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Lenten

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE







Paul Gustave Louis Christophe Doré (1832–1883) was a French artist born in Strasbourg, France. Because of an anxious personality, Doré sought calm in his Christian faith. He was fascinated with Jesus Christ and enjoyed huge success for his remarkable depictions of biblical scenes. Like fellow contemporary painter Edouard Manet, who was born and died in the same years, Doré was misunderstood for the unusual visionary nature of his work and the visual intelligence of his compositions.

IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Matthew 1:1–25

Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. *Matthew 1:19*

REFLECT

No one ever had a family history like Jesus. God, the Father of Jesus, selected two people, Mary and Joseph, out of all the people in the world to be His earthly parents. In Matthew 1, we learn about the family tree of Joseph. Joseph was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs of the nation of Israel. Boaz, Ruth, and David are also found in Joseph's genealogy. There are even a few ancestors of questionable repute such as Rahab, Amon, and Manasseh. Learning about these people reveals something about human nature. Joseph's ancestors were people who, just like us, were imperfect. Yet, many of Joseph's ancestors were also in close relationship with God. They talked with the Lord, listened for His leading, and obeyed Him. The Lord blessed them for their faithfulness.

God chose Mary, a young, blameless virgin to be the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, a humble, righteous carpenter to be the earthly father of the King of Kings. Since Joseph was engaged to Mary, he could have divorced her because she was pregnant. She could have been stoned to death according to Jewish law, and Joseph could have thrown the first stone. However, he did not want Mary to be hurt and decided to divorce her quietly. He was a kind and compassionate man.

Joseph and Mary were both visited by angels who shared God's message with them. They were obedient to the Lord and accepted God's calling. This obedience required great faithfulness, devotion, and discipline. We may never have an angelic visit, but our faith in God should grow stronger, our devotion deepen, and our obedience to His will become more disciplined as we grow in relationship with Him.

Joseph protected Mary and took care of her. He followed the plan set before him and reflected God's righteousness. God blessed Joseph with some wonderful role models in his family tree. We can look to Joseph and many in his genealogy to find examples of people who closely followed God and who the Lord used to demonstrate His love for all people. May others see the Lord in us as we walk closely with Him just as we see Him working in and through the lives of Joseph and his ancestors.

PRAY

Father, we praise You for the opportunity to walk with You every day and be led by the Holy Spirit. Thank you for the example of Joseph and others who lived in close relationship with You. Help us to be compassionate, loving, and obedient, and to reflect Your love for all people. Amen.



Vicky Dennis

Vicky is a retired teacher and a former Dawson staff member. She has co-facilitated several Bible studies through the years, is a member of the Vaughan-Blackman Life Group, and volunteers at The Learning Center.

THURSDAY, MARCH 3

FOLLOW THE LIGHT

Matthew 2:1–12

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

Matthew 2:10

REFLECT

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite things my daddy and I used to do was take a quilt out in our backyard at night to look at the stars. Yes, we talked about the stars, but mostly we just talked and spent time together. I loved to be with my daddy, and the times spent in the dark yard looking at stars are a special memory. God's grace provided a Christian home and loving parents for me as I grew to know Him as my Father.

God promises that those who seek Him will find Him. Why do some people ignore His nudges, His revelation of Himself to them, and reject Him? In Matthew 2:1-12, we read about a special group of wise and studied men, the Magi, whose attention was captured by an unusual light God purposely placed in the night sky. God used this light, a star, to draw them to Him in the form of His infant Son, Jesus. The guidance of God to the wise men as they visited, along with their gifts and worship, point to the true identity of the infant King as God's Son. Regardless of God's work in their hearts or what they knew about the star and the infant, God clearly led them into the presence of His Son. They faithfully responded and pursued the light, and God faithfully led them.

God prepared the Magi for their worship by impressing upon them to bring costly gifts or treasures to offer, gifts that were worthy of a king. Gold, a highly precious metal reflecting royalty, because Jesus was the promised King. Frankincense, a costly incense used in worship, because Jesus was worthy of worship. Myrrh, a sweet-smelling resin, used for burial. While myrrh was not a gift usually given to a child, God led them to choose it as a further reminder that this child was born to die a sacrificial death to save humanity.

The Jewish people of this time knew that Micah 5:2 clearly identified Bethlehem as the site of the promised Messiah's birth. The significance of the Magi's visit and their resulting worship caused an uproar in Jerusalem. God, again, guided the Magi in a dream to return home using an alternate route to avoid Herod. God protected Mary, Joseph, and Jesus through the faithful obedience of the Magi. The star—the light of Jesus—caught their attention and awakened their hearts. God reveals Himself to all of us. His love, salvation, and guidance are accessible to anyone who seeks Him and responds to Him. What an amazing God who knows us, loves us, and reaches out to save us. Like the Magi, will we respond to the light God shines on us?

PRAY

Holy Father, thank You for loving selfish sinners, like us, enough to sacrifice Your precious Son to save us. Thank You that You never stop pursuing us. Amen.



Donna Allan

Donna has been on staff as Associate Minister to Preschoolers since 2000. She and her husband, Jim, have been Dawson members for 34 years. They have two adult sons and a daughter-in-law, James and Miller and Shea.

FRIDAY, MARCH 4

GOD'S PLANS AREN'T ALWAYS OUR PLANS

Matthew 2:13–23

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

Matthew 2:13

REFLECT

Have a plan. Know the plan. Execute the plan, and achieve a desired outcome. We all follow this line of thinking to some degree. It has been ingrained into our minds since childhood. Militaries have a plan. Sports teams have a plan. Businesses have a plan. The Boy Scouts motto is “Be Prepared,” which encourages our youth to have a plan in all situations. Having a plan of your own is not a bad thing. However, we all know that life does not always go as we planned.

In Matthew 2, the Lord suddenly altered Joseph’s plan for his young family. We pick up in verse 13 and can speculate that Joseph had a plan to return to a simple way of life in his small hometown of Nazareth near Galilee, but God had other plans.

Due to the imminent danger to the Christ child brought on by King Herod’s extreme jealousy, fear, and pride, God communicated an alternate plan to Joseph. In a dream, an angel of the Lord told Joseph to take his family to Egypt to escape the danger and remain there until King Herod’s death. The Bible tells us that Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary that very night. What faith Joseph must have had! What obedience to the Lord Joseph displayed. Traveling to a foreign country on foot, at a moment’s notice, and being told to stay there for an indefinite period of time probably was not Joseph’s original desire.

In Matthew 2:19–23, we read about additional occasions where Joseph faithfully and obediently followed God’s instructions and plans to bring Jesus and Mary back to Israel. Joseph’s actions in these verses display three main things. The first is that Joseph obeyed God and kept Jesus, our Messiah, safe as a child so that He could grow and fulfill His mission here on earth. The second is that Joseph’s actions fulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament prophets such as Jeremiah and Hosea. The third is that Joseph is an example for each of us to follow and imitate when it comes to faithfully obeying God when He changes our plans and implements His own for our lives.

PRAY

God, our Provider, we marvel that You care for each individual personally. Thank You for giving Joseph dreams for guidance and a trusting heart to follow You. Help us to discern the nudges and leading of Your Holy Spirit. May we take action swiftly in response to Your call, O Lord. Amen.



Matt Parker

Matt and his wife, Allison, have been members of Dawson for seven years and have been active at Dawson through Life Group leadership, serving on the Finance Team, and serving on the Sunday Morning Greeting Team. Their children, Mac, Colton, Ellie, and Davis are also actively engaged at Dawson.

Psalm 32

- Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- 2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- 3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah
- 5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah
- 6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.
- 7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- 9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.
- 10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
- 11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

BEAR FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE

Matthew 3:1–17

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 3:2

REFLECT

In Matthew 3, we read about John the Baptist’s message and vocation. People in his day may have expected John to become a priest like his father, Zechariah, or a respected rabbi that taught in the temple in Jerusalem. Four hundred years had passed since Malachi had prophesied that God would send His messenger to prepare the way for the Lord’s coming. Matthew wrote that John fulfilled the prophecies of Malachi (3:1), Isaiah (40:3), and his own father (Luke 1:76). He was the voice in the wilderness who had come to “prepare the way of the Lord” (Matthew 3:3).

In the Gospel of Luke, he wrote that “the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel” (Luke 1:80). John made his public appearance in the temple wearing a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist. His clothing reminds us of the description of Elijah noted in 2 Kings 1:8. John did not dine on culinary delicacies, but on locusts and wild honey, food that was permitted by the Law and readily available in the area.

John’s message was simple and straightforward: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Many of the people who heard the message confessed their sins and were baptized. However, not all those who came to hear John repented. Repentance involves a change in the way we think that results in behaviors that reflect that new way of thinking. John told his listeners, which included Jewish religious leaders, to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” John was calling his listeners to repent (to turn from sin) and let go of the attitudes and behaviors that did not align with the Scriptures. Later, Paul exhorted believers to exhibit behaviors that demonstrate turning away from seeking to gratify the desires of the flesh and instead display evidence of seeking to walk by the Holy Spirit. When we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, we are empowered to bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

How is it possible to bear fruit in keeping with repentance? In John 15:5, we have the answer. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

PRAY

Lord Jesus, the desire of our heart is to be in right relationship with You. We want to bear fruit that is in keeping with repentance, and we know that is only possible as we abide in our Savior, Jesus. Search our thoughts and hearts, and as we confess our sins, forgive us and cleanse us so that we will bear much fruit. Amen.



Cyndi Cortes

Cyndi has been a member of Dawson since 1989. She has served at Dawson by teaching Senior Adults, GAs, and Acteens, and has participated in numerous Dawson-sponsored mission trips. She enjoys volunteering with Hearts & Hands and at The Learning Center where she teaches science and leads a Bible Study.



“REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM
OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.”

MATTHEW 3:2

MONDAY, MARCH 7

TEMPTED

Matthew 4:1–11

Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”
Matthew 4:10

REFLECT

In these verses, Satan tested Jesus. This followed Jesus’ baptism and took place in the wilderness where Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. It is important to remember that Satan’s temptations are real. Satan first approached Jesus with a natural temptation during fasting, the physical need for food. Jesus responded by saying, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” An easy weakness that Satan thought he had found was quickly denied by Jesus because He knew God’s word and obeyed it.

Next, Satan tempted Jesus by taking Him to the highest point of the temple in the holy city. Satan tempted Jesus with the emotional need of security and protection. In this temptation, Jesus could have shown His power because He knew that God would protect Him. However, Jesus responded by saying, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Again, Jesus used God’s word and obeyed it.

Finally, Satan tempted Jesus by taking Him to a very high mountain and offering kingdoms if only Jesus would worship him. Satan tempted Jesus with power and pride. Jesus responded by saying, “Be gone Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” Jesus used God’s word again.

Satan attacks all of us. When that happens in my life, I think of Satan as trying to halt or slow down God’s purpose for me or for others in my circle of influence. These verses remind us of Jesus’ humanity, and they provide a model for us to use whenever we are tempted by Satan. Satan’s temptations are real, and all followers of Jesus need to be alert and ready for them. Here are some ways to prepare ourselves:

1. Know God’s Word – attend and participate in corporate worship; read the Bible; participate in small group Bible Study
2. Be an Active Participant – teach a Life Group; join the Choir; volunteer for a mission activity; help at Kids Connection
3. Pray – actively communicate with God through prayer; take your praises, worries, temptations, and emotions to God

You might have other ways to prepare yourself for those temptations, but the bottom line is that Jesus has given us the model to follow to defeat Satan.

PRAY

Thank You, God, for sending Your Son Jesus to live among us and to be our Savior. Help us to prepare for the temptations that are to come our way. Let us live in Your presence at all times. Amen.



Bill Cleveland

Bill has been a member of Dawson his entire life. He and his wife, Jennifer, have taught various Life Groups, and are members of the Sanctuary Choir. Their son, Andrew, lives in Memphis, and their daughter, Mary Katherine, will graduate from Auburn in May.

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

DON'T IGNORE THE CALL

Matthew 4:12–25

And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” *Matthew 4:19*

REFLECT

My wife and I live in a country where the Islamic call to prayer is broadcast in Arabic from loudspeakers mounted on mosque towers called minarets. This happens five times each day, 365 days a year. Although this call to prayer can't be missed, it can be ignored. It can become so common and so familiar that the broadcast blends in with the other sounds of daily life, and you no longer “hear” the call.

In today's Scripture reading, we hear Jesus' call. Though the call of Jesus may be familiar to us, we should not ignore it. We hear His call to repent (v. 17), to follow (v. 19), and to emulate His priorities (v. 23).

1. Do not ignore the call to repent. Turn from a self-focused lifestyle, from trusting in human achievement to gain right-standing with God, and then turn toward Jesus. As we turn toward Jesus, we will experience an outpouring of His presence, mercy, and grace.
2. Do not ignore the call to follow. Jesus invites us to follow Him, not a prescribed religious formula. What an invitation! As we follow Him, we discover that He equips us and aligns our lives with His eternal purposes.
3. Do not ignore the invitation to emulate Jesus' priorities by these three things:
 - Teach God's truths, which reveal Himself and have power to transform lives.
 - Preach the Good News—a way has been provided for sinful humans to be reconciled to God and enjoy a right relationship with Him. That WAY is Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
 - Heal by being attentive to the physical and emotional needs of those around us and allowing God to work His healing power in their lives.

It was our privilege to partner with the Dawson Family of Faith during the Go Love Tell missions emphasis in Southeast Asia. This initiative was strategically aligned with Jesus' priorities. Our Lord was honored in a distant land through your obedient response to His call.

PRAY

Father, give us ears to hear the voice of our Good Shepherd—calling us to repent, to follow Him daily, and to live a life that reflects His priorities. Help us to see the divinely-orchestrated moments each day whereby we can boldly proclaim Your greatness and salvation. Amen.



Ken Jacks

Ken and his wife, Jonja, are members of Dawson and serve in Southeast Asia.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Matthew 5:1–16

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” *Matthew 5:16*

REFLECT

The Sermon on the Mount begins in Matthew 5. Jesus started with the Beatitudes, describing those who are blessed. Most of us, when we think of being blessed, gravitate towards things that are temporal or dependent on ourselves: possessions, power, family, etc. But in the Beatitudes, Jesus talked of blessing in a way that most would not have expected. He talked not of people who are powerful, but those who consider others before themselves. He also talked of those who show mercy and promote peace. What is their reason for being blessed? Their blessing comes from Christ Himself, for He extends them His mercy, brings them comfort and fulfillment, and He offers them the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus went on to say that we (His followers) are the light of the world. I love that He uses the example of light. Light attracts us. When we are in a dark place our eyes are naturally drawn to the light. Light helps us to see what is around us and gives us a sense of peace. It also penetrates the darkness.

When I was in high school, I was a camp counselor each summer. Our camp director taught us a fun illustration to use with the kids. He would bring out a box and tell them he had darkness trapped inside the box. He would then tease the kids by asking if he should let the darkness out. We would count to three, and He would open the box acting like he was throwing the darkness at them. The kids would be so nervous, only to find out that the darkness was gone when the box was opened. The light overtook it.

This is the reason Jesus came. He came to expel the darkness. He came to bring us peace, show us the way, be an example of how we are to live, and lead us to the abundant blessings we have in Him. When we consider and truly begin to grasp all that we have in Christ, it should change us. Isaac Watts said it well, “When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.” Our mindset changes when we come to know Christ. What we desire and chase after changes. Where we find our hope and peace changes.

PRAY

As we “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” may we truly be the light of the world. May the way we live our lives attract others and bring truth to those around us. May we let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to You. Amen.



Lacey Middleton

Lacey and her husband, Brian, came to Dawson through Together for Life. They now serve as Life Group Leaders for the College Ministry. They have four children, Emma, Ella, Michael, and Maybrie.

THURSDAY, MARCH 10

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Matthew 5:17–37

“For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” *Matthew 5:20*

REFLECT

As Christians, we identify as followers of Jesus; but is there more to understanding our spiritual identity? We trace our spiritual identities to the appropriation of God’s righteousness to our hearts through salvation in Jesus Christ. In His discourse on discipleship, Jesus described an alternative world; not the place Heaven, but the supernatural realm, reign, power, and presence of God, already realized in the disciples’ midst.

In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus said He fulfilled the law because He, not the law, has ultimate authority. Jesus revealed the ultimate meaning of the law by lifting the veil of the law and turning it inward to the heart. The phrase “I came to” denotes Jesus’ mission; that is, He came to mediate the righteousness of God to those who would believe. The righteousness that God gives is far greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees because it is based, not on the outward performance of or meticulous adherence to the law, but rather, it is based on an inward transformation of the heart by God. Jesus’ intent was to teach the disciples that those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven are to demonstrate righteous character and behavior that reflects life in the Kingdom of Heaven. God’s salvation transforms us both in right relationship with Him and in the right way to live that relationship.

By means of six case studies (5:21–48), Jesus demonstrated the ways in which His commandments go beyond the letter of the law by vividly portraying the righteousness of God’s rule that underlies the Mosaic code and how God’s righteousness brings restoration and reconciliation between one another. Thus, the legal code prohibited murder and adultery but not outbursts of anger, expressions of contempt and lustful looks—Jesus prohibits these in order to emphasize that the transformative nature of God’s rule replaces the willfulness of the believer.

Our orientation within the Kingdom of Heaven while here on earth, by God’s righteousness, is the origin of our spiritual identity; living in His kingdom is where we find true meaning and purpose. May we be empowered by God to demonstrate righteous character before His holy presence and to persevere with spiritual resilience during the wearisome times and sufferings of our lives.

PRAY

Lord, thank You for Your gift of salvation and Your righteousness. May You strengthen us, Lord, that we might endure through the disorientations and pains of this life; encouraged by the fact that You know us by name. Amen.



David A. Lawrence

David is an Army Reserve Chaplain (over 17 years) and is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Catherine, have been members of Dawson since 2015, and they are both Life Group leaders.

FRIDAY, MARCH 11

A BETTER WAY

Matthew 5:38–48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”
Matthew 5:38–39

REFLECT

When Jesus spoke the words recorded in our text for today, surely His disciples were shocked as their teacher’s instructions seemed to contradict the Jewish law and legalistic traditions they’d heard for years. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:38–39). “Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matthew 5:42). “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43–44).

What were they to make of Jesus’ words? What are WE to make of Jesus’ words? We know from earlier in Matthew 5 that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. So, how then are we to live?

The life Jesus calls us to live is as radically counter-cultural today as it was when He first spoke these words to His disciples. While the world around us screams, “Be true to yourself,” Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, whispers quietly and faithfully, “Follow me.” Following Jesus leads to eternal love, peace, and joy, but just like Jesus, we will encounter hardships along the way. The good news is that we do not have to face the challenges of life alone. Because Jesus Himself is the perfect fulfillment of the Law, it has been accomplished by our Savior on our behalf. It is finished. No more “eye for an eye” required, because Jesus paid it all. Praise God!

Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, He has demonstrated the perfect way of sacrifice and love for all. In His power we, too, can live it—not perfectly in this life and certainly not in our own strength, but by His grace and mercy we can become more like our Lord and Savior one prayerful step at a time.

PRAY

O perfect, holy God, who loved enough to suffer and die for those who sin against You, help us love our enemies too. Give us eyes to see those who mistreat us as sinners in need of the same abundant mercy and grace we ourselves have undeservedly received in Jesus. Fill us with Your Spirit, Lord, and love through us. Make us more like Jesus as we take up our cross and follow Him today and always. Amen.



Tracy Hanrahan

Tracy, a longtime Dawson member, has served on staff with the Music & Worship team for a number of years, and now serves as Collide Choir Director and as a Sanctuary Choir member. She and her husband, Tom, are grateful to all who have invested in the lives of their three adult children, Brooks, Ryan, and Emily.

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

2 My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7 The LORD will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

8 The LORD will keep your going out and
your coming in from this time forth
and forevermore.

PRAY FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Matthew 6:1–15

“But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” *Matthew 6:6*

REFLECT

Prayer seems to be an ever-running commentary in my mind. Years ago, the challenge to rewrite the Lord's Prayer in first person was given at a conference I attended. When you put yourself in the prayer, first person, your perspective changes: “Our (My) Father who is in Heaven, hallowed is your name. Your Kingdom come (fill me with your spirit), Your will be done (Your way, NOT my way) on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread (give me today what You have planned that I need) and forgive us our debts (forgive me for the dumb things that I do that aren't according to your will) as we forgive our debtors (please show me how to forgive those I don't want to forgive). Lead us (me) not into temptation but deliver us (me) from the evil one” (Matthew 6:9-13).

Perspective. Funny how things look differently when you take them personally. Many times outside influences cause us to take things not in the way they were intended. We often get our feelings hurt over the goofiest mishaps. The “tone” we interpret in an email that really wasn't there. Comments that were innocent in intent can make us angry. And sometimes we may even be the innocent bystander caught in the middle of someone else's frustration.

As such, we try to pray for those who hurt and angered us. (Or those who do not think exactly like we do.) Can you hear it? “Lord fix them because they hurt my feelings.” But just like my prayer written in the first paragraph, we should put ourselves in the first person and pray that we will be filled with the Spirit so that our actions (along with our prayers) speak louder than those spoken words.

That running commentary of prayer is not only in my head, but it's in my heart as well. I fall short every day, but keeping that line open with God, and asking Him to help me, can change my perspective at a moment's notice. I'm not exactly sure how many times a day I ask Him to “Forgive me for the dumb things I do,” but I'm learning to ask that He help me discern the right perspective (His perspective) from the start.

PRAY

Lord, please remind me to practice the words in Matthew 6:1–15 from a different perspective so that I don't stumble and cause someone else to as well. Whisper Your words in my entire being so You have room to change me and to show me Your perspective. Amen.



Amy Turnbow

Amy is Dawson's Director of Hospitality and has served in that role since 2005. She is constantly reminded that God's perspective is what to strive for and loves doing ministry around a table. Food, fellowship, and love are the main ingredients in all of her recipes.



“BUT WHEN YOU PRAY, GO INTO YOUR ROOM AND SHUT THE DOOR AND PRAY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN SECRET. AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU.”

MATTHEW 6:6

MONDAY, MARCH 14

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:16–34

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Matthew 6:21

REFLECT

Where is your treasure? The definition of the word treasure is: wealth or riches stored or accumulated, or to keep something of great value. Could your treasure be your bank account, family, social standing, or job? None of these are condemned by Jesus, but they are only of temporary or passing value. The treasure that Jesus taught about involves things with eternal value. Later in His ministry, Jesus stated that He was a King, but that His kingdom was not of this world. Are we living for this world which is only temporary or living for God's eternal kingdom? God blesses us in so many ways that have eternal significance. Some of those blessings include family, friends, and relationships that give life here (and one day in Heaven) meaning and joy.

In this passage, Jesus spoke of an issue that is common to all humanity. During this period of time, the prevailing view was that the more riches or wealth one possessed, the more God had blessed them. Those with less or meager possessions were not seen as blessed. Yet, o many times we see that God's ways are not our ways. Jesus explained that God insists on our total and undivided devotion. We cannot serve both God and money. We will be devoted to one and hate the other.

How do we store up treasure in Heaven? Jesus said where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. First, we can take stock of our heart. What are our priorities? Do we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and love others as ourselves? How do we love others as ourselves? In Jesus' time, Jews would be familiar with earthly treasure and heavenly treasure. To the Jews, storing up heavenly treasure was doing deeds of mercy and deeds of kindness to those in distress. Is our heart and mind open to those around us and how we can help meet those needs? As believers, we have the great hope and promise to spend eternity in the presence of God with Him in Heaven.

God gave us the greatest treasure when He allowed His Son to come to earth. Jesus came, lived, and faced the same challenges and temptations that are common to everyone. Without sin, He came and took upon Himself the sins of the world and died that terrible death on the cross. He made it possible for us to be with Him for eternity in Heaven. This gift which was paid with such a great price is free for us. All we need to do is accept it with gratitude, try to live a life that produces heavenly treasures, and know with certainty that we will be with Jesus forever.

PRAY

Lord, help us to keep our eyes on You and not the things of this world. Lord, thank You that because of what Your Son has done for us we can spend eternity with You. Amen.



Scott Smithson

Scott and his wife, Nancy, have been members of Dawson since 1978. He serves as a Deacon, a member of the Prayer Ministry, and as a Life Group teacher for the 11th grade, where he has served for 38 years.

TUESDAY, MARCH 15

ASKING, SEEKING, AND KNOCKING

Matthew 7:1–12

“For anyone who asks receives; and the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, it will be opened.” *Matthew 7:8*

REFLECT

“Mom, there’s a spider in my room! Dad, can I have some money for pizza? I don’t understand this homework. Is the storm coming to our house? I’m scared! (at 3:00 a.m.)” These are just a sampling of the times that our children have come asking, seeking, and knocking over the years. We are happy to slay the spiders, or for our tenderhearted children, gently capture then release the spiders into the great outdoors. We enjoy being able to provide for their needs. When they were very young, there was a kind of joy found in knowing that we could calm their fears in the wee hours of the morning. There was never any doubt that we would come to their aid. Our children know from experience that we will take care of their needs because we love them. There is a relationship history built up over the days, months, and years that sends them to us for help.

As children mature, they grow less dependent on their parents. However, as children of God, we never outgrow our need for Him. In Matthew 7, Jesus told His disciples to ask, seek, and knock in order to receive, find, and have the door opened. What are we supposed to be asking or seeking or knocking for? For Him! Our most crucial need is to have a relationship with God, but our sinfulness gets in the way.

By this point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has made it clear that an outward conformity to the Old Testament law and prophets is not enough to attain righteousness. God is concerned with the attitudes and motives of our hearts as well. We need the help of the Holy Spirit working in us to conform us—in thoughts as well as speech, in motives as well as actions—to His likeness. This is not an instantaneous transformation. It is a process lived out in relationship; an ongoing admission to God that we are completely dependent on Him for our righteousness.

Beginning in verse 9, Jesus used the parent/child relationship to illustrate how we can trust and depend on Him to meet our needs. As Christians, God is our perfect Heavenly Father. Imagine how much greater His ability to love us and His desire to give us “good gifts” when we ask. Have you received God’s good gift of salvation? “Ask and it will be given to you!” Have the responsibilities of your life or the relentless noise of information and entertainment distracted you from a relationship of dependence on God? Seek Him again like a well-loved child, confident that you will find Him; knock and be welcomed in.

PRAY

Dear Father, thank You for Your gift of salvation and Your indwelling Holy Spirit. Soften our hearts and open our minds to Your leading and teaching; make us daily more like You. Help us seek You and Your kingdom first and foremost. Amen.



Mary Matthews

Mary has been a Dawson member since 1990. She and her husband, John, have taught in Dawson Kids Ministry and worked with the children’s choirs. She currently sings in the Sanctuary Choir and helps with the Chapel Choir on Sunday evenings.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Matthew 7:13–29

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”
Matthew 7:13–14

REFLECT

We make hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions every day. Some of the decisions we make are complex, and some are fairly simple. When it comes to the most important decisions in life, Jesus gave His followers clear direction and instruction.

The first choice we have to make is what path are we going to take? Are we going to enter through the wide or the narrow gate? Jesus said that the wide gate leads to destruction and that many people will choose this as their path. As His followers, we want to enter through the narrow gate. Although this path can be difficult, this is the path that leads to life. At times, we can get distracted and discouraged. When we stray from the narrow path, we need to remember that Jesus has already walked the narrow path to the cross.

The second choice we have to make is who we are going to listen to? Are we going to follow false or true teachers? False teachers are often tempting to follow because they usually tell us what we want to hear. And they seem to be everywhere! False teachers are often deceptive and can be hard to identify. How can we identify false teachers? Jesus said that we can know their true identity by their fruit. A true teacher will bear good fruit and will not contradict Scripture. The third choice we have to make is how are we going to live? Are we going to place our faith in our works, or are we going to fully submit ourselves to Jesus and His will for our lives? Jesus taught that it is possible to do all of the right things but never submit ourselves to Him. The result is that Jesus will claim to have never known us. Do you know Jesus and does He know you...the real you?

As Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount, He left His followers with one final choice. The last choice we have to make is where we place our foundation. We can lay our foundation on the things of the world—money, power, success, etc. But Jesus taught that if we do this when the storms of life come, our house will not stand. Or, we can build our life upon the rock, Jesus, the Christ, and His teachings. If we do this, when the storms of life come, our house will stand. One of my favorite hymns is *How Firm A Foundation*. The fourth verse states: “When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply; The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.” How firm is your foundation?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your all sufficient grace. Help me to choose to follow You this day and every day. Amen.



Stephen Wolbach

Stephen is a lifelong member of Dawson. He co-teaches the Settle/Wolbach Life Group, and sings in the Sanctuary Choir.

THURSDAY, MARCH 17

AFTER THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 8:1–13

When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.” *Matthew 8:10*

REFLECT

I grew up as a preacher's daughter and have vivid memories of what Sunday afternoons looked like in our home. After my dad would preach, my family would come home, eat lunch, and the house would settle into Sunday afternoon mode. Often, I would hear the faint sound of a golf tournament on TV, and see my dad doze off in his orange recliner. Now that I'm married to a pastor, I see some of the same patterns in our home.

You certainly don't have to be a pastor to know what it feels like to give much of yourself throughout your day. Maybe it's through teaching, or travel with work, answering endless emails, or caring for your children that leave you physically and emotionally depleted and in need of rest at the end of the day.

After the Sermon on the Mount—three whole chapters of Jesus' teaching—we can assume that Jesus, in His humanity, was probably worn out. Yet Matthew 8 begins with Jesus coming down from the mountain with great crowds following Him. The crowds were astonished with Jesus' teaching and certainly wanted to hear and see more.

Today's passage highlights two men's appeals to Jesus. The leper and the centurion both come before Jesus with a great need for healing—one for himself and the other for his servant. Jesus, in His kindness and compassion, put aside His possible desire to rest and listened to them. He saw their needs and took note of their faith.

I wonder if these men had just heard Jesus's words, “Ask and it will be given to you...” and took these words to heart. These men boldly approached Jesus knowing that He had something to offer them they could not receive elsewhere.

Aren't you thankful that Jesus continues to extend His healing, grace, and love to you and me? Our Heavenly Father never grows weary as we do. He is always available and willing to hear the requests of His children and answer according to His will.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, help us to deeply believe that You give good things to those who ask. Help us too, like the leper and the centurion, to be bold in our requests knowing that You hear us and know what is best for us. Amen.



Danielle Eldridge

Danielle is mom of Hayden, Luke, and Jonathan, and wife to our Senior Pastor, David. She teaches part-time at Edgewood Elementary in Homewood and loves serving at Dawson as a 10th grade girls Life Group leader.

FRIDAY, MARCH 18

IS IT WORTH IT?

Matthew 8:14–34

And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Matthew 8:19–20

REFLECT

There are two very familiar questions I seldom verbalize, but I ask them to myself numerous times every day. Every time I’m asked to make a commitment that may take time, I ask them. Every time I’m made aware of something one of my children or grandchildren wants or needs, I ask them. I ask myself these questions over and over because they help me determine what is best for me and my family. If I don’t ask them, there is a good chance I’ll make decisions I later regret. Unfortunately, when it comes to a relationship with Jesus, some people fail to ask them. The questions are: “What is it going to cost me, and is it worth it?”

In Matthew 8, the gospel writer recorded a time when following Jesus was a very desirable thing to do. Jesus performed miracles, and as a result, adoring crowds followed Him everywhere He went. In the frenzy of trying to get close to Jesus, two people made attempts to impress Him with their desire to be His followers. Unfortunately, neither of them understood what it would cost them. The first man was a scribe (religious teacher) who proclaimed, perhaps loudly, that he would follow Jesus anywhere. Jesus responded by telling him that unlike the animals and birds, He (Jesus) had no place to lay His head. The second man asked Jesus if he could follow Him after he took care of his other, perhaps more important, family obligations. Jesus’ response let him know his concerns were insignificant in comparison to following Him. Neither of them understood what it would cost to follow Jesus. Jesus’ responses revealed what it would cost them, and anyone else who wanted to follow Him—everything.

When it comes to the question, “Is it worth it?” Jim Elliott, pioneer missionary to Ecuador, says it well, “He is no fool to give up that which he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.”

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your patience with us as we constantly struggle to give You control of “everything” in our lives. We know everything we have and everything we are belongs to You, but we often live as though it were ours. Amen.



Ben Hale

Ben Hale serves as Dawson’s Evangelism and Missions Pastor. He has led all of Dawson’s local, national, and international missions efforts since 2000.

Psalm 95

- Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- 3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
- 6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.
Today, if you hear his voice,
- 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
- 9 when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.
- 10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said,
“They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways.”
- 11 Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.”

SUNDAY, MARCH 20

HEALING THROUGH CHRIST

Matthew 9:1–17

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” *Matthew 9:1–2*

REFLECT

Have you ever been the odd person out in a conversation? Were your thoughts on a subject just not the same as the group you were with? Maybe it was with your closest friends or family. You may have even received polite silence from the group indicating that it needed to be the end of the conversation.

Today we are reminded of the power of Christ. In Matthew 9:1–8, Jesus surprised the people around Him by going against Jewish law and claiming something that only God can do. He did this by saying to the paralyzed man that was brought to Him, “Your sins are forgiven.” The silent judgment of His audience set in, but their thoughts were anything but silent to Jesus. At this moment, those who taught the law speculated that Jesus was blaspheming. Jesus stepped in and said: “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?”

In this passage we clearly see the authority of Christ and the deeper healing we need from Him. Christ saw the faith of those who had brought this paralyzed man to be healed. However, it is important to note that Christ didn’t first heal this man’s physical body, but rather restored this man’s soul by first forgiving his sins. Only after making it clear that He indeed had the power to forgive sins did Jesus say to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat, and go home.”

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you have the ability to walk in faith as those who brought their friend to Jesus did. Despite how the world views us, we are to stand firm in the Spirit. Christians are often viewed differently from others, which sometimes can create divisions—even amongst friends and families. Jesus not only healed the man’s body, but He also forgave him of his sins. Let our faith always remain strong in Christ, who is powerful enough to not only heal our physical wounds, but also bear the weight of the sin that we carry.

PRAY

Lord, I pray that today we are reminded of the power You have over our lives. I pray that even when we are outsiders in a crowd that we stand firm in You. Let us remember to walk in Your Spirit and to have faith in You. Amen.



Stephanie Roman

Stephanie Roman has been a faithful member of the Hispanic Congregation since 2018. She works as a medical assistant at UAB and serves faithfully as a Life Group leader for the Hispanic Middle School group.



AND WHEN JESUS SAW
THEIR FAITH, HE SAID TO THE
PARALYTIC, "TAKE HEART, MY
SON; YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN."

MATTHEW 9:2

MONDAY, MARCH 21

MIRACLE-WORKING POWER

Matthew 9:18–38

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Matthew 9:35

REFLECT

During a recent period of intense suffering for a friend of mine, I realized how many different doctors it takes to get to the bottom of a difficult medical diagnosis. Her weeks were full of visiting various hospitals and outpatient facilities, undergoing tests, examinations, and monotonous questioning. Despite a team of amazing doctors, she isn't fully healed and is still suffering daily.

In today's passage, we meet five individuals who are suffering in completely different ways. The first two were Jairus' daughter who had died, and an outcast woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for the last 12 years. Jesus healed both women through one touch. Next, Jesus encountered two blind men who called Him the Son of David. With one touch their sight was restored. Finally, Jesus cast a demon out of a man and restored the man's speech. Each healing was unique and personal.

The passage goes on to tell us that as Jesus traveled throughout the region, He proclaimed the Gospel and healed every disease and affliction. We see two similarities between the stories of healing in this passage. First, faith is the precursor to Jesus' action, and second, each healing leads others to recognize Jesus' power. Jesus spent His three years of ministry on earth drawing near to the hurting, offering them physical healing, and most importantly, spiritual healing. Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind (Isaiah 61:1–2). He offered both Jews and Gentiles hope for their earthly suffering and an eternal reality.

Today, as we wait for the return of Jesus, we long for the day when He will heal every disease and affliction for good. But for now, we call out to Him for spiritual healing, and we pray His healing power for those who are suffering. While God may not heal my friend of all her physical suffering, He still offers her the healing He offers all of us: the hope of eternity with Him. This gives us the restoration needed to be faithful workers amidst the plentiful harvest. May we draw near to the Lord during this season of Lent, knowing He offers complete healing to our suffering soul through the hope of the Gospel and the freedom found in His truth.

PRAY

Lord, we praise You for Your miracle-working power. You care for each of us so personally and intimately, knowing our needs before we ask. Heal us spiritually so that we may be Your faithful workers in the harvest. Amen.



Aubrey Johnston

Aubrey Johnston is the Associate Minister to Students at Dawson. She loves investing in and caring for the 6th-12th grade girls, while serving alongside the DSM team.

TUESDAY, MARCH 22

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH US

Matthew 10:1–42

“When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”
Matthew 10:19–20

REFLECT

As Christians, we should always be ready to share our faith with others. In Matthew 10, we read about Jesus sending out His disciples. He told the twelve about the kind of negative responses and dangers they would meet: arrest, physical harm, and resistance from powerful people—even from their own family members. Jesus said, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (v. 16).

Christians still face many of the same obstacles to sharing the Good News of Jesus. As witnesses, we must be mindful of the same obstacles. Raymond Ibrahim, a scholar of religion and expert in Middle Eastern culture, identifies Christians as the most persecuted religious minority in the world today.

In some nations, Christian workers have to be very careful in what they say and what actions they take. If not, they can be expelled from the country, arrested and jailed, or even be in danger of their lives. The warnings Jesus gives His followers are more than counterbalanced by the encouragement of His promise: “When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19–20).

Jesus also taught the disciples about the character they would need to embody as they carried out His mission (vv. 24–42). In Matthew 10:38, Jesus used crucifixion as an illustration to describe discipleship. A disciple must deny himself (deny his own self-will), take up his cross (embrace God’s will no matter the cost), and follow Jesus. Joining Jesus on His mission to save all who call on His name requires total commitment to Him.

C.S. Lewis reminds us that we are “at every moment totally dependent on God.” One of the names for God in the Bible is Jehovah-jireh, the God Who Provides. When we share our faith, God will provide the words we need.

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to be aware of opportunities to share Your love. Thank You for providing words for us to say and wisdom as we witness. Amen.



Johnie Sentell

Johnie has served as a Sanctuary Choir member, Deacon, and Bible study leader. He and his wife, Melvine, married at Dawson in 1968 and have two children and two grandsons. They have been blessed through local missions work, missions trips, and singing with the Dawsonaires.

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Matthew 11:1–19

And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” *Matthew 11:4–5*

REFLECT

The question posed by John the Baptist in verse 3 of our passage is a question concerning life’s hours of discouragement. One can readily believe that all people at one time or another are visited with hours of discouragement, doubt, and even depression. All of us at one point or another will walk that path, if only for a season.

John had demonstrated tremendous courage standing before Herod, calling him and his mistress out for their sinful relationship. Later, when this great man of God (v. 11) suffered in prison as a result of Herod’s retaliation (Matthew 14:3–4; Luke 3:19–20), John the Baptist seems down in spirit. He sends two of his students to ask Jesus his question which was brought about by his situation.

The man who proclaimed with certainty that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), the man who’d baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and witnessed the Holy Spirit landing upon Him like a dove, and who had heard the Father say of Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22), this man now doubts and wonders if he’d been wrong.

Discouragement is very real. It can cause us to feel alone and hopeless, like everything around us is unraveling. We live in troubling times. Many people are struggling and experiencing uncertainty about the future. Like John the Baptist, it’s human nature to take our eyes off of Jesus and what we know is true, focusing instead on our circumstances. In our passage, Jesus reassured John in the midst of his circumstances by reminding him of who He (Jesus) was (vv. 4-5).

Easter is the bedrock of our faith. It is a reminder that regardless of the circumstances in our lives, Jesus is still Lord over all. The hymn writer, Alfred H. Achley, declared the hope we have in the midst of our circumstances when he penned these wonderful words, “He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives: He lives within my heart.”

PRAY

Our gracious Heavenly Father, thank You that we can come to Your throne of grace with confidence. Help us today, Holy Spirit, to recall the hope and the victory that we have through Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection. May the reality that He lives encourage us today. In His name, amen.



Joshua del Risco

Joshua is the pastor of Dawson’s Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva, in Fultondale. He and his wife, Esther, have been members at Dawson since 2019.

THURSDAY, MARCH 24

A POWER NAP OR ANOTHER CUP OF COFFEE?

Matthew 11:20–30

“But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Matthew 11:24

REFLECT

Have you ever stayed up too late on social media or binge-watching TV? I have a list of a dozen things to do when weariness sets in. But let's be real—that nap, that coffee—those are temporary fixes to an underlying problem. We are tired. Not only a sleep-deprived kind of tired; we are spiritually weary. If you are anything like me, we are living just like all the citizens of those ancient cities that Jesus referenced. There is a church on every corner. We hear about Jesus and know about God. We read the Bible, we know Jesus personally, and we trust in the promises of God. That arrogance is oftentimes what causes us to feel wise. That arrogance is also what causes us to rely on our self, not our Savior. We seek the desires of our own hearts. We walk around carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders, the burdens of jobs and household on our backs. We must stop this worldly behavior, because it is literally wearing us out. Heed the warning from today's Scripture; judgment is coming.

There is good news though. We can choose a different path. We can walk each and every day with Jesus. He really wants us to live a life that is full of the fruit of the Spirit while honoring and fulfilling an intimate relationship with God, the Father. In order to do that, we need to live with a childlike faith. Our eyes and ears not only need to see and hear Jesus but fully depend on Him knowing that He has all of the answers. How refreshing. We get to live as children resting assuredly in the arms of our Heavenly Father. Ahh... take that deep breath and soak up God's peace!

How fortunate we are to have been chosen by Jesus to reveal God's love and truth. We need to learn from those wicked cities of the past. Stop the rat race of this world and focus our eyes on our Father with a faithful dependency. Open our eyes to our sins and repent. Find rest in knowing that Jesus can and will free us of all burdens. He promises love, healing, and peace. While that doesn't mean that there will not be any labor, it does mean our often meaningless and wearisome toil will transform into productive and purposeful work that glorifies our Lord.

So the next time you feel that slump coming on, go ahead and take that power nap or grab that energy drink, but add a little something else. Read a Bible verse, say a prayer, search for God, and deepen that relationship. The load will be lifted and your attitude just may change, one cup of coffee at a time!

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us enough to reveal Yourself, Your Son, and Your promises. Help us to rest in the assurance of knowing that Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light. Amen.



Mary Austin Jones

Mary Austin and her husband, Ryan, have two children: Libby and Harris. They have been members of Dawson since 2017. She enjoys serving in a 1st grade Life Group, at Dawson Day School, and during KidLife.

FRIDAY, MARCH 25

LORD OF THE SABBATH

Matthew 12:1–50

“And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

Matthew 12:7–8

REFLECT

Like many of you, I have invested great time and effort into trying to put together or fix various items. Maybe it was a piece of furniture, a toy for my girls, or a minor car repair; only to get to the end and realize I got it all wrong and needed to reach out to someone for help. The religious leaders in Israel were seeking to perfectly follow God. They were working diligently to keep all the rules, follow the Law, and make sure everyone else did as well. But they got it all wrong. They had the one, Jesus, who would fulfill the Law once and for all right there among them. But they could not see past their own self-righteousness.

The religious leaders were displaying their opposition to Jesus throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Here in chapter 12, the opposition of Israel’s religious leaders escalates over the issue of Sabbath laws. One Sabbath day, Jesus’ disciples plucked heads of grain to eat because they were hungry. That same Sabbath day, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand. Both actions were in violation of all the little rules the Pharisees had for the Sabbath. Jesus’ perceived breaking of the Sabbath law was the last straw for the religious leaders. The Sabbath, to them, was the height of their legalistic system. Jesus and His disciples would honor the Sabbath in the way God intended it to be honored. But because the Pharisees added many rules and regulations to the Sabbath, it was no longer a day of rest, it was a day of burden.

Jesus showed the true meaning of the Sabbath by pointing to three illustrations from the Old Testament. The Sabbath was never intended to restrict deeds of necessity, service to God, or acts of mercy. It was intended to bring rest, not hardship. God never intended any law to supersede human need.

We can all be tempted to cling to self-righteousness like the Pharisees. We pile burdens on ourselves that only lead to defeat and self-pity. Instead, let each one of us look to Jesus who perfectly fulfilled the Law for us and died as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In Him and through Him, we find the Sabbath rest that God intended from the beginning. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

PRAY

God, You are gracious and You are kind. At the depth of our sin, You show us the height of Your love. Thank You for sending Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He fulfilled the Law for us, and He is mighty to save. Amen.



Brad Gowing

Brad is Dawson’s Executive Pastor, husband to Maile, and dad to Addison and Audrey. Brad is a graduate of Samford University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house

of the LORD forever.

SOWING THE WORD—REAPING THE HARVEST

Matthew 13:1–23

And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow.”

Matthew 13:3

REFLECT

One of the oldest teaching methods is storytelling. Jesus, the Master Teacher, frequently told simple stories, called parables, to teach profound truths. His first parable, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was the Parable of the Sower.

How well I remember this story from my childhood days in Sunday School. Yet it’s a story with significant spiritual truths for all ages. First, let’s imagine the setting of this teaching moment. Jesus, on this occasion, sat in a boat on the Sea of Galilee where a large crowd had gathered by the seaside to listen to His teaching. Perhaps Jesus could see a farmer in the distance sowing his crops. Such a sight would have been a familiar one in Jesus’ day; after all, many of the people gathered there were possibly farmers or people who depended on farmers in the area for sustenance.

What follows in the story is a description of the four different types of soil on which the seeds fell—the hard ground, the shallow soil, the thorn-infested soil, and finally, the good fertile soil (vv. 13:3-8). The parable might more fittingly be called “The Parable of Soil Types.” Jesus used this parable to help His followers understand that there are different responses to the Gospel.

While Matthew’s account does not include the disciples’ direct request for an explanation, Jesus explained the meaning of the parable in verses 18–23. (Both Mark and Luke mention the disciples’ direct request.) The first three types of soil represent the hearts of people who do not become followers of Jesus—hearts that Satan hardens to the Gospel, hearts of persons who turn from the truth when problems arise, and hearts that have the Gospel message crowded out by wealth and the cares of the world. Finally, the good soil is represented by the hearts of people who hear and receive the Gospel. It then brings forth an abundant harvest.

The story of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection is so very familiar to most of us. However, may it never become so commonplace that our hearts are no longer stirred when we contemplate the price that was paid for our sins. Instead, may our hearts always be like fertile soil that when the seeds of the Gospel are sown in them, they will spring up and produce much fruit.

PRAY

O Merciful Savior, may our hearts never grow indifferent to the truths in Your Word. Make the seed planted in us result in good works as we share the Gospel in our families, in our communities, and in our world. Amen.



Fran Duncan

Fran Duncan and her husband, Clarence, have been members at Dawson for the past eight years. They are the parents of two adult daughters, Karen Carlisle and Karla Stephens, who live in the Birmingham area. Fran enjoys participating in women’s Bible studies and currently co-teaches a women’s Life Group.



AND HE TOLD THEM MANY
THINGS IN PARABLES, SAYING:
“A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW.”

MATTHEW 13:3

SIMPLE MESSAGE, HARD TRUTHS

Matthew 13:24–58

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.” *Matthew 13:35*

REFLECT

In this passage, Jesus offered seven parables that give us a single unified message: the incomparable value of entrance to His Kingdom in Heaven. Many of these parables seem to be centered on destroying evil in the world, which can be a frightening thought for anyone. However, with the threat of punishment for wrong comes the promise of reward for good.

The Parable of the Wheat and Weeds (vv. 24–30) explains how the devil is in direct and purposeful opposition to Jesus, but there will still be good wheat harvested. Notably, the weeds are not immediately pulled up and burned because good wheat could be trashed in the process. At times, we can all seem like weeds, a detraction from an otherwise healthy harvest. But, we have the opportunity to change—and become spiritually mature followers of Jesus. This change occurs when we accept Christ into our hearts. A seemingly simple decision can radically change us.

Even more amazing is that our faith can help influence a number of other people. The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast (vv. 31–33) both show that something small can grow into something tremendous. This faith and this change is not simple and definitely not easy. For many Christians that means being willing to lose out on security, health, and wealth. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Priceless Pearl (vv. 44–45) show us people who found a treasure so recognizably valuable they were willing to sell everything they own to have it.

I cannot think of anything on earth that would warrant that kind of response, but we, as believers, must be ready to sacrifice anything and everything for Christ because He is worth it. We have to be ready to sacrifice our own sense of community, just as Jesus was (vv. 54–58). We might not be welcome by our friends, coworkers, and family, but the possibility of attaining eternal treasure and being able to share it with those who reject us is easily worth it. This isn't a new idea. The Scriptures have been developing this concept for millennia. Jesus makes this clear in verses 34–35 and in the verses 51–53. The Old Testament is a grand prequel to the hopeful message of the New Testament. The hopeful message is rooted in the simple message that belief leads to change—change in our hearts and spirits.

PRAY

God, thank You for blessing us in all the ways You have. Give us grace for our failures, our faults, and our fears. Thank You for allowing us the chance to be changed. Amen.



Michael Bullington

Michael and his wife, Anna, have been members at Dawson for over four years. They are active in their Life Group and have volunteered with the youth and children's ministries. They have one daughter, Nora Jean Bullington.

TUESDAY, MARCH 29

TURNING GRIEF INTO GOODNESS

Matthew 14:1–21

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. *Matthew 14:19*

REFLECT

Sometimes life can seem to be going really well. You know, when it feels like all the cogs are turning. Then something tragic happens, and it all suddenly halts. It is in those moments that we can lose sight of how God can use those tragic interruptions to turn our grief into His goodness.

Just prior to this passage, in Matthew 13, Jesus taught from a boat to the masses of people as the crowds continued to grow. At the same time, He was also training His disciples and modeling the Gospel message to them. Eventually coming to a culmination of sending them out two-by-two (Mark 6:7–13). All is well!

Then we come to Matthew 14 and trouble really began to develop for John the Baptist. John, a cousin of Jesus, was known among the Jews as a proclaimer of the Gospel and pointed people towards the coming of Jesus. In this process, he called out Herod Antipas' moral failure and was imprisoned as a political move by Herod to silence him. However, Herod's continued self-indulgences and lack of moral aptitude leads him to promise to do whatever his "step-daughter" wanted just for dancing at his birthday. After consorting with her mother, she stated that she wanted John the Baptist's head on a platter. I have often wondered if Herod had some internal debate as to whether to comply with this wish or not, but ultimately he does.

Jesus, having heard of John's beheading, desired to do some understandable grieving and took a private boat to a solitary place. However, the masses decided to follow Him (v.13). The disciples wanted to help Jesus have that time of grieving and advised Him to send the people away. Despite the perceived effort to help, they did not realize that they were about to learn another lesson. Jesus, instead of dismissing the crowd, lays aside His private grieving. Seeing their hunger, He chose to meet their need by feeding the multitude.

We learn from Jesus that even in our deepest moments of sorrow, God can turn it into a great opportunity to serve others and still fulfill His work. Whether bringing healing to others physically or spiritually, God works through us even in our grief to bring goodness to others.

PRAY

Lord, we acknowledge that we grieve at times. There is not a moment of our lives that You can't use to help others see Your love for them. Help us through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be open to Your direction even when we hurt. Amen.



Dan Mullis

Dan serves as the Associate Music & Worship Minister directing our Instrumental Music Ministries as well as the Dawsonaires. He holds a Masters of Worship Studies from the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies. He is joined in ministry by his wife, Carrie, and two sons Caleb and Ethan.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30

KEEPING YOUR EYES ON JESUS

Matthew 14:22–36

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. *Matthew 14:26*

REFLECT

There are storms in everyone’s life that test our faith. It is not that we don’t have faith. We just tend to stray from it in the midst of difficult times. The account of Jesus walking on the water comes after the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples had witnessed this, seen Jesus heal the sick, and even raise the dead. Surely, they had faith in Jesus and His Lordship. Yet, in the middle of the storm their faith wavered.

God allows us to go through storms in our lives for our good and His glory. God uses these difficulties to shape us into His image and remind us of our need for Him. The disciples experienced this on the Sea of Galilee that night. They were focused on getting through the storm and not on the One who was allowing them to go through the storm. Even when Jesus appeared to them walking on the water, they did not recognize that the Master of the Sea was there to protect, deliver, and comfort them. Jesus told them that they had nothing to fear because He was God and in control.

We see something of our faith (and lack of faith) through Peter when he asked to come to Jesus on the water. Peter obviously had to have faith in Jesus to even ask this, but when Peter saw the waves, he lost his focus on Jesus, and he began to sink. The issue when Peter began to sink wasn’t that he lost faith in Jesus (because he immediately cried out to Jesus to save him), but he doubted that Jesus could sustain him in the storm. Our faith will never be perfect, and at times we will doubt, but we have to remember that God is working all things together for our good and His glory. He can and will sustain us in all our storms.

The reaction of the disciples to Jesus calming the storm is something we shouldn’t miss. They worshipped Him. When our weaknesses are exposed in the storm, we must lean on the object of our faith and worship Him for what He has done and what He promises to do for those who accept Him as their Savior.

When they came ashore on the other side at a place called Gennesaret, an interesting thing happened. There is no record of any prior ministry of Jesus in this area. Yet, the people there apparently had heard about Him. They brought those who were going through their storms of illness to Him and had faith that even touching the hem of His garment would heal them. What strong faith by those who barely knew about Jesus in contrast to those who should have had the strongest faith! In this Lenten season, have faith that God will sustain us through the fiercest storms. Our faith in Him (no matter how strong or faltering) should result in worshiping and glorifying Him above all else.

PRAY

Lord I believe; help my unbelief! Amen.



Don Glass

Don and his wife, Ginny, have been members of Dawson since 1971. They have served in various roles in the church. Currently, Don helps lead a Young Adult Life Group.

THURSDAY, MARCH 31

WE ARE DIFFERENT

Matthew 15:1–39

“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.”

Matthew 15:18

REFLECT

When was the last time you distinguished something as falling into one category or another? We live in a world full of distinctions, so chances are you made several of them in the last 24 hours. In Matthew 15, Jesus drew clear lines between clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile, and the possible versus the impossible. The Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ day classified ceremonially clean and unclean hands based upon man-made traditions that had been passed down from previous generations. When Jesus’ disciples didn’t adhere to these customs, Pharisees and scribes traveled from Jerusalem to set the record straight. Jesus immediately pitted their tightly held traditions against the word of God. In their hearts, these religious leaders were hypocritically holding their practices above God’s commands.

Jesus proceeded to make a few of His own distinctions. He distinguished between true worshippers and those who were merely giving lip service to God (vv. 7–9), indicating who has been planted by the Lord or who will eventually be uprooted. Jesus also radically redefined what defiles a person by noting what comes out of the mouth, thereby proceeding from the heart makes one unclean (v. 18). After breaking away from the Jewish crowd, Jesus went with His disciples to the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon. The cities of Tyre and Sidon had been condemned by prophets like Isaiah (Isaiah 23) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 28), so the racial and ethnic differences would have been highly noticeable to the disciples. These Jewish followers would have prided themselves in carrying on the faith of their father, Abraham. Imagine their surprise when Jesus upheld a Gentile woman as having great faith!

I live in an area of the world where traditions and customs determine what is permitted or forbidden. Cleanliness and purity are based on long-standing rituals. My unintentional faux pas and language blunders remind me that I am outside my passport country. But ultimately, what sets me and you apart is nothing outward, such as our accent, abilities, or habits. Instead, it is the inward change Christ has made by conquering sin and death.

As we focus on the death and resurrection of Christ, we remember what distinguishes us as believers. Believing by grace through faith in Jesus’ death for the forgiveness of sins gives us right standing before God.

PRAY

Father God, thank You for sending Your only Son, Jesus, so that we may have eternal life by grace through faith in Him. Help our lives to be a testimony to those around us. Guide us as we carry this Good News to the ends of the earth. Amen.



M. V.

M. V. is a Dawson member serving in the Middle East.

FRIDAY, APRIL 1

FOLLOWING JESUS

Matthew 16:1–28

“You’re the Messiah,” Simon Peter said, “the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16

REFLECT

The Sadducees and Pharisees challenged Jesus to show them a sign from Heaven. Jesus dismissed their request and later counseled His disciples to beware of the “leavening” of truth by the authorities. The “leavening” is the contamination of the true teaching of God’s word.

To continue teaching His disciples, Jesus took them by sea to Caesarea. Here, away from the authorities, He wanted to explore two critical issues with them. The first was to determine if they understood who He was, and the second was to explain what was about to happen and what it meant. Simon Peter said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus acknowledged he was right. He explained to Peter that for His kingdom to come, He must go to Jerusalem to be humiliated, tried, killed, and raised from the dead three days later. He also told His disciples that they had an essential role to play. They would be the ones to share the Good News about what happened and build the church around the world. But He also explained that to be His follower, a person must give themselves up, pick up their own cross, and follow Him.

What does this mean for us?

As Christians, we know that Jesus is the Messiah, the true Son of the Living God. We acknowledge He has risen and has authority over Heaven and Earth. Jesus is Lord. But what does it look like to “give up ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him?”

We have a choice of centering our life on ourselves or centering it on Jesus. If we cling to our life, our self-centeredness, we will end up with nothing. But if we turn loose of our life and let Jesus be the center, we will have everything. To keep Jesus as the center requires studying the Bible, praying, and seeking opportunities to share the Gospel and love our neighbors. To follow Him, we must learn that what “the world” thinks is excellent, is actually foolish, and what “the world” thinks is folly, is true wisdom.

PRAY

Dear God, hold me to the truth of Your words and instructions. Strengthen our discipline to learn more of You and Your kingdom. Give us discernment and courage in following You. Do not let evil and temptations of the world sway us. Help us continue to grow in our faith. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.



Ed Phillips

Ed was baptized at Dawson and has been a member for 26 years. With his wife, Joy, he has led Kids Connection for the past 10 years. The Phillipses also serve in Dawson’s baptism support ministry.

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

2 O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

3 If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the
morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the LORD!

For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

8 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

SUNDAY, APRIL 3

FACE TO FACE

Matthew 17:1–27

[Peter] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

Matthew 17:5

REFLECT

Jesus invited Peter, James, and John up a mountain where He spoke with some of their great forefathers in the faith, Moses and Elijah. And the disciples are indeed in the midst of a “mountaintop” faith experience here—one of those life milestones when we get an overwhelming glimpse of God’s magnificence—when a bright cloud overshadowed them.

This bright cloud gave off some strong Old Testament vibes. As we read, we might remember the book of Exodus, when God’s presence dwelt in the pillar of cloud by day, reminding Israel of His faithfulness as they wandered through the desert. We may remember God appearing to Moses in a cloud, giving him the commandments and tabernacle instructions. Or we may recollect that moment in 1 Kings when the cloud of God’s presence filled the Holy of Holies in the temple as Solomon’s priests put the Ark of the Covenant there.

The disciples, familiar with their Old Testament, would have known what this cloud meant—God’s presence coming to dwell with humanity! That’s why the cloud appeared directly after Peter offered to set up a tent for Jesus on the mountain. Peter, James, and John were being shown that God had come to dwell with humanity—but not in a tent like in the days of Moses, nor in a temple like in the days of Elijah. He had come to dwell with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.

Sure enough, a voice from the cloud testified, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” The disciples fell down, terrified. Why? There was no veil separating them from this incarnation of God’s presence as there was in the temple. No covering; no shield! Or was there?

Jesus’ immediate and sole response to the disciples’ terror was, “Rise, and have no fear.” Jesus’ message to the disciples and to us is that HE is our shield. Because of His sacrifice, the veil between God and us was torn down, as in Matthew 27. Jesus’ blood is the only covering we will ever need. And when we listen and trust in His work, we can dwell with God, face to face, and we can then approach the throne with confidence as sons and daughters of God.

PRAY

God, thank You for Your faithfulness to us, that You made it possible to dwell with You through the work of Christ. May we always and only ever be found in Him. Amen.



Becca Jenkins

Becca is the wife of Blake Jenkins, Minister to College Students at Dawson Family of Faith. They have two sons, Thomas (5) and Will (1) and enjoy inviting college students into their home every week for good food and great conversation.



“THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH
WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED;
LISTEN TO HIM.”

MATTHEW 17:5

MONDAY, APRIL 4

GREATEST OF ALL TIME

Matthew 18:1–20

“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3–4

REFLECT

We often see the acronym GOAT (Greatest Of All Time) used in sports and in other social media when someone has excelled over a long period of time. The disciples in the first century were the same as twenty-first century men and women wanting to know, “Who is the greatest?” However, the disciples did not settle for our temporal world but wanted to know who would be the greatest in the eternal kingdom of God. To answer the disciples’ question, Jesus used a little child as a visual illustration of how to become a great person—not just in this life, but for eternity.

During this Lenten season, we humble ourselves to make an intentional effort to worship Christ deeply. He knew us, chose us, and loved us even before our parents gave birth to us. Although He knew our sinful behavior before we were born, He still reconciled us to a holy God through the cross. There is no reason to boast in our own good character but to humbly recognize we are God’s children, and any goodness comes from God.

God is the creator of all humanity, and all humans bear the image of God. To insult anyone is to insult our creator. It is not unusual to disagree with others’ opinions—there is place for disagreement—but to malign the character of another is to malign God. We are called to maintain humility and patience when dealing with other people.

Our relationships and respect for others within the family of God is also an important part of our humility. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. God’s grace to us directs us to be humble toward our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Regardless of differences in opinions, cultures, and race, we should see not just the image of God, but Christ who abides in us and in our fellow believers.

We must also be humble regarding our resources. As Americans, we are incredibly blessed with material wealth. God has blessed us, but we are only stewards of our resources and will never be more than stewards of the resources that are put under our control. Paul asks us the question in 1 Corinthians 4:7: What do you have that you did not receive (from God)? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Let us be humble like a child, trusting Christ to be our Protector and Defender.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, we know You have created us, and in spite of our sins, You have lavished Your love on us through Jesus. Teach us to be thankful for all that You have provided, and may we bless You with all our being. In the name of Jesus, Amen.



Ben Williams

Ben and his wife, Candi, are Dawson members serving in Europe.

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

THE PICTURE OF FORGIVENESS

Matthew 18:21–35

“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Matthew 18:35

REFLECT

This passage highlights the parable of the Unforgiving Servant. It begins with Peter asking Jesus about the number of times to forgive someone who sins against you. He mentions the number seven to Jesus. Within the Jewish faith, three times was sufficient to show a forgiving spirit, so when Peter said seven, he thought he was showing generosity. However, when Jesus told Peter to forgive 77 times, He meant to forgive others without keeping count.

To illustrate this kind of forgiveness, a parable is told of two instances of debts owed by servants. The first servant owed an incalculable debt of 10,000 talents that he could not repay. Because the servant couldn't pay, his master ordered that he would be sold with his wife and children. But when this servant fell on his knees and implored his master to have patience with him in paying the debt, the master felt pity for him and forgave the debt.

Likewise, a fellow servant who had just been forgiven his debt owed a hundred denarii to the servant. Compared to the debt of 10,000 talents, a hundred denarii was a small amount. When the fellow servant pleaded for patience in paying this debt, the forgiven servant refused and put him in prison until he had paid in full. Once the master heard what his servant had done, he was distressed at the fact that his servant had not forgiven the debt that was owed to him as he had done. As a result, the master threw his servant in jail until he had repaid it all.

Jesus reminded His followers to extend the same mercy and forgiveness that we have received. When we choose not to forgive someone, we are very much like the first servant. Because of our sins, we have a massive debt that we can never repay, and this debt separates us from a holy God. However, God, in His great mercy and patience, has withheld His immediate righteous judgment that we deserve for our sins and provided His only Son to pay our debt for our sins.

Because our Master has forgiven our debt, we must show the same forgiveness to our fellow servants or risk being liable to pay the consequences ourselves. In this Lenten season, may we remember the perfect example of forgiveness displayed by our Savior. May it cause us to forgive others even when it may be tempting to choose not to forgive.

PRAY

Father, thank You for displaying what forgiveness means and for paying the debt we could never pay. Help us to remember that the mercy and patience You have shown us can be extended to anyone we meet. Amen.



Bret Malone

Bret is active member in the DYP-Stroud/McCutchin Life Group and currently serves in Dawson's Student Ministry as a Life Group leader for 9th Grade guys. He also volunteers with Kids Connection.

HEAVENLY TREASURES

Matthew 19:1–30

Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. *Matthew 19:21–22*

REFLECT

As Matthew 19 begins, Jesus has ended His Galilean ministry, and He and His disciples have begun their long journey to Jerusalem. In Matthew 19:16, they encounter a rich, young man who asked Jesus a question. He could have been a Pharisee because of his diligence in following the law. But while he was sincere in his desire to gain eternal life, he was sadly mistaken in thinking that merely obeying laws could attain the goal for him.

Jesus was patient with this young man by explaining that he should keep the commandments to receive eternal life. The young man, probably excitedly, told Jesus that he, in fact, had kept the commandments that Jesus mentioned. When Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor, the young man went away sorrowful. It is clear that the young man had made his wealth his idol and held it even more closely than following Jesus. Had he understood that God was infinitely good, the young man would have discovered that human deeds could not earn eternal life.

When we do a “gut check” on ourselves, what do we find that we follow more closely than Jesus? What are our priorities? In other words, where do we focus the majority of our energy? Is it on accumulating wealth at the expense of sharing with others in need? Is it watching sports at the expense of attending worship? Is it focusing on gaining power and recognition at the expense of treating others fairly?

We see the tragedy of the young man (vv.16–22) in stark contrast to the reward awaiting those who follow Jesus (vv. 23–30). Becoming more focused on heavenly treasures might include: more time in God’s word, regular Sunday morning Life Group and worship participation, or volunteering at Kids Connection or The Learning Center.

How we spend our time reflects our priorities. We need to constantly reevaluate our priorities so that they are in line with storing up eternal, heavenly treasures instead of temporary, earthly treasures.

PRAY

God of grace, thank You for Your love and patience as we learn more about Your ways and what You value. Help us to focus on eternal treasures that will never fade away instead of focusing on earthly treasures. Thank You for preparing an eternal place where our focus will be on serving and glorifying You. Amen.



Carolyn Herr

Carolyn has been a Dawson member for 34 years. She currently serves on the Missions Committee and has served on many local and foreign mission teams. She has previously served as a Life Group leader and an ESL teacher at Dawson.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7

ASK OF THE LORD

Matthew 20:1–34

And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. *Matthew 20:34*

REFLECT

Of all the senses, sight is the one that seems most necessary. This was most certainly true for the blind men who lived out their days on the side of the road just outside of Jericho. They were likely homeless, definitely jobless, and well on their way to being hopeless. They were social outcasts because of their lack of sight. Even so, they cried out when Jesus walked by them. These men were bold in their demand for attention. “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” they cried. Jesus spoke to them saying, “What do you want me to do for you?” They replied, “Lord, we want our sight.” Scripture says that Jesus showed them compassion. He touched their eyes, and they were able to see.

Oftentimes we approach our issues horizontally. Earthly problems have earthly solutions, right? It can be much less stressful to do what we can do versus waiting for what God might do. Sometimes the obvious way is often not the best, the wisest, or the most righteous way. I’ve learned that nothing is too small or too big to ask of God. My mother always said; “Pray about it. Ask God to help you find it,” even for something as simple as a missing sock. I thought that was the most ridiculous thing ever, and I couldn’t see how God would help. I was capable of finding the thing I had lost, but my mom was right. Now let me be clear, I didn’t always find everything I ever prayed about, but I did (and still do) find the things I pray about more often than not. The point is, even when we cannot see when God is working, the fact remains that He is always concerned about His children and ready to answer our prayers.

While I have sometimes felt silly going to God about the small things, I have also had to struggle to find courage to pray about the big things and leave them at His feet. One of the hardest things I’ve done so far is to trust God to provide for college when I couldn’t see how it would happen. My family isn’t wealthy, and I didn’t earn any crazy, big scholarships. My mom refused to let me take out loans, but again, she told me to pray about it. Pray is exactly what I did, and God drew near to me. He answered my prayers in a way that gave me peace about the future. God has given me just what I’ve needed moment to moment. He has required that I surrender to His sovereign will each day so that my trust is in His goodness and grace and not my own ability and intellect.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, what a privilege to carry everything to You in prayer. Give us courage to be bold in our prayer, and faithful in trusting You. Amen.



Micaiah Bolton

Micaiah is from Savannah, GA, and is a junior at Samford University. She is pursuing a degree in Worship Leadership and hopes to work in music ministry. She serves as BETA Intern with the Music & Worship ministry at Dawson and loves to read in her free time.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8

WHO IS JESUS?

Matthew 21:1–46

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”
Matthew 21:23

REFLECT

Who is Jesus? This may be the central question of our lives. Our answer to it determines not only our future (starting now and into eternity), but also our every day. During Jesus’ triumphal entry to Jerusalem, all the people asked, “Who is this?” In Matthew 21, we get a glimpse of Jesus in multiple scenarios.

What attribute or truth about Jesus stood out to you from your reading? Now take a few moments and ask God, why did this stand out to me today? What do You want to reveal to me about Yourself? Is there an invitation You are extending to me?

Who is Jesus? In this passage, Jesus was recognized as a prophet, an authoritative teacher, a leader, a healer, a threat to the way things have always been, the bearer of God’s name, and a defender of true worship. And in this one passage, we notice an array of facets of Jesus’ character: compassion, condemnation, wisdom, leadership, obedience, directness, humility, righteous anger, and inspiration.

Lent is an extended season of attentiveness to God. During Lent, we make a choice to prepare our hearts and minds to receive Jesus in a fresh way. Whether we are new to the faith or don’t even remember not knowing Jesus, God wants to reveal Himself anew this season. On this side of Heaven, we will never fully grasp all that Jesus is and did on our behalf. But we follow One who wants to reveal Himself to us again and again, speaking life into our circumstances, breathing hope into our hearts, leading us in the paths we should follow, and guiding us in the good works He prepared for us to walk in.

Our God is not whatever we make Him to be. He comes first, and we follow. He is who He is, and we spend our lives getting to know Him. Do you feel condemned like the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees? Ask Jesus now why you feel this way. Because there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1–2). Confess any sin God is revealing to you and accept His grace. If you long for His compassion, ask the One who delights to extend it.

Do you need to know today that your faith is secure? Ask Jesus for faith so deep that it can move mountains (vv. 21–22).

PRAY

Jesus, thank You for the ways you reveal Yourself to us every day. Help me to be attentive to You and all that You want to show me. You are my Savior, and my life today belongs to You. Thanks be to God. Amen.



Staci Waldvogel

Staci Waldvogel works at Fuller Theological Seminary and has been a member of Dawson for three years. She and her husband, Dieter, have three children, Mathis, Tyler, and Anna. Staci and Dieter serve with Dawson Young Professionals.

Psalm 31:9-16

- Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.
- 10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my iniquity,
and my bones waste away.
- 11 Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach,
especially to my neighbors,
and an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.
- 12 I have been forgotten like one who is dead;
I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I hear the whispering of many—terror on every side!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.
- 14 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.”
- 15 My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand
of my enemies and from my persecutors!
- 16 Make your face shine on your servant;
save me in your steadfast love!

IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

Matthew 22:1–46

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37–39

REFLECT

The Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, and as they gathered around Him, one of them, a lawyer, asked Christ which commandment is the greatest. And if we're truthful, isn't that what we want to know? Isn't it the question we struggle with as we try to balance the responsibilities in our life? What's our greatest responsibility? Where should we invest our time, energy, and resources?

Jesus' answer made it perfectly clear. The thing we should do best, the thing that should be our greatest responsibility, is to love. Love for God above all else, and love for others. Jesus knew the religious laws, but He never allowed those laws to overshadow the need to love. He preached love. He lived it in His life, and He exemplified it in His death. His message of love covers our intimate relationships of marriage, family, and friendships as well as those who are outside of our small sphere of influence, those who are beyond our comfort zone where the needs are often the greatest.

In 1 John 4:10 we read: 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 the Father loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for our sins. Christ the Son loved us so much that He willingly suffered the agonizing death of a criminal on a cross so that our sins could be forgiven and we could have eternal life. But what about us? God gives us the freedom to choose to return that love or not. God wants and desires our love, but He wants it freely given and of our own choosing. Our love for God is the one thing He doesn't own, even though He deserves it. In His greatest love for us, God gave us the ability to deny Him the very thing He desires above all else.

The early Christian theologian and philosopher, Augustine of Hippo, better known as St. Augustine, said, “Love, and do what you like.” On the surface, that sounds crazy and irresponsible. But if we do what Jesus commands us to do—to love God with every fiber of our being and love our neighbor as ourself, it really makes perfect sense. It really is all about love.

PRAY

Father, as we approach Easter, may we be filled with the love that You proclaimed through Your death on the cross, and may we joyfully share that love with a lost and broken world. Amen.



Chris Black

Chris and his wife, Kris, joined Dawson in 1993. He teaches a Young Adult Life Group, serves as a Deacon, and has participated in international mission trips to Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Africa, and China.



“AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT:
YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR
NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

MATTHEW 22:39

JUST BELOW THE SURFACE

Matthew 23:1–39

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” *Matthew 23:27–28*

REFLECT

We have a dresser in our daughter’s room that we found at an antique shop many years ago. The craftsperson gave this hefty piece a second life by painting it with a creamy white chalk paint. It’s a beautiful piece of furniture, with intricate detailing and five big drawers perfect for cramming in all sorts of things. Over the last few years, the knots in the wood have begun to show through. Sap hidden within has begun to seep out, undaunted by the coats of paint above. The white exterior has become stained with yellow streaks, shadows of what lies just below the surface. Given a little bit of time, what was hidden now shows through. I am the same way. And I’m betting you are, too.

Each year countless pilgrims would ascend the mountain on which Jerusalem was built to participate in any number of religious feasts. They had taken great care to remain ritually clean, observing specific rules and customs so they could partake in the celebrations. One slip up and they would be counted as unclean for seven days, missing the entire event they had traveled so far to join. Coming into contact with a grave was one of the many things that would prohibit one from participating. As a caution to the unfamiliar traveler, locals would paint the graves white before feast days. And so, with the whitewashed backdrop of Jerusalem around him, Jesus offered a strong word to the religious leaders of the day. We, who are infatuated with people noticing our works of righteousness. We, who remain persistently resistant to the interior change the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives. We, who are often more consumed with the image on our screen than the transformation of our hearts.

Jesus is calling us to start on the inside, owning up to the death and decay that sin spreads within us. He’s condemning fast fixes and shallow discipleship. He’s saying “no” to outward shows of righteousness that only happen in front of a camera lens or standing in a Sanctuary. He’s calling us to reject death and choose life. He’s inviting us to choose him. So put the paint away and invite Christ to clean out the tomb. After all, empty tombs are His specialty.

PRAY

Living Christ, my hypocrisy and only-for-show faith is an affront to the work of transformation You actually want to do within me. Give me humility and courage to choose the harder, more lasting change that You’re nudging me toward. Amen.



John Woods

John serves as the Music & Worship Pastor at Dawson alongside a team of other committed and passionate minister-musicians. He is married to Lindsay and dad to Hudson, Emma, and Mason.

TUESDAY, APRIL 12

ARE YOU READY?

Matthew 24:1–51

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” *Matthew 24:35*

REFLECT

In Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Jesus two questions that have been studied, pondered, and even debated since that time: When will Jesus return, and what will the sign of His return be? In short, when is He coming back, and how will we know? In all three gospel accounts of this discourse, Jesus immediately replied with a warning to be on the alert (watch out!) for deceivers who will try to lead believers astray. He also gave a vivid, dire picture of the signs of His second coming. Jesus prophesied about events that will happen, but He does not give the hour or day of His coming. In fact, He made it very clear that only God the Father knows the “when” of the disciples’ question.

As a young believer, Jesus’ description of the end times caused me quite a bit of uneasiness and anxiety—even fear. As I have grown in my faith, the Holy Spirit has quieted my heart with the words Jesus spoke to the disciples in verse 35: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Praise God! The words of Jesus include promises such as: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33) and “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25). What comfort we find in the words of Jesus...words that will never pass away.

As Jesus prepared to go to the cross, He made sure the disciples had a full picture of what was to come. Just as they could not comprehend what was about to happen with Jesus’ death and resurrection, we cannot fully comprehend what will happen at the end of the age when Jesus makes His triumphant return. But we can be ready for His return. We can be watchful, discerning, and committed to loving and serving God and others with each breath He gives us. Are you ready?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for the words of Jesus that will never pass away. Thank You for providing a way to be in relationship with You through Your Son, Jesus. And thank You for your promise to send Him back to redeem your people for eternity. Help us to trust You alone with the timing of Jesus’ return, and please give us peace as we move closer to that day. Equip us daily to live out the Gospel so we will be ready when He comes. We love You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Lisa Simpson

Lisa joined Dawson in 1993, where she met her husband, Scott. They have three children who have all grown up at Dawson. Lisa enjoys serving in Dawson’s Student Ministry, as well as volunteering at Kids Connection and The Learning Center.

AWAITING THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Matthew 25:1–46

“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

Matthew 25:13

REFLECT

What does it mean to await something or someone with all your being? It is quite one thing to await and even long for the date of an event to arrive or to be reunited with a beloved person; yet it is quite another thing to really be prepared for the arrival! In Matthew 24:25, Jesus taught about His return, or the swift and sudden second coming. He impressed upon His hearers the fact that there will be no opportunity for last-minute preparation or repentance.

Jesus knew His followers learned by repetition, so after telling them in chapter 24 about His return, He continued in chapter 25 by using three parables to further clarify what it really means to be prepared for and awaiting in readiness for His return. The first parable in verses 1–13 uses the setting of a wedding. The custom was for the groom to arrive at the bride’s home to get the bride for the ceremony. It was customary for girls to keep the bride company as they waited for the arrival of the groom. When the groom arrived to get the bride, they would be joined by a great procession to go to the groom’s house where a feast would take place. This often lasted a full week. These 10 virgins or bridesmaids were to dance along the road with their lamps in celebration as the procession made its way to the groom’s home with the hope of taking part in the wedding banquet.

In Jesus’ parable, the groom did not arrive as early as expected, so the bridesmaids became weary and fell asleep. Five of the bridesmaids were good planners and brought a jar filled with extra oil to replenish their lamp. Five were on time to join in the procession and had lamps filled with oil in hand; however, during the wait for the arrival of the groom, the oil in each of the ten lamps was burned. Five had the needed oil to continue to the banquet feast. The five who were unprepared raced to purchase extra oil. By the time they returned, it was too late to join the feast.

As a Christian, one must ask, “What does it mean to wait for our Lord’s coming?” And Jesus gives us the answer in verse 13—“Watch,” or be prepared. The watchfulness is in their being prepared in advance of the arrival. The unprepared cannot borrow from the prepared. The prepared went with the bride and groom to the celebration. The foolish went to secure the oil and upon their return, they found the door shut.

PRAY

Lord, I pray that we each will prepare our heart for Your return by the watchfulness we employ daily through conversation with You, by the way we truly love You and place You above all other things in our life, and by the ways we serve You through loving others. May we be found faithful as Your people. Amen.



Alta Faye Fenton

Alta Faye Fenton’s connection to the Dawson Family of Faith began March 1, 1991, when moving here with her husband, Gary, who served as Senior Pastor of Dawson for nearly 26 years. She has three grown daughters, three sons-in-law, and five grandchildren.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Matthew 26:1–35

Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same. *Matthew 26:35*

REFLECT

There is a lot going on in Matthew 26. Some of those things include: Judas opted to betray Jesus, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus predicted all the disciples would fall away, Jesus prayed at Gethsemane knowing what was to come, Jesus was betrayed by Judas, and Peter denied Jesus three times. In all this, one passage that convicts me is Peter’s bold statement in verse 35 that “even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.”

Peter did deny Christ three times just as He said he would. We know from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus had also prayed for Peter to keep his faith strong. Jesus told Peter that Satan had “demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.” Yet, Christ lovingly responded to Peter’s bold and brash statements—and restored Peter beautifully. We know that Peter’s confession became “the rock” on which Christ built the church. If he was truly a disciple and his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God was to become that rock, how would he falter? If he faltered, what hope do we have?

You might say, had you been in Peter’s shoes, that denial of Christ would never have happened. You might even say, you could have withstood the peer pressure, been quicker on your feet, and been better prepared for that whirlwind night. But let’s not be too hard on Peter; he represents us.

Peter is arguably one of the best representatives of modern American Christians with unwaivering confidence in our own strengths and abilities. Our culture teaches us to be self-assured and independent. Satan knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows that a believer who is sure in his own abilities is easy to snare because he’s off his guard.

Peter was quick to boast that, in his own strength, he would not falter. What was he quick not to do? He didn’t stop and ask Christ why would he falter. He didn’t ask for guidance or for strength to persevere. He just barreled on, relying on his own talents. Peter learned, as we do, we don’t stand a chance against temptations and trials without relying on God. Satan is usually too quick for us, unless we are leaning into and relying on God’s strength and the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Peter learned to lean on Jesus. What an encouragement that is. Lean on Him today!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us first and for the promise of the Gospel. We ask that You grant us patience and wisdom to seek You and Your guidance first, in all we do so that we may glorify You. Amen.



Chris Grissom

Chris and his wife, Beth, have been members of Dawson for over 20 years. They started attending as part of what is now Together for Life and have been here ever since! They have three children, Grant, Matthew, and Laurel.

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 15

REALIZED VALUE

Matthew 26:36–27:56

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. *Matthew 27:50*

REFLECT

Have you ever bought something that didn't have a fixed price? For me growing up, it was baseball cards. The ultimate baseball card for me was an autographed Ken Griffey, Jr. rookie card. I would have given every dollar in my piggy bank for that card. In my mind, there was no price high enough; I would have paid all I had. That was because the value of the card, to me, was worth any price. This holds true in many other things as well. The price we are willing to pay is based on our assessment of the value of that which we are purchasing.

Jesus did as much for us on Good Friday. Jesus, who lived a perfect life, free from sin, chose to pay the ultimate price for you and me. Why? Because to Him, our value is unlimited. Even though we are not worthy, Jesus saw our value and willingly paid the highest possible price for us.

I know that personally, many times I fail to have the perspective that Jesus has of me. I place more weight on how the world values me, and my perception of that value is never enough. So, I try to do more to increase my worldly value, but my efforts will never be enough. Thanks be to God that we don't have to worry about our value because we have the joy of knowing that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God and for God. Your value is so great that Jesus would have died for you even if you were the only person on earth.

Let us then, this Good Friday, reflect on the fact that we are God's masterpiece, created for a purpose, with enormous value, evidenced by the ultimate price paid by our loving Savior. In response, let us realize our value by living with joy, serving others, and letting our light shine for Him.

PRAY

Father in Heaven, thank You for loving us and valuing us so much that you sent Your only Son to take our place on the cross. Through Jesus, we can have access to You anytime, anywhere. You hear us, You respond to us, You uphold us. Help us to remember our value to You and Your purpose for our lives. Amen.



Justin Mayfield

Justin and his wife, Suzanne, were married at Dawson in 2009 and have three children: Anne-Ryan (age 6), and Madison and Mims (both age 3). Justin serves in many areas of the church, including Together for Life, Finance Committee, Audit Team, Church Coordinating Team, and has also served as a Deacon.

SATURDAY, APRIL 16

BURYING JESUS

Matthew 27:57–66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. *Matthew 27:57–58*

REFLECT

It was the darkest of days. The 3:00 p.m. sun went dim, the disciples scattered, and the body of the Son of God hung dead on the cross. Most of the religious leaders responded to Jesus' death with a mixture of pride and fear. For one of them, though, watching Jesus die led him to step out in one of the greatest acts of faith recorded. Joseph, a wealthy man of Arimathea and a member of the Sanhedrin, had been a follower of Christ, but a secret one for fear of losing his rank among the Jewish council. As the sun went down, though, Joseph worked up the courage to ask Pilate for Jesus' body. The Romans would have disposed of most crucified bodies in a crude way, but Jewish families still treated even their crucified to a proper Jewish burial. It wasn't Jesus' family who came asking for His body, though. God called a hidden disciple out of the shadows for a task he was uniquely positioned to complete.

Pilate granted his request, and on the day before Sabbath, Joseph physically removed Jesus' battered body from the cross and covered it with spices and a cloth. Just as the baby Jesus was wrapped and laid in a borrowed manger, Joseph wrapped and laid the crucified Jesus in a borrowed tomb.

According to Jewish law, touching a dead body would have made Joseph unclean. He would be unable to enter the temple or celebrate Passover. We can't know until Heaven how much Joseph might have known or understood as he cared for Jesus in his death. He may have simply wanted to honor Jesus with a proper burial. His actions paint a picture of the awesome truth of the freedom he received through Christ's redemptive sacrifice on the cross. Joseph was no longer bound by his religious position, or the temple sacrifices or the legalistic need to remain "clean" by His own efforts to fulfill the law. Joseph only needed to walk by faith in the Messiah and wait for His coming redemption.

In our greatest seasons of sorrow, when Jesus seems absent, it's difficult to watch and wait for God's faithfulness, but our hope of salvation through Christ is always secure. Will we, like the Jewish leaders, attempt to keep Christ hidden away so that He doesn't threaten our comfort and power, or like Joseph, risk it all to glorify Him in faith, trusting He will do what He has promised?

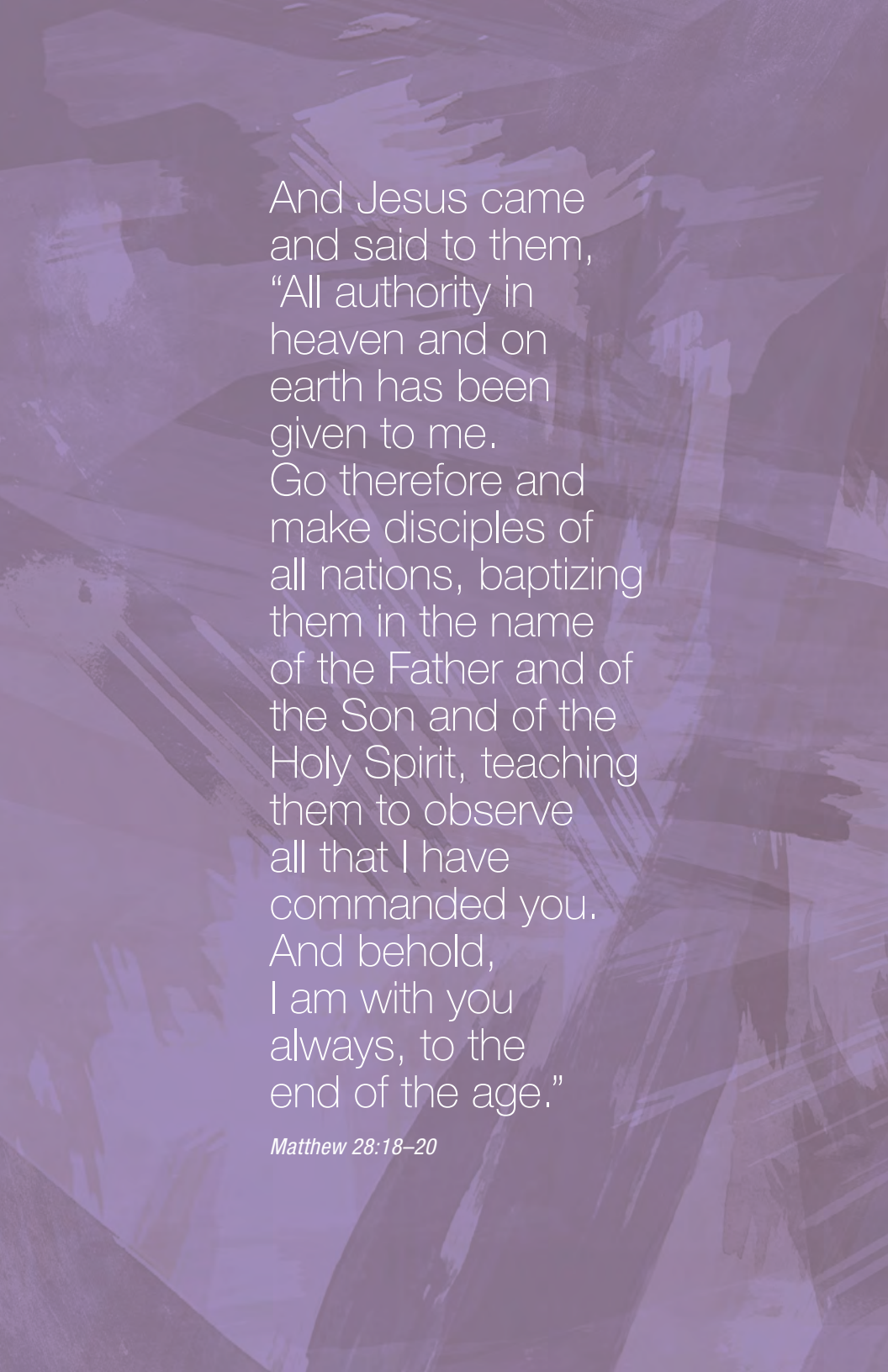
PRAY

Lord, please give us the courage and faith to obey Your call and to honor our Savior even when it costs us everything. Amen.



Sherri Brown

Sherri Brown grew up at Dawson and returned several years ago after serving in ministry locally. She loves to teach the Bible to both adults and children. Sherri is married to Justin, and they have a nine-year-old daughter, Abigail.



And Jesus came
and said to them,
“All authority in
heaven and on
earth has been
given to me.
Go therefore and
make disciples of
all nations, baptizing
them in the name
of the Father and of
the Son and of the
Holy Spirit, teaching
them to observe
all that I have
commanded you.
And behold,
I am with you
always, to the
end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 17

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:1-20

REFLECT

One of the most enduring memories of my maternal grandfather was him sitting in his reading chair with a soaring stack of books beside him. As a teenager, I curiously inquired, “Granddaddy, how do you read all of these books?” He said, “Well David, these are the books I’m considering reading this week. I will flip to the final page of each book, and if I like the way it ends, I’ll pick it up from the beginning.” My grandfather was always prone to exaggeration. So, I’m doubtful he actually did this with each book he read, but I am sure that there is something to learn from taking in the final page of any book.

We come now to the end of our Lenten journey (the final page) through Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew ends his account of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus on a gloriously high note. We know Matthew 28:16–20 as the Great Commission. Here we discover Jesus’ words to His disciples before He ascended to Heaven. These words, along with Luke’s account in Acts 1, give us marching orders to go, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey Jesus’ words. This was their mandate and, in turn, ours also.

Jesus gave this commission to the remaining 11 disciples. The number 11 is a glaring number of incompleteness and imperfection. From the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 spies sent into Canaan, or the 12 sides of the walls in the New Jerusalem, we are accustomed to 12 being a number that symbolizes perfection and completeness in the Bible. But here, Jesus addressed the 11 disciples. Never has a number stung so much. It is a reminder of the betrayal of Judas, and a reminder that this mandate is given to a group reeking of imperfection. In Matthew 28:17 we read, “They saw Jesus, they worshiped him; but some doubted.” What a revealing statement. The disciples were full of both adoration and apprehension. In one breath they offer doxology, while in the next, doubt still lingers.

Jesus didn’t wait for those inaugural disciples to perfectly get their act together before commissioning them for service. Nor does Jesus wait on us to completely eradicate all doubt and right all of our imperfections before he sends us out on His mission. Our perfect understanding or our perfect obedience are not prerequisites to serve Him. No, Jesus calls and equips us to serve Him as we are and where we are on our own imperfect journey. So today, we read the final page of Matthew’s Gospel reminded that it is but the first page of the story of the birth of the Christian church—a story that is still being written through the lives of his imperfect followers, you and me.

PRAY

Father, we thank You for Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Help us to live lives of obedience to His call to go and make disciples. Amen.



Dr. David Eldridge

David is the Senior Pastor of the Dawson Family of Faith. He and his wife, Danielle, are the parents of Hayden, Luke, and Jonathan.





DAWSON
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