



## Lent Devotional Week 3

Wednesday, March 11  
through Tuesday, March 17

### Wednesday, March 11 Be who God intended for you to be

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."*

*"Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries (prayer boxes with scripture) wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others." Matthew 23:1-7*

Jesus is saying to the Pharisees that their religion is essentially for show. It is about how they will be perceived as spiritual, how they try to say the right things with the right tone of voice. How they will look proper with cutting edge religious attire and then be addressed with special names to give them respect. But Jesus counters this with:

*"...whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."  
Matthew 23:12*

Jesus is not interested in who you can pretend to be. He is very interested in the real you, the 'you' who He loves deeply, the person who God created you to be – his masterpiece. So we need to stop pretending to be somebody else such that we don't even know who we are.

*“For we are His workmanship (masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10*

This does not mean that we go out in the world and tell everyone we see our deepest, darkest secrets. This is about deepening our relationship and union with Jesus, which requires us to get very honest about who we are. It is about changing our hearts from the inside such that what comes out of us into the world will be good and true, and then we can shine as lights in this world to point the way to our Lord and Savior.

Prayer - Father, we desire to stop lying to ourselves and trying to hide from you, as if that was really possible. Yet sometimes we try or don't realize that we are not even being honest with ourselves. We want to change that now and be completely and rigorously honest with you first and foremost. Then from there everything can flow outward to be used for your good works as you intended.

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## **Thursday, March 12** **Upside Down and Backwards**

*Woe to you, you teachers of the law and Pharisees. There is such a gulf between what you say and what you do. You will stand before a crowd and lock the door of the kingdom of heaven right in front of everyone; you won't enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from doing so.*

*Woe to you, you teachers of the law and Pharisees. What you say is not what you do. You steal the homes from under the widows while you pretend to pray for them. You will suffer great condemnation for this.*

*Woe to you Pharisees, woe to you who teach the law, hypocrites! You traverse hills and mountains and seas to make one convert, and then when he does convert, you make him much more a son of hell than you are.” Matthew 23:13-15*

Woah! Tell us how you really feel, Jesus! And He is just getting started. Read Matthew 23:13-39 for the full effect. Since the time of Abraham and the children of Israel, these religious leader descendants set apart for God, have over time, totally lost the plot of the story. It all gets so twisted that they eventually crucify the one who came to save them. They were focused on the wrong things. They had it all backwards.

*“You remove fine layers of film and dust from the outside of a cup or bowl, but you leave the inside full of greed and covetousness and self-indulgence.” Verse 25*

The people who missed it the most and did away with Jesus were those entrusted to bring the people to God. Jesus is saying to them, “I have come for you and you’re refusing me.” Doesn’t that just break your heart for God?

For some reason though, He loves us and He is still putting up of with us and inviting us to open our hearts to Him. We want to invite His Spirit to live within us with a clean, pure heart for God rather than for the world to flood into us with its influence such that we try to just look good on the outside.

Prayer – Father, we thank you that you love us and have never given up on us. And we want to say how much we do love you. We want to keep guarding our hearts from all the things that can seduce us away from you. Sometimes we worry more about outside appearances than what is going on within us. But what is in our hearts will eventually pour out into the world around us. Help us to guard our hearts from guilt, anger, greed, envy, pride and other emotions that can keep us from living in your joy and peace and from loving others with a healthy and pure heart. Amen

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## Friday, March 13 Wisdom

*Isn't Lady Wisdom calling?*

*Listen; don't you hear the voice of understanding crying out?*

*She's taken her stand at the highest place in the city,  
at the crossroads where everyone can see her.*

*There, and at the gates, at the entrance to the city,  
right in front of the city doors she cries out. Proverbs 8:1-3*

I often wonder why I take the foolish path full of regrets rather than the wise path that would have made life so much easier and better for me. Often it is because I just charge down a particular path without pausing to listen to Wisdom. Proverbs tells us that Wisdom is not hiding in the shadows, but standing in the highest place, at the crossroads, where everyone can see her.

We come to junctures in our lives every single day; crossroads, big and small, and Wisdom is there at each of them. The question becomes whether or not we slow down enough to listen, or whether we just zoom by making whatever turn we're going to make. Perhaps it is what everyone else is doing, or it isn't really a bad thing or illegal – but is it really the wise thing for you to do? My past is different than your past and what is okay for you may not be good for me. Proverbs is telling us that Wisdom is available to us if we will listen.

We may want to pay attention to this. It could change the rest of our year. So, let's do this. When you get to one of those critical crossroads slow down enough to ask, "Given my unique circumstances and my future goals, what is the wise thing for me to do?" Even if you answer that and then chose to do something else, you will at least know that you are choosing the foolish path rather than the wise path and you can see how that turns out for you.

*Correction by wisdom is your most valuable possession. Proverbs 8:10.*

Prayer – Father, we ask for Wisdom at all our crossroads this week. Gives us ears to hear Wisdom calling to us and directing us as we journey through this life. The world will draw us away on wrong paths. Each of us is unique and in a particular season of life where the wise choice for me might be quite different than for anyone else. Thank you for this most valuable gift called Wisdom that you have made available to us. Help us to develop the habit to seek Wisdom at every crossroad. Amen.

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## **Saturday, March 14**

### **Living in the Moment**

*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? Matthew 6:26-27*

I was skiing in an open field just after a recent snow and spotted a creature thrashing about a little way ahead. As I got closer, I could tell it was a raven. At first, I thought it was mortally injured, but then realized that the movements were light and springy, almost joyous. The raven was actually rolling in the snow, then spreading its wings while inverted like it was making "raven angels", then turning, dipping up and down in the fluffy white powder as though this was a bird bath. If a raven could smile or laugh, I believe this one was doing just that. As I approached, the bird flew off a short distance and then resumed his entertainment. This raven was thoroughly enjoying the moment.

I realized how much I was missing by not doing the same. I was so fixated on a particular life problem, that I hardly noticed what I was doing, where I was, and what was around me. I was missing out on the gift of this moment with which the Lord had blessed me. There was nothing I could change by worrying about my particular issue or by reliving all the possible different scenarios about what I could have, should have, or would have done. Like if I thought about it hard enough, I could somehow change the reality of it all.

Why not just let go of it, even for a few minutes, and give it to the Lord? What if I was just still, and rested and trusted in the Lord. I stopped and gave thanks for the day and the blessings of this moment. Suddenly I really saw where I was with new eyes and all the amazing beauty that surrounded me. And I smiled and laughed with the raven.

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28*

Prayer - Father, thank you for all the blessings in each day that we often miss because we are so preoccupied with this world and all the distractions and endless tasks and problems that come our way. Help us to pause, be still, and know that you are God. Psalm 46:10

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## **Sunday, March 15 Who has The Truth?**

*John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn’t following us.”*

*“Don’t stop him,” said Jesus, “because there is no one who will perform a miracle in my name who can soon afterward speak evil of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. And whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ —truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward. Mark 9:38-41*

There are a lot of Christian denominations out there. Depending on how you define a denomination, the numbers range from over a 1,000 (Wikipedia) to over 40,000. (Christianity Statistics) Whatever the number, that is a lot! All of them differing on some fine points of theology or culture. Each thinks they have it right and the ‘other groups’, who see it differently, have it wrong. So the ultimate question then becomes, “Who gets to be in the Kingdom?” But none of us have a say in that. It is, after all, God’s Kingdom. And each group can struggle with the idea that God could use ‘those people’ who think and believe differently than we do, because ‘those people’ are not really ‘in.’

In the verses above, John had observed someone trying to imitate and follow Jesus, and then tried to shut him down because he was not a part of their little group. But Jesus corrected John and said “Don’t stop him.” Even someone doing something as simple as serving a glass of water in His name isn’t going to go unrecognized. Around Jesus the same thing was going on with the Pharisees, who tried so hard to follow every detail of the law that they lost the whole point of the law, and pretty much told God that He had it all wrong.

And just like the Pharisees, the reason behind all this is fear. We want to get it right. That is understandable. But it keeps us humble to know that no one but God knows the absolute truth. There is so much that we don’t fully understand. We need to live in grace and love towards others and not in fear.

*But we have not received a spirit that makes us fearful slaves. We received God’s Spirit when he adopted us as his own children. (Romans 8:15)*

If we seek Him, we will find Him.

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

*“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Romans 7:7-12*

We need to realize that we are all at different points in our journey. Criticizing anyone else's journey does not further ours. It actually hinders it and we risk becoming like the Pharisees.

Prayer – Father, when we encounter you moving in other people's lives in ways we do not understand, or see them at different points in their journey, help us to have the humility such that we do not criticize them and become like the Pharisees. We recognize that none of us have all of this sorted out. Only you know the complete truth. We are all going through a process towards knowing you more, loving you more, and drawing closer to you. May we offer others the same grace that you have given us as we step forward in faith, and love our neighbors as ourselves.

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## **Monday, March 16**

### **Super Placebos**

A placebo is a harmless pill, medicine, or procedure prescribed more for the psychological benefit to the patient than for any physiological effect. You have likely heard about any number of experiments where one group was given a real medication to alleviate an illness and another group was given a harmless sugar pill (placebo), and then the groups were compared at the end.

If the medication really helped, you would expect that the group taking it would do better than the placebo group. This comparison tries to differentiate between real results and the power of suggestion. If you really believe something is going to work, sometimes it does just by the power of your belief.

This power of the brain is so strong, scientists tried an experiment using only placebos. People knew they were getting a placebo as a remedy for their illness. One group got an ordinary placebo and the other group got the 'Extra Strength Super Placebo.' The group taking the Extra Strength Super Placebo had consistently and significantly better improvements from their illness verses those just taking the regular placebo.

Some believe that religion and prayer is simply a super placebo. We want it to be true so much that it becomes true for us and we see what we want to see. So is faith just a placebo? There is no

denying the power of positive thinking. But Christianity is better than that. Something actually happened in the first century such that we measure time in accordance with BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini – Year of the Lord). We have numerous eye witness accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection which are now preserved in what we call the New Testament section of the Bible with better documentation than much of our other history in the world.

*And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. 1 Corinthians 15:14*

The most important question that you must answer is this: Who is Jesus to you?

*Then he (Jesus) asked them, "But who do you say I am?"*

*Peter replied, "You are the Messiah sent from God!" Luke 9:20*

Prayer- Father, thank you for the gift of life that we have been given and the chance to be brought back into fellowship and union with you. It is a free gift that you offer us. We can't earn it, achieve it, or sacrifice for it - but only accept it. We reflect this season on what it cost you to redeem us and the mystery that you could love us with such a great love that we cannot comprehend it. Amen

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## **Tuesday, March 17**

### **Mission Statements – What is Yours?**

*"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights," James 1:17*

Most successful businesses have a mission statement, which is the bottom line of why the business exists. Here are some examples.

- **Smithsonian:** The increase and diffusion of knowledge.
- **American Heart Association:** To build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.
- **Heifer International:** To work with communities to end hunger and poverty and care for the Earth.
- **Freedom Church Los Alamos** – Helping people take their next steps with Jesus together.

What is your mission statement? As Jesus followers it might be something like, "Bringing glory to God in all that we do" and living in accordance with Jesus' final directions to us:

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34*

How do you best honor God? Honor those who God honors. And who does God honor and love? Everyone around you. Honoring and loving others is evidence of honoring and loving God. And that 'everyone' includes you, so be careful not to dishonor yourself in the choices you make.

*"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

Prayer - Father, we want to live for you. We have tried living for ourselves and it does not work. We were created to live for you and in relationship with you. Your spirit dwells in us and in every person who belongs to you. Help us to consider carefully all of our decisions such that we chose the path that honors you, our own bodies, and all those who you love. Amen