left side of the cross, write down sins that you were enslaved to before you became a believer. To the right of the cross, write "Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." Spend some time in prayer, praising God for sending Jesus to be the sacrifice for your sins, and then, listen to "Consider the Cross" by Summit Worship wherever you stream music.

Day 13: April 19

“A Poem of Sabbath Rest”

Christy Thornton

“And the Sabbath was beginning.” - Luke 23:54

Goodness, had Jesus been working.

The man was nonstop.

All day, he primed for them to dine.

At supper, he broke bread, poured wine,

and taught his disciples one more time.

But they reclined,

unclear that it was workin' time.

All through that night he worked.

He slipped back to the garden

where the blood drops

gathered like dewy mist

ushering in the sacrificial flood.

He was betrayed, arrested, mocked, scorned,

shuffled in shadows

by cowering councils until Pontius Pilate

asked the maddened masses

and they decided—“Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Even then, he kept working.

They beat him.

He poured the wine.

They hung him on the cross.

He broke the bread.

His work liked to never end.
That Lamb worked down to the bone.
And in response to sin-hissed slanders,
he labored forgiveness,
breaking our bonds with his blood.

Jesus worked until the job was done.
Then, he rested.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor ... but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:8–10).

“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9–10).

That first Holy Saturday,
the Son of God started the ceaseless Sabbath.
He did all that was necessary to save us.
He finished his work and unleashed his rest.

Come to him, all you who labor
and he will give you rest.
Come to him, all you who are weary of work
and enter his rest.

The work is his.
The rest is ours.

Respond: Listen to Andrew Peterson's "God Rested" wherever you stream music, and this Holy Saturday, remember the true Sabbath rest of God. Write out the ways you are tempted to work to earn God's favor and forgiveness. Next to each one, write "This work is his. His rest is mine."

Day 14: April 20

“Easter”

Julius Tennial II

“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’” - Luke 24:30–32

With dim eyes, two guys walk the path of grief,
comforting one another with unbelief;
they had hoped that Jesus was the one,
but then their clergy killed the Son.

But the hands that hold Jesus begin to sweat;
death strains and starts to lose his grip.
The night that had suppressed the day
gives way as darkness dissipates.

When dawn finally breaks,
the Son is found breaking bread
with the two disciples too deprived to see;
they do not deserve him staying to eat.

But behold, in these men, starved of sight,
you and I also offered the bread of life.
The One once broken offers himself again,
as through his Word we feast on the Passover lamb.

He is risen and we are welcome,
to eat the bread of his presence;
should our hearts not burn within us

at his lavish acceptance?

Respond: Write down three to five ways Jesus nourishes us in his life, death, and resurrection. Then, break the fast and celebrate! Have a big meal with family and/or friends to remember and proclaim that Christ is risen!

Day 15: April 21

“I Love to Tell the Story”

Kristy Wallace

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” - Acts 1:8

Jesus died. His disciples were grieved. Jesus rose. They were shocked. He stayed among them 40 days, teaching them about his kingdom and helping them understand what had happened. And then, with these words recorded in Acts 1:8, he left. He’d done what he came to do. It was finished.

But the disciples’ work in response to the gospel was just beginning. They were his witnesses. We are his witnesses too. Yesterday was Easter, and we celebrated the work of Jesus. Today, we remember that our work is just beginning.

It isn’t difficult work, though. It isn’t something that requires a degree or a skill. It’s simply “be my witnesses.” Tell what you have seen and heard. Proclaim Christ in word and deed. Work from your rest in Jesus.

When our first child was born after four days of labor, we told the story to everyone. It was the biggest thing going on in our lives. We could hardly talk of anything else. After a while, we quit telling the story as often. But around his birthday, or when someone else is nearing their own due date, the story will come up again, and I relish telling it with the same drama and intrigue of those early days.

When we have experienced something life-changing, don’t we want to tell the story? As time separates us from the event, we may begin to forget how amazing it was—and then something happens that brings us right back there again. Yesterday was Easter. Let this celebration bring you right back to the moment of awe when you recognized Jesus as your Savior. Let being his witnesses be a celebration that he completed the work of saving you. Consider the words of an old hymn I learned growing up in my little country church:

*"I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do."*

Respond: Take time to write down the story of your own coming to Jesus. Try to remember the revelation you experienced and the emotions you felt. Focus on the celebration of what Jesus did to forgive the sins that you committed. Praise God for what he has done for you.

Day 16: April 22

“The Easter Gift”

Eric Stortz

“Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: ‘ ...This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ... Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself!’ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them.” - Acts 2:14, 32–33, 38–40

We have so much to celebrate in Jesus’ resurrection. But wait, there’s more! After he rose again and ascended into heaven to reign as King, he gave us a gift as precious as he is. From Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, we learn a good deal about this gift—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit himself was present and active in Christ’s ministry and helped him accomplish his mission. And in many ways, that was just the beginning.

When Christ ascended, he poured out his Holy Spirit on believers—on every one of *us*! Consider what we learn about the Spirit’s activity in Acts 2:

1. The Holy Spirit performed miracles to aid the spread of the gospel (vv. 1–13).
2. The Spirit moved Peter to preach an effective gospel message (vv. 14–41).
3. The Spirit aided Christ in his ministry on earth (vv. 22–24, 32–34).
4. The Spirit inspired the texts that Peter says predicted Christ’s salvation (2 Peter 1:21, Hebrews 3:7, et al.).
5. The Spirit caused Peter’s audience to respond to the gospel in faith (vv. 40–45).

From those three thousand believers who became the first Christian converts in Acts 2, to the billions who have become Christians since then, the Spirit is ever living and active in RDU and

around the world. Wherever the gospel is preached and believed, we know the Spirit is at work in those communities. Thank you, Jesus, for sending us your Spirit!

Respond: In the early days of Acts 2, the Holy Spirit moved the new believers to worship, generosity, evangelism, meditating on biblical instruction, etc. As you remember the gospel right now, how are you responding afresh? How is the Holy Spirit working in you right now? Describe the ways in which the Holy Spirit has been working during this Easter season.

Day 17: April 23

“Weak Made Strong”

Madison Collier

“As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” - Acts 4:20 (NIV)

Easter Sunday has come and gone; our Savior has died in our place on the cross. But praise God his plan did not end with death! The cross offers final forgiveness of sin, but the *resurrection* gives us life beyond the grave.

“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11–12). Just as the cornerstone served as the focal point of a building’s foundation, Jesus is the basis on which we order our new lives—a point so important to Luke that he included this verse in both Luke and Acts!

So what does this new life look like? As we build our hope on Jesus’ blood and righteousness, it’s hard to imagine ourselves behaving as Peter and John do in Acts 4. They were healing and speaking with all boldness, for they “[could not] but speak of what [they had] seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

I find it easier to keep my head down and just put one foot in front of the other. I often think I am not like Peter, John, or any of the other disciples. But most of those laudable “Bible heroes” were nothing special.

Acts 4:13 tells us that when the leaders of the temple “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” They weren’t able to proclaim and heal because of their talents or training, but simply because they were with Jesus and received his gift of the Holy Spirit. Even the leader who opposed them recognized it.

If you've trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection to save you, remember how you are still growing in his presence in the power of his Spirit. We can trust in his name, rest on his unchanging grace, and know that our weakness is made strong in our Savior's love. Then, we can boldly proclaim what we have seen God do in Jesus, no matter the storm we face. Our Savior clothes us in his righteousness and allows us to enter eternity, faultless before the throne of God.

Respond: When it comes to telling others about Jesus, do you draw back in fear? Write out to God the reasons you feel afraid about telling people about Jesus. Then, ask God to make you courageous just like he did for the apostles, so that you can "speak [his] word with all boldness." Ask God to overcome your fears and remind you of the power of the Holy Spirit in you. Bonus: Listen to "Cornerstone" by Hillsong.

Day 18: April 24

“Worthy to Suffer”

David Parisher

“And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”

- Acts 5:40–42

Can you remember the most joy you ever felt? Maybe you got a present you really wanted, or something that you had been hoping for came true. How did you react? Did you tell your parents and friends all about it? Did you jump for joy?

Easter Sunday is a day of rejoicing for all of us. We dress up in vibrant spring colors and sing loudly to celebrate with our church family. We rejoice because our Redeemer lives and has been raised from the dead!

On that Sunday, we remind ourselves that we are called to be a rejoicing people, both on Easter and on all the days that follow (Philippians 4:4). Acts 5:41 shows us that the disciples understood this call to rejoice, even in times of suffering and persecution. They rejoiced because they were counted “worthy to suffer” for Jesus’ name!

Having been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), the disciples could not help but tell people that Jesus is the King and Savior. Even facing the threat of harm for their actions, they knew they had to tell people about Jesus. It was a joy that could not be stopped. As Peter tells the council, the apostles had to “obey God rather than men” (5:29).

As we reflect on Easter, we have been given the same task as the apostles. We are called to proclaim Christ in word and deed in RDU and around the world. Like the apostles, the world may tell us to stop speaking in that name (5:40). When we are filled with the joy of Christ by his Spirit,

we overflow and spill out the hope of the gospel to all. We cannot help but tell people about Jesus, even when they do not receive it.

So go boldly and live sent this week. Proclaim that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Respond: Write out all the ways you rejoice in Jesus. How has he filled you with exuberant joy? Then, think of someone in your life that you know needs to hear the gospel, and ask God for the opportunity to let your joy overflow by sharing the gospel with them this week. If he shows you a time, write down when you will tell them.

Day 19: April 25

“Fully Full”

Janetta Oni

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.” - Acts 6:3

Dinner often goes like this in my house: “Mom, I’m done! I don’t want to eat more vegetables. I’m full!” followed in short succession by, “Can I have dessert?” And with that final request, my kids unintentionally expose a truth: how one can both be full and still have room for more. I’d love to call out the blatant deception in their mealtime “gaslighting,” but Acts 6 shows us that fullness can have layers. Maybe my kids are onto something. (But don’t tell them that.)

Acts 6 is full of the word “full”: The “full number of disciples” (v. 2); men chosen to serve who were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (v. 3); Stephen, a man “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 5); Stephen again, described as being “full of grace and power” (v. 8). “Full” in Acts 6 is not full like you feel after eating a big meal—it’s full like you’re a cup filled to the brim, but the water keeps coming and starts spilling everywhere.

Stephen is that kind of “fully full” of faith, wisdom, grace, and power, and his fullness was dynamic. It impacted everyone around him. Stephen was already full, yet the Spirit kept filling him. He overflowed so much that his face literally shone like an angel’s (v. 15).

For Stephen, fullness wasn’t a stopping point—it was a launching pad. Our “fully fullness” is too!

That kind of fullness doesn’t stay hidden. How could it? Even when people opposed him, they “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (v. 10). Fullness, when rooted in the Spirit, doesn’t just hold steady (which often feels like a pretty good result to us); it overflows and multiplies.

The Easter story paints for us the ultimate picture of “fully full.” The empty tomb is a paradox: It looks empty, but actually, it’s filled to the brim. It teems over with the fullness of God’s victory over death, the fulfillment of his promises, and the abundant life now available to us in Jesus.

“Fully full” doesn’t stop. It never runs dry. The Spirit’s fullness is dynamic, overwhelmingly spilling everywhere, demanding and providing more and more and more.

Respond: Write your name, followed by the “fully full” description from Acts 6:5. (For example: “Janetta, a woman full of the Spirit and of wisdom, full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, full of grace and power.”) Now, begin to imagine how God is making these qualities true of you. What might be standing in the way of this becoming a reality in your life? Take some time to reflect and write those things down, and ask God’s Spirit to make you fully full and overflowing.

Day 20: April 26

“You Become What You Behold”

Chris Gaynor

“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ... And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” - Acts 7:55, 59–60

Following Jesus does not guarantee a life that is free of pain and hardship. Even Jesus told us that we should expect trouble. And he reminded us that by his death and resurrection, he had overcome the world. Hebrews 12:2 exhorts us to look to Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Over and over again, the Scriptures encourage us to fix our eyes on Jesus and gaze on the beauty of the Lord. It’s clear that what we look at determines our direction. We become what we behold. We are changed by what we see. It matters where we set our sights. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18a).

Long before he reached this climactic moment in his life, Stephen had been looking at Jesus. His mind and heart were set on the One who suffered and died so he could live. Stephen had been transformed by gazing on God’s grace to him in Jesus. He was overwhelmed and undone by the reality of what Jesus had done for him. No fear. Only faith and hope and love. So it is no wonder that in his final moments, his response to his tormentors sounded very much like Jesus: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46); “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Looking at Jesus, he became like Jesus.

Respond: Wherever you are, whatever you are facing, look to Jesus. Ask God to transform you as you behold the glory of God in the face of Christ. Use this old hymn to help you rejoice in Christ:

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest;

Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with His goodness, lost in His love.”

Write out your story or song to Jesus, praising him for his work in the gospel and in your life, and share it with someone today.

Day 21: April 27

“Now and Forever, I’ll Still Be Boasting in His Grace”

Christy Thornton

The life of a disciple-making disciple runs on the rhythm of the resurrection. So while our fasting and feasting Easter devotional may be ending, the true feast has barely begun.

Every day, we celebrate Jesus and his gospel. Every day, we delight that the kingdom of God has come near to us. Every day, we behold our King, the exalted One. Every day, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and in our fullness we overflow with the good news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

We live every day unto the Savior, unto the Son. He has overcome the grave. Now and forever, we boast in his grace. We raise the banner, that all the world would know his name—Jesus. Hallelujah!

We offer our lives as living sacrifices of worship and witness—knowing God and making him known.

Delight in Jesus and his gospel by listening to “Exalted One” by Summit Worship wherever you stream music. Let your life today, tomorrow, and all your days be a never-ending celebration of Christ.