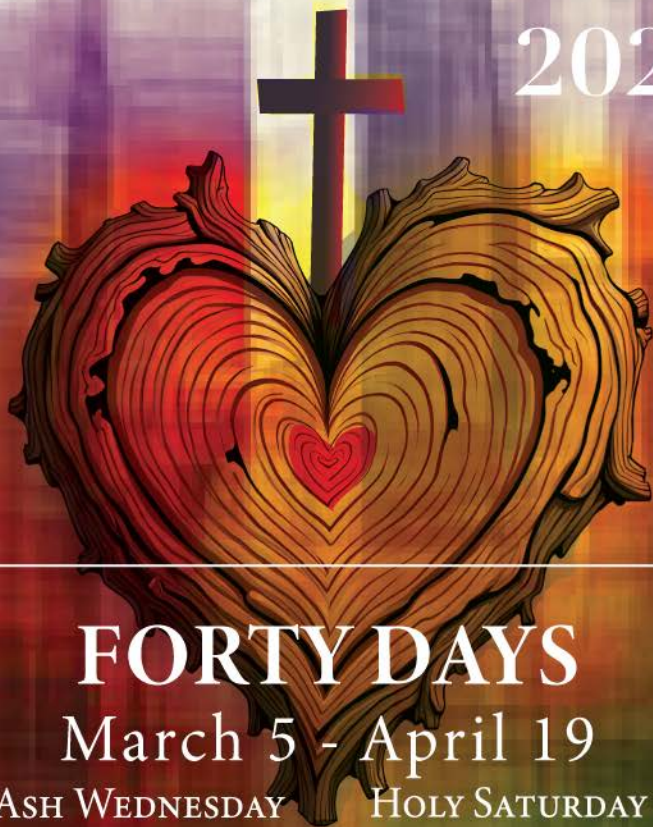




BEN HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

LENTEN DAILY DEVOTIONAL

2025



FORTY DAYS

March 5 - April 19

ASH WEDNESDAY HOLY SATURDAY

Dig Deeper:

**MOVING FROM SURFACE-LEVEL FAITH
TO THE CORE**

COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

Why Lent?

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL POEM

Over the years I've learned to appreciate
The true meaning of Lent and our Lord's blessed fate
He knew He was destined to meet a horrible death
He knew He would suffer until He drew His last breath
He tried to explain to Peter, James, and John
But they and His disciples could not fathom this great wrong
So He prayed and moved onward in His last 40 days
Knowing His journey would ultimately save
"Not my will Father, but Thy will be done"
Was His prayer in Gethsemane, our Jesus, God's Son!
So let us remember in this season of Lent
To reflect and remember our sins to repent
To praise God for our Savior, our Immanuel, our Christ!
Who died and has risen to give us eternal life!!!

By Bonnie Eades Green Askew

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INTRODUCTION



**"Hope and Healing: Embracing Our Faith"
Ben Hill United Methodist Church
2025 Devotional
Rev. Dr. Derrick Rhodes, Senior Pastor**

At Ben Hill United Methodist Church, we do not simply sip on faith like it is a lukewarm cup of tea. Oh no, we are brewing the real stuff—bold, black, and strong—because surface-level faith will not keep us warm when life’s storms roll in! Every week, this community of Believers gathers to dig deeper, moving from shallow puddles to the deep, life-giving waters of the CORE. And that is the heartbeat of our 2025 devotional: Dig Deeper.

Faith on the surface is easy—like a Sunday hat that is fashionable but flimsy in the wind. But the CORE? That is where the roots grow thick, where faith is not just for show, but it is working in the trenches of your everyday life. As we march into this new year, this devotional invites us to roll up our sleeves, put on our spiritual work boots, and get to digging—because surface faith will have you shouting “hallelujah” on Sunday and hollering “help me, Jesus!” by Monday morning.

Life has a way of coming at us fast—like Georgia traffic in rush hour. Uncertainty, heartbreak, and chaos come knocking, and surface faith cannot answer the door. But when we dig deeper, we find treasures waiting in the soil of struggle: joy that does not fade, peace that refuses to quit, and strength that outlives the storm. And that is what this devotional is all about—going beyond the surface to the sacred CORE where God’s love transforms, heals, and holds us together.

Inside these pages, you will find stories that will make you laugh, cry, and maybe even shout “amen” in the middle of your living room. These reflections are not sugar-coated—they are soul-soaked! Written by the voices of Ben Hill, they will remind you that faith is not just for the mountaintops; it is for the valleys, the detours, and those days when life feels like a never-ending uphill climb.

Visualize this: Faith is not a plastic flower sitting pretty on the table; it is a tree with roots so deep that even the strongest wind cannot shake it. It is not just words we sing on Sunday; it is the foundation we stand on when life tries to knock us down. It is not just “God is good all the time” when things are easy—it is trusting that He is still good even when the road gets rough. That is CORE-level faith!

(con't)

This year, we are challenging ourselves to go beyond surface smiles and polite “God bless yous.” We are diving deep, where the Word of God meets the worries of the world, where we grow from spectators to soldiers in the army of the Lord. Because here is the truth: faith that is only ankle-deep will not help you swim when the floods rise.

We are digging deeper together. We are finding faith that is real, raw, and rooted. We are building spiritual muscles in small groups, strengthening our souls through service, and anchoring ourselves in prayer and worship. And yes, we will stumble sometimes—because none of us has this thing all figured out—but every stumble is just a reminder to get back up and dig deeper.

So, let this devotional be your spiritual shovel. Dig into these pages like you are searching for buried treasure (because you are). Laugh at the funny moments, cry with the heartfelt ones, and let the wisdom of your brothers and sisters at Ben Hill push you to grow. As the theologian C.S. Lewis said, “You cannot go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.” That is the power of digging deeper—starting fresh, growing stronger, and finishing well.

Welcome to the CORE, where faith is not surface-level, and love runs deep. Let us make 2025 the year we move from puddles to oceans, from “good enough” to “God’s best.” Let us dig until we find ourselves rooted, grounded, and ready for whatever life throws our way. Because when we dig deeper, we do not just survive—we thrive.

Dig deeper, church family. The CORE is calling, and the treasure is worth the work.

Pastor Rhodes



2025 LENTEN SEASON FAST



The purpose of Lent is for believers to prepare for the coming of Easter through prayer, abstinence, repentance, and self-examination. Many commit daily (excluding Sundays) to “giving up” certain luxuries to replicate Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. The abstinence is replaced with a Lenten spiritual discipline such as reading a daily devotional, praying, or meditating to draw nearer to God.

From Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025, until Resurrection Sunday, April 20, 2025, the Ben Hill United Methodist Church congregation is encouraged too collectively:

- Pray for Spiritual Growth
- Pray for Young Adults

Participate in one of the following: (Please check with your doctor to make sure you can participate in the type of fast listed below)

1. The Daniel Fast (benhillumc.org/daniel-fast)
2. Fast and Feast: Fast for a certain number of hours (i.e., from 5:00 am until 5:00 pm) then Feast by consuming all daily calories within a certain number of hours.
3. One Meal Fast: Consume all daily calories via one meal each day.
4. Individual Open Sacrifice: Abstain from a personal guilty pleasure while seeking support/discussion/guidance from a trusted confidence.
5. Technology Sacrifice – Abstain from using electronic devices, social media, and/or streaming services from 5:00 PM – 5:00 AM daily (unless for essential job-related tasks or school related tasks).

CORPORATE PRAYER

Is every Wednesday, from 6:00 – 6:45 p.m.

To attend Corporate Prayer, call
(518) 263-8440

Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Dig Deeper-Moving from Surface-Level Faith to the Core

Rev. Dr. Derrick Rhodes

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 58:1-12

Imagine it is Ash Wednesday. You are decked out with ashes on your forehead and lips whispering promises of fasting. But deep down, something feels off. It is like frosting a cake that has not been baked—looks good, but there is no substance. That is the problem: surface-level faith. We are busy with rituals but missing the relationship. Why do we settle for shallow faith? Because it is easier to look holy than to live holy. We fast but forget the hungry. We pray but skip the part where we act. It is like planting seeds and leaving them to bake under the sun with no water, no growth or no fruit. Faith is not a puddle; it is a deep well waiting to be tapped. Isaiah shouts, “Cry aloud; do not hold back!” He is not calling for pretty prayers or polished rituals. God desires us to dig deeper, to move from shallow habits to living at the CORE. What does that look like? At Ben Hill, living at the CORE means committing to all five spiritual practices every day: 1. We are involved in a small group—i.e. Bible Study, Sunday School, United Women in Faith, or United Methodist Men. 2. We are serving in a ministry, using our gifts to bless others. 3. We are tithing, giving God the first and best of our labor. 4. We have a daily quiet time, tuning our hearts to God’s voice. 5. We are evangelizing, sharing something good about Ben Hill. When we live at the CORE, Isaiah promises, “Your light shall break forth like the dawn.” That is faith with roots and wings—faith that grows and glows, faith that transforms the world.

Prayer: Lord, I come to you, desiring a deeper faith. Forgive me for times I have gone through the motions. Help me commit fully to spiritual practices that honor you. Draw me into community through a small group, guide me to serve in ministry, teach me to tithe faithfully, lead me into daily quiet time with you, and give me boldness to share your goodness with others. May my life reflect your light, rooted in your truth and bearing fruit for your glory. Shape me, use me, and help me live at the CORE of my faith. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Lean on God

Paula Cotton

Scripture Reference: Psalm 91

Reflecting on my childhood experiences, I always enjoyed going to the amusement park with family and friends. In addition to eating the bright red crunchy candy apples and sugary cotton candy, we had a fantastic time riding the roller coaster. The faster and higher it went made it even more thrilling and electrifying. Today in our fast-paced modern world, life can be compared to a speedy roller coaster ride. Time seems to have accelerated and days fly by alarmingly fast. Struggling with daily activities and unexpected trials and tribulations feels like an emotional battle of perseverance. Holding on to this roller coaster of life with its ups and downs is challenging. Do not try to face this challenge alone or depend on worldly solutions. Psalm 91 reminds us that "God is our refuge and strength". We must face life's issues and demands with prayer and trust in God. He renders the compassion and reassurance we need to face the adversities and turmoil that swirl into our lives. God is the lifeline that supplies our stability; He upholds us with His righteous hand. He is the light that shines brightly and bestows upon us hope, peace and salvation. The good news is we are not alone. With God we feel optimistic and confident as we face life's twists and turns. God is in control and His eye is always on us. He loves us more than we can ever imagine and He delights when we depend on Him. Meet life's issues and demands by being strong and victorious with God's power.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father. You are amazing and powerful. Thank you for leading and guiding us each day. Lord, we trust You to strengthen us so that we will be able to overcome life's challenges with confidence. Amen.

Friday, March 7, 2025

Trust God Regardless of...

Daryl Kirkland

Scripture Reference: Acts 7:35-42

This passage reminds us of Moses' incredible role in Israel's journey. The Israelites' rejected Moses despite all the wonders God performed through him. Moses was called by God to be their leader, deliverer, and guide. Yet, the people, in their impatience and doubt, chose to turn away and create idols in the wilderness, disregarding the miracles and wisdom Moses had delivered to them.

This story highlights the dangers of forgetting God's faithfulness and the importance of trust in His timing. Even though Moses performed miracles and received divine guidance, the people quickly lost faith. Their hearts turned back to Egypt, symbolizing a return to bondage and familiarity instead of trusting in the unknown but greater promises God had in store for them. In the words of Corrie Ten Boom, one who was imprisoned in a concentration camp for hiding Jews from the notorious Nazi regime, "never be afraid to TRUST an unknown future to a KNOWN God".

As we reflect on this passage, we are reminded to guard our hearts from turning to idols in our own lives—whether that be in material things, comfort, or even our own understanding of how life should unfold. When life feels uncertain or difficult, we may be tempted to rely on our own solutions instead of TRUSTing in God's greater plan for us.

During this Lenten season, let this passage encourage us to stay rooted in faith and obedience, even when the road ahead seems unclear. God has a purpose for us, just as He did for Moses and the Israelites. You were born on purpose for a purpose.

May we remain steadfast in trusting His guidance, knowing that He is faithful to fulfill His promises, even when we can't always see the next step ahead. Keep your eyes on Him—He is our deliverer and our strength.

Prayer: Dear Lord, during this time of reflection, please remind us that You have a purpose for us. Reveal Yourself and our purpose so that we can fulfill it during our journey here on this earth. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, March 8, 2025

A Shelter in Life's Storm

Mari Early

Scripture Reference: Psalm 91:1-2

Life often feels like a storm—full of challenges, uncertainties, and moments when we are unsure where to turn. In these times, Psalm 91:1 offers a promise that brings comfort and hope. When we choose to dwell in the shelter of the Most High, we find rest, protection, and peace in His presence. Dwelling in God's shelter is not about escaping life's hardships. Instead, it is about leaning into the unshakable refuge of God's love. His shelter is not a distant place; it is as near as our prayers and as constant as His presence. He invites us to rest—not because the storm has passed, but because He is with us throughout the storm. Perhaps today you feel overwhelmed, anxious, or burdened. Be encouraged! God is your refuge. When the weight of life presses on you, remember that you don't have to face it alone. His shadow offers protection from what feels unbearable. His strength is greater than your circumstances, and His love is your anchor in the storm. This promise isn't just a distant hope; it's a present reality. As you dwell in God's shelter, you are reminded that He is faithful, unchanging, and mighty to save. His presence is a shield of comfort and a beacon of hope that lights your path through the darkest nights. Let this truth encourage you: in every moment of your life, God's shelter is wide open, His peace abundant, and His love everlasting. You are not alone.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for being my refuge and my strength. When life feels overwhelming, help me to rest in Your presence and trust in Your promises. Remind me that no matter what challenges come before me, I am safe in Your care. May Your peace fill my heart, and Your hope guide my steps. Amen.

Sunday, March 9, 2025

"Digging Deeper"

5 CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

COMMUNITY > Crowd > Congregation > Committed > Core

#1: COMMUNITY

Engage those who are within driving distance of the church. "Discover what types of people live in your area, decide which of those groups your church is best equipped to reach, then discover which of the styles of evangelism best match your target."

(Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren)



Monday, March 10, 2025

Faith and Miracles

Krystal Wattley

Scripture Reference: John 20:29 & 2 Timothy 4:7-8

I thought I understood faith and what it meant to believe and trust in God and hold Him to His word, but then a personal tragedy happened in my life. My husband suffered a stroke, and it changed my outlook on living a faith-based life forever. It was not clear if he would survive, and at the current time of this submission, it is not clear what his life, our life, will be moving forward. So, to find peace, I dug deep in scripture. I knew which scriptures to reference due to my Christian upbringing and discipleship classes but applying that knowledge of scripture to a real-life situation was surreal. You hear the words pray and miracle but experiencing God's work and witnessing His miracles has placed me on a higher level of understanding of my purpose and what living a faith-filled Christian life is all about. I learned to trust and have faith. The scripture John 20:29 resonated with me. My faith and trust strengthened, and I saw God work miracles regarding my husband's condition, through corporate prayer, clergy anointing, singing hymns, and reading scripture. I know I witnessed a miracle of gradual healing. Moving forward, I understand that my sole purpose for being on this earth is to spread God's word and praise Him continually. It is not about me, my situation, or my family. It's much more significant, and I plan to shout it to the mountaintops. There is a gospel song that reads "May the work I've done speak for me," and it is associated with the scripture 2 Timothy 4:7-8. That song will serve as my anthem for doing what I am here to do: serving others, praising God, and living a faith-filled Christian life.

Prayer: Heavenly father, help me remember what my purpose is as I am here on earth. Guide my footsteps to ensure that you are known and that your word is heard. Lead me through a path of righteousness, serving and witnessing to others as I praise your name. Amen.

Tuesday March 11, 2025

Hear Our Pray O Lord!

Henry Wiggins

Scripture Reference: Psalm 102:1, Psalm 143:1, James 5:16

“Hear Our prayer O Lord, Hear Our prayer O Lord, Incline thine ear to us And grant us Thy peace.” Even though the inspiration for this hymn is attributed to Psalm 102:1 and Psalm 143:1, reading Psalm 17 made me remember it. I remember the words to this hymn from growing up in my home church in Virginia. It means much more to me today because I know that James 5:16 is true when it says “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (NKJV). The first part of that verse also says to confess your trespasses (sins) to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. Being healed can mean a lot of things. You can be healed from a physical sickness, or a mental ailment. Most importantly, we all need to be healed from sin. I have seen the Lord answer many of my prayers with ‘Yes’, some with ‘No’ and some with ‘Wait’. I do not believe God will answer prayer if your heart is not in the right place. You have to confess your sins, repent and turn away from sin. God is pleased when you do this and the answer to your prayers will be clear.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Please help us each day Lord to Walk in the way which is pleasing to You. Help every man, woman, boy and girl to be the person that You want them to be. In the matchless name of Your Son Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Stay Focused on the Goal

Nathaniel Malbrue (Youth)

Scripture Reference: Luke 21:34

Luke 21:34 talks about not letting our hearts get weighed down by distractions, and I feel like that's something I'm learning in my own life. Right now, I'm in track conditioning and just went through tryouts. I'm working hard to build up my strength and endurance. It's not easy. There are days when the workouts feel like too much or when balancing track, school, and everything else starts to feel overwhelming.

Sometimes I catch myself focusing so much on how well I'm doing-whether I'm keeping up in practice or staying on top of my grades-that I lose sight of God. I get caught up in the pressure to do everything perfectly. But then I remember that Jesus calls us to stay focused on Him, not the worries or distractions around us. When I take a step back and pray, it's like I'm reminded that God's strength is there to carry me through, even when I feel like I can't keep up.

Conditioning has taught me something about faith too. It's a process. I don't instantly become stronger or faster; it takes consistency. And in the same way, my relationship with God takes intentional effort. I have to make time for prayer and trust that He's preparing me for the challenges ahead-whether that's track meets in the future or just handling the pressure of school.

This verse reminds me to not let the anxieties of life weigh me down. When I focus on God first, He gives me the peace and strength I need for everything else.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being with me in every season of life, even when things feel overwhelming. Help me to stay focused on You, even when I'm busy or stressed. Give me the strength to handle what's ahead and remind me that You're preparing me for every challenge. Amen

Thursday March 13, 2025

Lot Forgot

Johnnie Follins

Scripture Reference: Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18

In Genesis 13, we see a powerful lesson in faith and obedience through the story of Abram and Lot. Lot, blessed by association with his uncle Abram, failed to recognize the source of his blessings. He overlooked that it was God's favor upon Abram, rooted in Abram's obedience and faith, that brought wealth and prosperity into their lives. When their shared abundance created conflict, Lot chose the lush and developed plains near Sodom and Gomorrah, driven by worldly desires and selfish ambition. Lot forgot to consult God in his decision, prioritizing his immediate gratification over spiritual discernment. Abram, however, trusted God's promises and viewed the land with spiritual eyes, relying on God to fulfill His covenant to make Abram the father of many nations. It is significant that God spoke to Abram only after Lot departed, reaffirming His promise and expanding Abram's vision. God declared that everything Abram could see would be his inheritance, a land of "fatness and fellowship." Abram's obedience led to eternal blessings, a legacy that would create disciples for generations to come. Let us remember that what God has for us is uniquely ours. Greed, manipulation, or worldly desires cannot rob us of His promises. Trust in God's plan, walk in faith, and remain obedient, knowing that His blessings will sustain us eternally.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for reminding us that obedience and faith unlock Your promises. Help us to see with spiritual eyes, trust Your plan, and honor the blessings You provide. May we never forget that You are the ultimate source of our abundance. Amen.

Friday, March 14, 2025

A Word from the Father

Stephanie Watts

Scripture Reference: 2 Kings 20:1-11

I received a call from Mr. Kermit Majett. He is a dear friend of mine as well as my late mother, Mrs. Ira Deloach. He called to check on me due to the recent loss of my mother. During our conversation he shared his walk with Christ through various times and trials in his life. One testimony that struck me was the life and death of his wife from his second marriage. He shared that she had a terminal illness and that she prayed the prayer from 2 Kings 20:1-11. Hezekiah was a leader in Israel. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that God would heal him and add fifteen more years to his life. God answered her prayer! He told me to be patient in waiting on the promises of God. He said tests would come in my life, but to trust God. He also warned me of the counterfeit blessings that Satan would send. His words were filled with wisdom, experience and compassion. Before we hung up, he imparted to me that he loved me as if I were his own daughter. I told him that I would do like Mary and hide these words in my heart.

Prayer: Lord thank You for sending people to encourage us on our journey. It is through them that we find hope and peace in our lives. Amen.

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Trusting God in the Face of Opposition

Trennis Harvey

Scripture Reference: Psalm 27

"The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1) As a school administrator, I often find myself navigating decisions that impact vulnerable students. Whether it's advocating for underrepresented groups or implementing policies that challenge the status quo, these choices sometimes create tension. I've encountered resistance from colleagues and community members who struggle to see the bigger vision. Yet, in these moments, I've learned to trust in God as my protector and guide. Psalm 27 reminds me that God is my stronghold, and His light shines on the path He has called me to walk, no matter how dark the opposition feels. During one particularly challenging season, I faced criticism for prioritizing the needs of at-risk students. While the backlash was disheartening, Psalm 27:3 gave me strength: "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident." Knowing God was with me helped me maintain peace and keep my focus on the students I was called to serve. Three Steps to a Positive, God-Centered Mindset: 1) Anchor in God's Word: Spend time daily in scriptures like Psalm 27. Let His promises remind you that He is your shield and strength. 2) Pray for Perspective: Ask God to help you see beyond immediate struggles and focus on His greater purpose. Trust His plan even when others cannot. 3. Seek Godly Encouragement: Surround yourself with people who affirm your calling and remind you of God's faithfulness. This Lent, reflect on the truth that God is your light and salvation. As you face opposition, let His protection and guidance give you the courage to continue making a difference.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for the assurance in Psalm 27 that You are our light, salvation, and stronghold. We praise You for Your protection, guidance, and unwavering presence in our lives. Help us to trust You fully, even in trials, knowing You are our refuge and strength. Amen.

Sunday, March 16, 2025

"Digging Deeper"

5 CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

COMMUNITY > CROWD > Congregation > Committed > Core

#2: CROWD

*T*hose who show up for church every Sunday but have not made the commitment to join the church. Jesus attracted crowds by loving unbelievers. The crowd must become the church.



Monday, March 17, 2025

Gratitude and Faith in Grief

Sheryl Stone

Scripture Reference: Psalm 105:1-42

Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done” (Psalm 105:1). I thought losing my father was tough, but walking through the grief of losing my mother has been one of the hardest journeys of my life. Yet in this Lenten season, Psalm 105 calls me to reflect on God’s faithfulness and to give thanks, even in sorrow. As I remember His goodness, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for having had my mother 60+ years in my life. Her love, wisdom, and faith in God shaped me into who I am today. Though her absence brings sadness, I am thankful for the gift of her presence in my life and the memories that continue to sustain me. In Exodus 33:1-6, God warns the Israelites of their stubbornness, yet He remains faithful to His covenant. This scripture reminds me that even in my grief and sorrow, God is present. While I yearn for my mother’s comfort, I find peace in knowing God is always with me. His love fills the spaces where I feel most empty and His grace gives me strength to move forward. Romans 4:1-12 encourages me to lean on faith, just as Abraham did. It wasn’t Abraham’s works that made him righteous, but his trust in God’s promises. In my grief, I am learning to trust God’s promise of eternal life. I believe that my mother is now in God’s presence, and one day, we will be reunited. This faith brings me hope, even in my loneliest moments. For this Lenten season, I hold onto gratitude for my mother’s life and the legacy she left behind. I also cling to faith in God’s unfailing promises, knowing He is faithful through every season, including this one.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your boundless love. Strengthen our faith to trust your plan, even in uncertain and grief-stricken times. Fill our hearts with gratitude for blessings you bestow upon us, as you are always present. Guide us to live in your light, with unwavering hope and joy. Amen.

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Keep Your Eyes on Jesus

Niyah Malbrue (Youth)

Scripture Reference: Colossians 3:2

MORNING:

Colossians 3:2 states “set your mind on things above not on things on the earth”. This verse for me is a reminder of what fills my heart and mind. Life can be stressful whether it’s with school or friendships and the desire to fit in. But in this verse, Jesus is encouraging me to stay alert and not let these things pull me away from what really matters. Instead of getting caught up on these temporary worries of life, I can focus on what really brings me peace-my faith, my values and God’s purpose for me.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, I pray that You continue to lead us on the path of righteousness and continue to stir me away from any disruptions that will lead me away from You. Heavenly Father I come to You and thank You for the great support system that You have blessed me with and all of the great opportunities that You have bestowed on my life. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Carrying Jesus to High School

Christine Thompson (Youth)

Scripture Reference: Job 1:1-22

EVENING:

Job 1:1-22 makes me think of faith and belief. Job had so much faith in God. Even though everyone he loved died, and all his livestock to keep him alive died, too. He still believed and had faith in the Lord. This could show someone my age that even though something is terrible, it could be a test of faith in Christ Jesus. Trust the Lord because good and great things are guided when people believe and have faith in Him. Dealing with academic pressure, social issues, family/friend problems, or personal setbacks can be tricky during this time. Navigating the complexities of high school life and remaining positive despite the challenges may be difficult for non-believers. I will maintain my faith by trusting God and keeping Job in mind.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray that You give everyone the faith given to Job so we may prosper in Your name and bring more disciples to Your kingdom. When we encounter difficulties, big or small, please help us remember Job’s example and trust that you are with us...Even when we don’t understand why things happen. I pray that everyone has a good rest of their week and a wonderful day. Amen

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

God Listens and Knows What We Need; Just Trust Him!

George Bates

Scripture Reference: Proverbs 3:5-6

From the time I was a kid, my mother and I would read scripture together. She asked me to make this scripture, Proverbs 3:5-6 a core part of my religious belief. When my mother passed away in 2001, I was deeply saddened. But as time passed, I became more and more pleased as well as happy that she was with the Lord because she would have no more days of being tired, no more operations and no more pain. I also believed that her spirit would be with me and that she could be part of my life from her place in heaven.

In a time of difficulty, I had a very powerful dream, and it involved my mother. A CEO, who was also a business associate and friend of mine had taken money from our company that belonged to our investors and I informed the investors. The CEO fired me. I had put most of my money in the company and could not get it back. I was in a difficult situation. I was out of money and with no job. I had just started graduate school and was without the funds to pay my tuition.

One night while I was sleeping, in a dream I saw a very, very bright and intense light. It did not frighten me but comforted me. It occurred when I was in deep meditation and prayer, asking God for a way out of my difficulty. I was following my mother's guidance. A short time after the dream started, my mother appeared to me in a vision and said to me "Trust in the Lord with all your heart". She went away and I felt very peaceful. I knew that mother was helping me from Heaven.

The day after the dream, I received a call from a former boss asking me if I would have lunch with him the next day. We had lunch and to make a long story short, he offered me a position with his company, and it was with a significant increase in pay. He said I could continue with my graduate work, and we would make out a work/school schedule. When the meeting was over, I was elated and went to my car, closed my eyes and thanked God and my mother for making a way out of no way. God is good and my mother continues to look down on me and helps me through life. I think of her often and thank God for letting her be my mother. Praise God!

Prayer: God, we know You are with us, and You listen to us. If we trust in You, we will be able to weather the storms of life and we will enjoy more of life's moments. Trust God! Amen.

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Do What They Did

Carol Ann Moore

Scripture Reference: Psalm 63:1-8, Daniel 3:19-30, Revelation 2:8-11

This Lenten season coincides with a period of uncertainty in our country. The results of the 2024 Presidential election shook me. I asked God "what now"? This can't be good. Can I pass this test? How do I love a leader and a group of people who I believe hate me and lie for a living. Well, I asked for a word and God never disappoints. The subjects in these passages faced opposition with praise, conviction and attentiveness. Adversity and testing are common themes in Psalms, Daniel and Revelation. My test isn't as hard as theirs but a test nevertheless. The bible is my spiritual GPS system. It helps me arrive at a destination I cannot reach on my own. In Psalm 63:1-8, David was hiding from a crazy king and fighting his way to the throne of Israel. His future definitely appeared uncertain. However, in spite of his dilemma, David praised God with passion. Although a flawed man, no one in the bible rivaled his passion and praise. The Holy Spirit said to me, "Praise Me Like David". Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated an unshakeable knowledge of God in Daniel 3:19-30. King Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into a fiery furnace for not bowing to his false god. They spoke truth to power telling Nebuchadnezzar "our God is able to save us but even if He doesn't, we won't bow". That's conviction. The Holy Spirit whispered, "not Herod, Pontius Pilot, Robert E. Lee, Hitler or Donald Trump triumph over the righteous". In Revelation 2:8-11 Jesus cautions us to stay attentive. He called the impoverished Church of Smyrna rich. Jesus said in Revelation 2 that He is the Alpha and Omega and this to me means only He has the last word.

Prayer: Dear Lord I pray as your children that we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly before you. Amen

Friday, March 21, 2025

Sovereignty of Seeking in Silence

Kenneth C. Harris II (Young Adult)

Scripture Reference: Psalm 63:1-8

When it comes to God and our faith, each of us carries a unique theology—our own understanding of who He is to and for us. This personal relationship is a gift granted through salvation. Yet, in our zeal to share, we sometimes overstep. Too often, people weaponize their understanding of God, using Him as a tool of convenience or manipulation rather than as a source of truth and transformation. This Lenten season, ask yourself: “Is it Christ I want people to follow, or is it me?”

Psalm 63:1-8, the passage I chose to shape this devotion, speaks to the personal pursuit of God—a yearning that begins within. My devotion, *Sovereignty of Seeking in Silence*, reflects my belief that seeking God is an intimate, internal process. There are moments when God reveals something just for us, yet we rush to proclaim it to the masses when it was never meant for public consumption.

Sovereignty means independence. I believe God calls us to seek Him selfishly—not in a self-centered way, but independently, free from the need for external validation. The authority that comes from seeking Him is only possible when we surrender to His will and attune ourselves to His voice above all others.

We must remember that as unique as each of our relationships are, we are still one body. When the foot aches, when the head spins, we must let our hearts, turned toward Him, guide us through the pain. As an artist in many forms, I have learned this: there is no “painting” without pain. Without it, all you have is “ting”—an empty sound. In seeking God, be honest about what pains you. Your honesty with Him is your merit for relationship. And in the end, He will make a masterpiece of your life.

A Prayer for Seeking: God, give us the courage to be still. To shut up and get out of Your way.

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Trying Something New with God

Brandi Gamble

Scripture Reference: James 2:26, Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 63:1-8

Have you ever felt that nudge to try something new, but doubt creeps in? Maybe it's a career change, a new hobby, or stepping into a leadership role at church. It's easy to feel unsure—what if I fail? What if I'm not good enough? But here's the good news: God is with us in the process. Psalm 63:1-8 reminds us of our deep longing for God, and when we seek Him, He provides the strength and assurance we need. When you're facing something unfamiliar, lean into God's presence. He knows your heart and your potential better than you do. Isaiah 5:1-7 speaks of God tending His vineyard with care and expectation. Just like a vineyard requires patience and nurturing, our new beginnings need time to grow and bear fruit. It's okay to start small and trust that God is working, even when we don't see immediate results. James 2:26 says, "For even as the body without the spirit is dead; so also, faith without works is dead." Take me, for example. I felt God nudging me to start my own business, but fear held me back. I worried about finances, competition, and whether I had what it took to succeed. But instead of letting fear stop me, I prayed and took a small step—starting my business and sharing my services with friends. Over time, with faith and persistence, my business began to grow. There were setbacks, but I trusted that God was guiding me. Just like the vineyard in Isaiah, I nurtured my efforts, and eventually, I saw the fruits of my labor. So, if you're feeling hesitant to start something new, remember this: God has already planted seeds in you. Water them with faith, patience, and trust. You don't have to have it all figured out—just take the first step.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for planting seeds within me. As I step out in faith, help me trust Your timing and nurture my efforts with patience. Let my work reflect Your goodness, and may I always remember that You are with me. Amen.

Sunday, March 23, 2025

"Digging Deeper"

5 CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

COMMUNITY > CROWD > CONGREGATION > Committed > Core

#3: CONGREGATION

Those who have joined the church and have become members. They are not serving in any ministry. We must communicate the value of membership.



Monday, March 24, 2025

Death Gives Meaning to Life

Mike Watkins

Scripture Reference: Psalm 39:4; Romans 2:6

As a high school student, I once had an assignment to write a paper. My football coach inspired me to write one called "Death Gives Meaning to Life." I used the football field with the time clock as a metaphor for the importance of having to accomplish a goal before time expires. That was 50 years ago. Reflecting on these scriptures caused me to think about that paper and the inspiration of Coach Buran. I learned on the football field, just as in life, we each have assignments. If we complete our assignments to the best of our ability we will achieve victory. As individuals in life each of us has been given assignments that we must strive to complete to the best of our ability. Our assignments are revealed through prayer and God's word. In football the playoff season is considered "The Road to The Super Bowl." During that time teams are preparing to achieve the ultimate victory. Most players feel that achieving that ultimate victory is what gives meaning to the months of hard work in their football life. The Lenten period is the "Road to Calvary" where we as Christians are called to reflect on our lives and in so doing prepare to celebrate Christ's ultimate victory. Reflecting back to my high school football days, my senior year our team worked hard on completing our assignments and we achieved an undefeated season. I'm so glad that 2,000 years ago Jesus, with the words "It Is Finished," completed His assignments and reigns undefeated! As we look toward Calvary, I urge us all to seek God's guidance to successfully complete our assignments, understanding that he is standing at the goal line waiting to help us celebrate the victory of a meaningful life.

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for the assignments in our lives. Because we don't know the day nor the hour when You will call us home, empower us to pursue our assignments and Your purpose for us daily and in the end receive the ultimate victory. Amen.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

Accountability

Tiffany Wilson

Scripture Reference: Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16

I used to ask myself, “Does God really love us no matter what we do?” The saying in church, “come as you are”, is that really how God intended it? As I am growing, I believe God will meet us where we are but I don’t think He intended us to stay there. I was introduced to God at a young age and through an abusive childhood He protected me. What happened needed to happen otherwise I would not know God and I am thankful for the journey so far. My childhood caused me to be broken as an adult and even though I was done with my childhood it was not done with me. I had wounds I did not see. I was desperate for love because I was not loved properly. I was searching for love in people who could not give me what I needed. Hope deferred makes the heart sick and I had been choosing people who kept me sick. I made those choices. God told me no, and I was saying yes and the cost was great. When I asked God to help me, I had to hold myself accountable. Once I understood how God had carried me in my ignorance, I fell to my knees and thanked Him. He had grace for me because I did not know what I was doing. I did not need what I was looking for, I already had it. God loved me all along! He loved me so much that He allowed me to see myself; to see the truth and He gave me the opportunity to change. If you want to see change you have to be the change and the truth will set you free. I came to Him as I was, but His love didn’t allow me to stay there.

Prayer: Father God, You said “Ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find”, I am asking for a mirror to see myself so I can fix what is broken in me. Allow me to see myself clearly so I may see others and give them the same grace You have given me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Finding True Purpose

Canaan Green (Young Adult)

Scripture Reference: Ephesians 2:10

MORNING:

In the journey through life, I've always had one goal and that was to be successful. Now I'm not 100% sure what my plan is to reach my goal. Even though I'm indecisive on career plans and the future, I still know my goal will be accomplished. Whatever is to transpire in the future, I know it's through the Lord's will.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank You for Your love and grace. Please guide me with wisdom and strength, Grant me peace in my heart and help me show kindness to others today. Amen.

God in the Middle

Kaleb Robinson (Youth)

Scripture Reference: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

EVENING:

I was scared to begin middle school this year. I have cerebral palsy; I have a noticeable walk and delayed thinking - so I must get pulled to take tests. I worried about experiencing increased bullying in middle school. My mom walked me to my homeroom, and it took almost an hour to get inside. To avoid being bullied, I attempted to fit in. I wouldn't do my work, I talked during class or I played during class. These actions were incredible to my friends; however, my teachers and mom saw things differently. During a parent-teacher meeting, I realized I was doing more harm than good. My mom and teachers were tired—was God tired, too? We learn in youth church that there are ways to avoid temptation and make wise choices. This is why I chose 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. It reminds me that, even when faced with peer pressure or situations that might encourage bad behavior, be like the Israelites. I rely on God's strength to resist temptation and trust that He will keep me.

Prayer: Dear God, I need Your continued assistance and strength. Be with me as I navigate life in middle school. Apart from You, I am nothing. Help me to become the young man I am to be. Amen.

Thursday, March 27, 2025

God's Gift of Forgiveness

Sharon A. Williams

Scripture Reference: Psalm 32:1

As I reflect on the life of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, I praise and give Him all the glory. I have been declared righteous through my belief in Him and given the precious gift of forgiveness and eternal life. One of the main lessons I have learned in life is not holding onto unforgiveness. I must forgive others as He has forgiven me. Holding onto unforgiveness leads to anger and resentment building up in the mind, heart, spirit and leads to broken fellowship with God. After the murder of my youngest son, Brandon, a divorce and losing my home, I prayed with the help of family and so many praying friends at Ben Hill United Methodist Church to not let the seeds of confusion, hate, anger and resentment overcome me in my weakest hours. I did not want to become bitter. I remember hearing the evangelist, Joyce Myer, saying we have a choice in life when trouble and hard times come. We can become bitter or better. Through the many prayers, I worked through being able to forgive and the joy that The Lord gave me, was my strength to live in peace. Holding on to unforgiveness destroys the ability to live in peace with yourself and your relationship with God and others. God is able, as we turn to Him, to heal our pain, soften our hearts and restore our joy.

Prayer: Thank You Father God for Your great love and gift of forgiveness. Help me to show compassion, kindness and always forgive, as You have forgiven me. Amen

Friday, March 28, 2025

Forgive Me Lord!

Tina Stevenson

Scripture Reference: Psalm 32:1-2, 5

July 4th, 2013 was an exciting day as my Mom was coming to visit and enjoy an Independence Day Cookout with my family! Mom temporarily moved to Chicago to serve as a caregiver for the Aunt who raised her but was now suffering with dementia. Mom came home on holidays to see her family. She spent time with each daughter individually and July 4th was my day! Her friend Joanna drove her to our home, we laughed, had barbecue and she and Joanna moved into the sunroom to talk. Mom looked tired and slower, but I attributed that to age. I asked how she felt, and she said she was fine. She had a doctor's appointment the next day. Mom and Joanna left, and I looked forward to seeing her the next day. Shortly after leaving, the door bell rang. I thought something was left behind, so I ran to the door. Joanna summoned me to her car because something was wrong with Mom. At the car, I saw my Mom in distress. I ran back into the house, called 911 and awaited the paramedics. At the hospital, I called family to join us, and we prayed. The ER physician came and stated my Mom was "dead." In disbelief, I was angry. Angry at the doctor for the terrible delivery of the message, at paramedics taking too long to arrive and at myself for not asking more questions of Mom. What more could I have done to prevent what occurred? Angry! Psalm 32 reminds us that God will forgive us and restore our joy when we acknowledge our sins and ask Him for forgiveness. I harbored anger toward others. I moved through my anger and valued the joyous time with Mom. The time to witness her love for her granddaughters and son-in-law and watching the intimacy of "girlfriend talk" with Joanna. I recalled the love shared throughout my life. I forgave the doctor, paramedics and myself. God called Mom home, and we gained eternal love from Heaven. He reminded me that forgiveness is for me.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank You for the joy that comes when we confess our sins to You, and You relieve us of our guilt and anger. Thank You for hearing our cries, guiding us forward and loving us unconditionally. We rejoice in the Lord to our forgiving God! Amen.

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Spiritual Intimacy in the Christian Walk

Herbert Barber

Scripture Reference: Romans 12:2

Dig deeper what does that mean to me? The Word must become a part of me all the way to the deepest part of my heart. As a result, any thought that I have, any action that I take will be influenced by the Word of God. This is the level of commitment that I believe God wants from us as Christians. Breaking past the superficial to a deeply felt commitment to godly principles. This will be reflected in the actions that I take as I interact with the world, when I encounter other people and when I spend my time and resources to help causes that promote the furtherance of God's Kingdom on Earth.

Prayer: Lord help me to move beyond superficial concerns. Help me to practice thinking deeply about Your Word as I seek to do Your will by thoughtfully applying Your will in all areas of my life. Lord let thy will be done through me as I seek to follow Your Word. Amen.



Sunday, March 30, 2025

"Digging Deeper"

5 CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

COMMUNITY > CROWD > CONGREGATION > COMMITTED > Core

#4: COMMITTED

*T*hose who have committed to their own personal growth through daily prayer and tithing. We become whatever we are committed to.



Monday, March 31, 2025

May Those Who Love God Praise Him and Shout Hallelujah!

Dione Traci Duckett

Scripture Reference: Revelation 19:1-8

Before beginning His ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness enduring temptation. During Lent, Christians spend forty days before Easter reflecting on Jesus' experience and His crucifixion for our sins. We pray and practice moderation to "quiet the noise" of our everyday lives and get closer to God. On Easter, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, proving that He was the Son of God. The Lenten experience is an intentional, self-imposed, planned-for "wilderness" experience that we observe to draw us nearer to God. We should use this experience to remind us to focus on God and the life of Jesus when life hits us with our personal, unexpected wilderness experiences. During this recent holiday season, I had a personal wilderness experience. One of my dogs developed a cancerous tumor and had to have her tail amputated. A few days later, my godfather ("the nicest man on the planet") died. During this time, I also experienced arthritic pain (for the first time ever) in both knees—so bad that I could barely walk. Did I tell you that I am an entrepreneur? During what is typically a low business season and a period of rest, I was blessed with my busiest holiday season ever. Many days, I was tempted to just stay in bed and cry. Instead, I stayed positive by continuously praying and thanking God for His many blessings. I sacrificed sleep to spend more time to help my dog heal and to manage the increase in business. I started physical therapy, practiced discipline over the holidays, walked my dogs in the snow, and lost fifteen pounds. Friends and family helped in unexpected ways. Now my dog and I are almost fully recovered; business is good; and the experience has brought me closer to God. I am ready to celebrate. Hallelujah!

Prayer: Dear God, Thank You for blessing me through my wilderness experiences. Revelations 19:1-8 reminds me that those who love God sing "Hallelujah!" as an expression of heartfelt praise. During Lent and my personal wilderness experiences, I will focus on and celebrate Jesus' life and sacrifice for me. Hallelujah! Amen.

Tuesday, April 1, 2025

Angels Among You

Paul Vaughn

Scripture Reference: Psalm 34:18

Reflection: I hope these words bless someone today. When my mother was transitioning, she had not spoken, moved, or opened her eyes for over a day and a half. She had taken no food or water. As her condition remained unchanged, I stepped outside for a moment to breathe. It was a beautiful evening—cool, peaceful, and not a cloud in the sky. The moon shone brightly, and the night was silent. Not a bird, not a cricket, no sounds at all. Suddenly, I looked up and saw clouds forming, though moments before there had been none. These clouds appeared as angels in long robes, surrounded by seraphim. It was breathtaking. A deep peace washed over me, as if God was reminding me: “It’s all right. I’m always with you. I’m always watching. I’m always protecting.” When I returned to my mother’s bedside the next evening, she still had not spoken. Then, at around 12:01 or 12:02, she began to breathe rapidly. She opened her eyes and, to my amazement, spoke clearly. She told me to tell everyone that she loved them. She said, “I’ve tried to do what was right. I’ve taught you well. Go out, love, teach, and pass this ministry on to someone else. Bless someone else, because God is always with you. God is always watching.” Her words reminded me of the angels I had seen earlier—the confirmation that God’s presence and love are always with us. That moment of peace and reassurance was not just for me but for all of us. It was a reminder to continue to love, teach, and bless others, knowing that God is ever-present, watching over and guiding us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your eternal presence and the peace You bring, even in moments of pain and loss. Thank You for the gift of my mother’s wisdom and the reminder of Your love through the vision of angels. Help us to carry her legacy of love, teaching, and ministry forward, always trusting that You are with us. May we bless others as You have blessed us. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Jesus Can Do Amazing Things

Anna Kilborn-Wright (Child)

Scripture Reference: Luke 9:10-17

This scripture reminds me that good things can happen when you believe and have faith. Jesus can do the impossible. Trusting Jesus when you don't have enough is the best way to show gratitude. We can trust God to provide for us and our families. It also shows how Jesus used the bread and fish to feed many and still had more left over. It reminds us to share what we have with others and God will bless us. Lastly, it teaches us to be grateful for what we have, even if it's only a little

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us you can do amazing things with a little because you are bigger. Please help us trust You to care for us and share what we have with others. Thank You for always providing for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Jesus!

OUR PROVIDER

Our Protector

OUR PEACE

Thursday, April 3, 2025

Learning to Live in God's Grace

Catherine Lewis

Scripture Reference: Romans 12:12

Twelve years ago, my life changed for medical reasons that keep me very close and in touch with my God. I was awakened late one night with a very loud thumping sound in my chest. Was I having a heart attack? After seeing my physician, I was diagnosed with heart palpitations and no cure was available for me. Then came the tinnitus, ringing in the ears. I have lived with these health problems for years. The tinnitus reminds me that God is listening to every prayer, which He answers daily, supplies all my needs and forgives my sins. The palpitations of my heart tell me He has covered every beat with His blood when He died on Calvary. I am so grateful for the ringing and the erratic beating that lets me know that I am alive, living in His goodness. Thank you, Father, for your unconditional love. I continue to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering and to persevere in prayer.

Prayer: I will lift my eyes to the hill from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. Thank You, Father, for Your everlasting help, You are always here with open arms and loving me. Thank You for being Our Father in heaven and thank You for the opportunity to love You in return. In the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Friday, April 4, 2025

He's That Kind of Friend

Carolyne Hall Simmons

Scripture Reference: John 15:12-14

Growing up as an only child for several years was a unique experience in my village. My only sibling, my brother John, was born when I was a seventh grader! As a child, I observed that most children had siblings or cousins who were their friends. In my family there were no maternal cousins, and our paternal cousins lived in Chicago, Washington, Detroit and St. Petersburg, Florida. They all lived a very long way from Birmingham, Alabama. As a young child, friends were very important to me. Friends gave me a sense of belonging, completion and wholeness. What is a friend? Friendship is one of God's perfect gifts to us. A friend is a person that you share a bond of mutual affection and esteem, a person with whom you have developed a close and informal relation of mutual trust. Friends help each other by being accepting, active, affectionate, amiable, honest, sometimes complacent, non-judgmental and forgiving. I have been blessed throughout my life with some really good friends. I still have cherished friends from kindergarten to college, from neighbors to co-workers and sorority sisters to my beloved Ben Hill Church Family. I thank the Lord daily for those friends and for the greatest gift of all, His son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is always with me. He is my healer, provider, protector and counselor. He is with me when I am happy, when I am sick, when I rejoice, when I am sad, when I mourn and when I am glad. He wraps His loving arms around me and He listens to my prayers even when I don't know what to pray for. I call on Him and He answers. HE'S THAT KIND OF FRIEND! HALLELUJAH!!!

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for the presence of Your Precious Son. We are so blessed that You sent Him to this world to save us. What a friend we have in Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, April 5, 2025

Persevering With a Deeper Faith

Leroy Miller

Scripture Reference: Psalm 126:5-6, James 1:2-4

There was a time in my life where I had to lean on a deeper faith to persevere through hard trials. I lost all my kidney functions and had to go on dialysis. While on dialysis, my body became very weak, which caused me to have frequent blackouts resulting in hard falls. As a result, I could no longer drive or even walk for any length of time. It was like I was slowly dying. During this time, I had to have both hips replaced, which added to my suffering. I was becoming desperate for a kidney transplant, but I kept the faith that I would soon receive one. Unfortunately, during one of my blackouts, I fell and dislocated my newly replaced hip which also resulted in me breaking two bones in my foot. Two weeks later, I was informed that a kidney had become available after being on dialysis for seven years. I was very relieved, but that feeling was short-lived. I was told that due to my recent hip repair and broken foot, I did not meet the physical requirements to undergo a transplant. I was heartbroken, since finding a deceased donor match can take years. However, I had faith that I would get another chance before it was too late. One month later, another kidney match was located. However, I was once again denied the transplant due to my physical condition. Of course, this news was devastating. However, I leaned into my faith even more and thought of the joy that would eventually come when I would be able to get a transplant. Three months later, although very rare, another kidney became available, and this time I was able to receive the transplant. Having deeper faith enabled me to persevere through all the suffering and disappointments.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please bless me with patience and perseverance. Please let my faith in You grow stronger through whatever trials I may face. Show me how I can glorify You through my suffering and continue to serve You, even when my body is sick. Amen.

Sunday, April 6, 2025

"Digging Deeper"

5 CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT

COMMUNITY > CROWD > CONGREGATION > COMMITTED >

#5: CORE

*T*hose that are most dedicated and devoted to ministry. They serve in various ministries and tend to their own spiritual growth.



Monday, April 7, 2025

A Love Story

Rosemary Phillips

Scripture Reference: Hebrew 10:19-25, 1 Corinthians 13:13

My brother gained his wings in June 2024. Marvin had a unique personality and in true form opted to discontinue life support and life sustaining medications. Rev. Winn helped me to see this is a story of faith and hope, but mainly, love. Marvin, diagnosed with COPD 13 years ago, miraculously survived a 39-day hospital stay in March 2024. This time, more organs were failing; he was on a ventilator, kidney machine, insulin, etc. In my mind's eye, I see Marvin praying about his future observing the emotional and physical strain on his family. He's talking with God, saying, I trust You God; I have faith in Your promise of eternal life. I have hope that my healing is on the other side which gives me joy, the source of my strength. Then he says, God, can I do this my way? With God's blessing, he proceeded. Picture family members gathered in his ICU room, his pastor and first lady, others on FaceTime, for a celebration of life I call a Hallelujah Party! Picture us praying, singing the gospels he loved, roasting him, hugs, kisses, farewells. Marvin hosted the most awesome Homegoing imaginable! Afterwards, he slept peacefully away surrounded by his wife and children. During this very special time of the year, we are focused on the sacrificial love, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am reminded of my brother's unwavering faith and trust in God in spite of his circumstances and his own sacrificial love for us. True faith requires sincerely trusting in Jesus to meet our deepest needs and willingness to submit to His will. My brother's unselfish Christ-like act inspires us to make these eternal qualities "faith, hope, and love" our most treasured life investments.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love towards us. Continue to strengthen our faith, help us to place faith over fear, and to submit to Your will even when it differs from our own. Father, help us to love one another as You love us. Amen.

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Sanctuary

Warren Sims Banks

Scripture Reference: Psalm 20

Our Sanctuary is a place of refuge, shelter, and a retreat. There, we find silence, deliverance, and a place where we hear from God. Over time we begin to gather our strength to overcome the various situations and circumstances that we find ourselves being a part of, through no fault of our own. Ten years ago, I found myself alone after the Homegoing service of my beloved wife, Annie Jewel (Chief) Banks. We had been together for almost fifty years. The funeral was held on Monday, January 5, 2015, at Ben Hill UMC. After a 40 plus mile drive to our birth home of Griffin, Georgia, she was laid to rest. Three days after her funeral, I was so overcome with grief that I took my original manuscript from our storage area and destroyed all twenty-six thousand handwritten pages. I was so lost and angry that for a brief period I forgot all the attributes of Christian discipleship that I had learned over the years. I was strictly into me. I fell to my knees and cried out, "Lord, what should I do?". I could not see what God's next purpose for my life would be, especially after losing my wife! But God immediately spoke to me and answered my cry. The Lord spoke clearly to me that I was not forgotten nor forsaken and that He had a new plan and direction for my life. He outlined the next steps that I was to take. It was there in the Sanctuary, my Sanctuary, that I rediscovered Jesus Christ and I was made whole again. It was there that I found purpose and meaning to continuing my journey and proclaiming the love and light of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for always being there for us and providing for our needs. May you continue to bless and keep us as we continue our journey. You are our great "I AM" and I am thankful that You are our Sanctuary. We rejoice this Lenten Season. Amen!

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

Trust God

Cameron Oates (Youth)

Scripture Reference: Psalm 20:7

Back in the Bible times, horses and chariots were like tanks and jets today—they showed a kingdom’s power. Kings would trust those things to win battles. But David knew better. Instead, he put his trust in God. Today, we don’t have chariots, but we do have other stuff we rely on—like social media. It’s easy to think likes, followers, and comments make us cool or important. But the truth is those things won’t last. God is the only one who will always be there. So instead of stressing about how many people like our posts or how popular we are, let’s remember to trust God. Those things will not last forever, but God will.

Prayer: God, help us trust You more than anything else. Remind us that You’re more important than anything this world offers. Amen.



Thursday, April 10, 2025

The Journey of Faith Through Adversity

Sparkle K. Adams

Scripture Reference: Psalm 31:9-16

I am sharing a deeply personal story about facing adversity during my political campaign and military career, drawing parallels to biblical struggles. Despite being ridiculed, threatened, and racially discriminated against, I relied on faith in God for strength. I was feeling like David in the Bible, facing slander and danger but remaining steadfast in prayer. Eventually, my perseverance paid off — I won the election, becoming the first Black person elected in that city, and later retired from the military with numerous awards and accolades. Trust in God, no matter how dire the situation may seem. He may not come when you want Him, but He will be there right on time! I reached out to one of my mentees asking him what this scripture means to him as a 17-year-old high school senior. Mekhi Grimes shared that this scripture reminded him that no matter the struggles or conflicts he faces, God will always walk by his side. He explained that when he feels weak, he should turn to the Lord for strength and guidance. He reflected on a difficult time when his grandmother passed away, and his family experienced deep depression. They stayed isolated in their home for weeks to grieve. What helped them through that dark period was remembering how his grandmother would host Bible study sessions to help them grow spiritually and build a relationship with the Lord. Her teachings reinforced the importance of trusting in God to overcome trials and tribulations. The core message is to trust in God, even during challenging times, as He will provide guidance and protection when it's most needed. He will provide the deepest patience to wait on Him and strength when we are weak as long as we sincerely and faithfully trust in His word.

Prayer: Dear Lord, though we may feel depressed and attacked at every turn, the one thing to remember is when we turn to You, nothing negative will enter our air space. You will have a hedge of protection around us from any hurt, harm, or danger because we trust You. Amen!

Friday April 11, 2025

My Faith

Patrick C. White

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 54: 9-10

Psalms 31: 9-16, Hebrews 2:10-18

Hi, how are you? How have you been? How's the family? Though these are the ways in which we greet one another, I have struggled with this at times since July 2020. Has this been challenging to you? Let me tell my story. Here is a quick summary: July 2020, I became my dad's caregiver; December 2020, Dad died of heart attack; January 2021, I lost my job; March 2021, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure and sent to the ER; and August 2022, I lost my younger brother to cancer. Now I must be honest, during these times I am not exactly sure how I made it. I was drained mentally, physically, emotionally, and to a certain extent, spiritually. But I never lost my faith in God! Today's scripture is a reminder of what God promises us despite what our reality might look like. So, notice that was not the end of the story. In January 2023, God gave a job with promotion. And within six months I was able to manage my blood pressure via lifestyle changes. The losses of my father and younger brother were extremely hard, but God also surrounded me with family and friends who loved me and a church family that provided support and opportunities to provide support. My faith sustained me through the storms. Faith is a power God provides. God allows us to go through challenges and issues in life, but He does not leave us. Never underestimate the power of your faith!

Prayer: Dear God remind us as David reminds us in Psalm: Even though we walk through the darkest valley, we will fear no evil, for You are with us; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort us. Amen. (Psalm 23:4)

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Trust God in Uncertain Times

Dr. Zina Rhodes

Scripture Reference: Psalm 31:9-16

The recent presidential election has left many of us feeling downcast, uncertain, and even fearful about the future. Some worry about making ends not just meet but touch, as inflation and shrinkflation tighten their grip on our pockets. In moments like these, it's natural to wonder: Where is God in all of this? Psalm 31 reminds us that these feelings aren't new. The psalmist himself experienced distress and cried out, "Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress." Yet, even during turmoil, the psalmist found hope. In verse 14, he declares with unwavering faith, "But I trust in You, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'" In these uncertain days, as we wrestle with economic challenges and a shifting world, we too can echo the psalmist's words: "But we trust in You, Lord... You are our God." Let us hold on to this truth: No matter what unfolds, God remains in control. Even when the days seem dark and the path ahead uncertain, we can rest assured that our God is still on the throne, overseeing it all with His perfect wisdom and care.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your mercy and constant protection. Forgive us when we fall short and renew our faith through Your Word. We trust in Your undefeated power and perfect plan. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Sunday, April 13, 2025

DEVOTIONAL
SCRIPTURE THEME

Colossians 2: 6-7

New International Version

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Monday, April 14, 2025

Rooted in Restoration, Transformed by Justice

Rev. Willie Nelson, III, M.Div., M.A.C.M.

Scripture Reference: Isaiah 42:1-9

Lent is a season that challenges us to dig deeper into our faith, and Isaiah 42:1-9 calls us to reflect on the transformative justice of God. The passage paints a picture of the Servant, Jesus Christ, chosen not to crush or condemn but to restore. “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (v. 3). Honestly, these words remind me of the moments when I’ve felt bruised and barely holding on, wondering if God could still use me.

Holy Week holds the key to that transformation. Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna,” but by week’s end, He was betrayed, unjustly condemned, and hung on a cross. Yet, through His suffering and resurrection, He proved that God’s justice isn’t about punishment—it’s about restoration. Jesus didn’t come to preserve the systems of oppression; He came to dismantle them and offer a new way of living.

This challenges me to ask: Am I willing to let God dismantle the parts of me that cling to the surface—my pride, my comfort, my need for control? True transformation requires surrender. It means allowing God to heal the broken places in my heart and to strip away the excuses that keep me from seeking justice for others.

In a world where political leaders often prioritize power over people, God calls us to reflect His justice in our daily lives. This isn’t easy, but Holy Week reminds us that transformation always comes at a cost. Jesus gave everything to restore us—how can we hold back?

As we reflect on His sacrifice, we are reminded that we, too, are called to be agents of change—rooted in His love and empowered to reflect His light in our communities and the world. This Lent, I’m asking God to transform me from the inside out, so I can live rooted in His justice and love. Will you join me?

Prayer: God, I humbly come before You knowing that You are the God of transformation. Please break through the surface of my faith. Heal what is broken, restore what feels lost, and empower me to reflect Your justice and love in the world. Amen.

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Journey With Jesus

Demarcus Fields

Scripture Reference: Psalm 71:3

David's life offers a unique perspective on what it means to walk closely with God. The Bible describes David as "a man after God's own heart," which shows the deep relationship he had with the Lord. Even though David's life was far from perfect—marked by failures and poor decisions—he consistently trusted in God's character. His words in Psalm 71:3, calling God his "rock and fortress," reflect his confidence in God's love and protection. This image of God as a rock and fortress reminds us of His strength and faithfulness. Unlike relationships that can feel conditional or dependent on our behavior, God's love remains constant. He doesn't expect us to be perfect but invites us to trust Him fully. David's example shows that even when we fall short, we can turn to God as our refuge and guide. In my own journey with Jesus, I've found that trusting God can be both simple and challenging. Seeing Him answer prayers and work in amazing ways strengthens my faith. But there are also times when waiting for answers feels difficult and doubt creeps in. David's life teaches us that even in those moments of uncertainty, we can hold on to the truth that God is our protector and guide. He is with us, even when we don't fully understand His plan. Walking with Jesus means learning to trust Him in every season of life. Whether we are celebrating victories or navigating challenges, we can rely on God to be our rock and fortress—a safe place where we can find peace and guidance.

Prayer: Lord, help us to trust You as our rock and foundation. Guide us through moments of doubt and remind us of Your constant love and protection. May we always find safety and peace in You. Amen.

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Tired of Reruns

Willie Vincent

Scripture Reference: Hebrews 12:1-3

I spent many years feeling dejected because I decided to do the “right thing” and found myself “black-balled” in a local school district. A principal lied on a student and ordered me to suspend him, and her associate superintendent upheld the lies. I found myself having to choose between being quiet and compliant as the school district mistreated this child from “the hood” or risking it all to do what was right. His parents didn’t have the capacity to fight for him, so God compelled me to do it. Eventually, the school district did the right thing and exonerated the young man, but my potential career as a principal quickly faded. Before I left the district, an associate superintendent called me and said, “Everyone knew you were right, but you almost lost your job.” I was more dejected at this point because he and others made the concession that I was right. I left that school district and spent many years angry about it. Many years later I realized I was still “rerunning” that race – the one that was behind me. The text reminds us that we must run the right race- the one that is before us. There is no benefit to rehearsing and mulling over things that I will never be able to go back and change. Deep faith means believing that it will all work out – somehow. It did. Many years later I saw the young man in a restaurant. He walked up to me and thanked me for appearing to lose it all for him. He invited me to his graduation after he earned his master’s degree, and he is presently coaching football at a university. I was grateful to God at that very moment for all I gave up and gained in that school district.

Prayer: God, we can’t always see the way, but a deeper faith compels us to run on believing that there is a way. We are not asking You, God, to take away the things that distract us. We want the courage to do that ourselves. Empower us, God. Amen!

Maundy Thursday, April 17, 2025

Leaving Dormancy for Daybreak

Rev. Dr. Bernice Kirkland

Scripture Reference: Psalm 116:1-2, 12-9

Additional Scripture: Ephesians 3:20

David had reasons to love the Lord unconditionally. He understood “if it had not been for the Lord on his side,” he would have died. Our humanity is designed to make us aware of our need for God. The Lenten season invites us to transformation, regardless of our baptism. We are engaging in self-denial, with the desire to embrace spiritual discipline. In doing so, God provides direction. David had decided to give his whole life to God who had proven himself.

What will we surrender to God during Lent? This season invites us into a spiritual focus that produces eternal blessings. God wishes to extend Lenten blessings of new perspectives and peace that surpasses all understanding through prayer and study. We give ourselves to God while listening for His still small voice. The late Whitney Houston sang, as the Psalmist wrote, “I love the Lord; he heard my cry and pitied every groan. As long as I live and trouble rises, I will hasten to his throne.” We are invited, by the grace of God, to build our lives on God’s firm foundation.

God extends fresh opportunities to us, as night turns into daybreak. The clouds of the sky roll back to enlighten each day. On that Good Friday, some thought that all hope was gone; just as Jesus was transitioning to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever! Look up! Reach up! Never give up!

We are created in the image and likeness of God. We are being transformed as we follow God, hear God and love God! The question is not “what we give up for Lent?” The question is whether we will pause, pray, and wait upon our Lord.

God has blessings with our names on them. Enhance the practice of spiritual discipline daily. Pray as God blesses this new season. Study, discern and watch for God. The earth may appear dead in January, but it is only dormant. Be still and know that God is present. Wait upon the one who wants to enhance and even transform our situations. We must trust the one who can do exceedingly, abundantly, above all we could dare imagine (Eph. 3:20).

Prayer: Gracious God may Your love and day-breaking power be ignited in us, in Your church and in your world. We need You now, like never before, and thank You for Your goodness and Your mercy towards us. Amen.

Good Friday, April 18, 2025

Denial/Rejection/Betrayal

Rev. Genetha Rice-Singleton

Scripture Reference: John 18:25

Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." John 18:25, NIV Peter, a man of faith, found himself in a situation where he denied knowing Jesus not once but three times. This is a struggle that many of us can relate to. Faced with a similar dilemma, we might find ourselves questioning our own faith. Would we have denied knowing Jesus Christ to save our lives? It hurts when you are denied or rejected by your friends. The denials we face from family and friends come in many forms. I recall sitting in the cafeteria with individuals I believed were trusted friends when a young lady approached us and accused me of saying some cruel words about her. I turned to my trusted friends and said "you were there, I did not make that statement." My trusted friends turned their heads in denial. Thirty years later, I feel the rejection/denial/betrayal as if it was yesterday. We are friends today, but my scar from their denial remains. I felt betrayed by individuals I thought had my back. As I reflect on Peter's denial of Jesus, I can't help but wonder how Jesus felt at that moment. It's a personal reflection that leads me to ask: how does Jesus feel when I, too, deny knowing Him as my Lord and Savior? Don't let your denials, rejections, and betrayals keep you in a dark place. Continue to love those who leave you scars. The denials, rejections, and betrayals Jesus faced turned into a GOOD FRIDAY.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remain loyal to You and Your Word. Give me the courage to speak and stand boldly for You. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.

Saturday, April 19, 2025

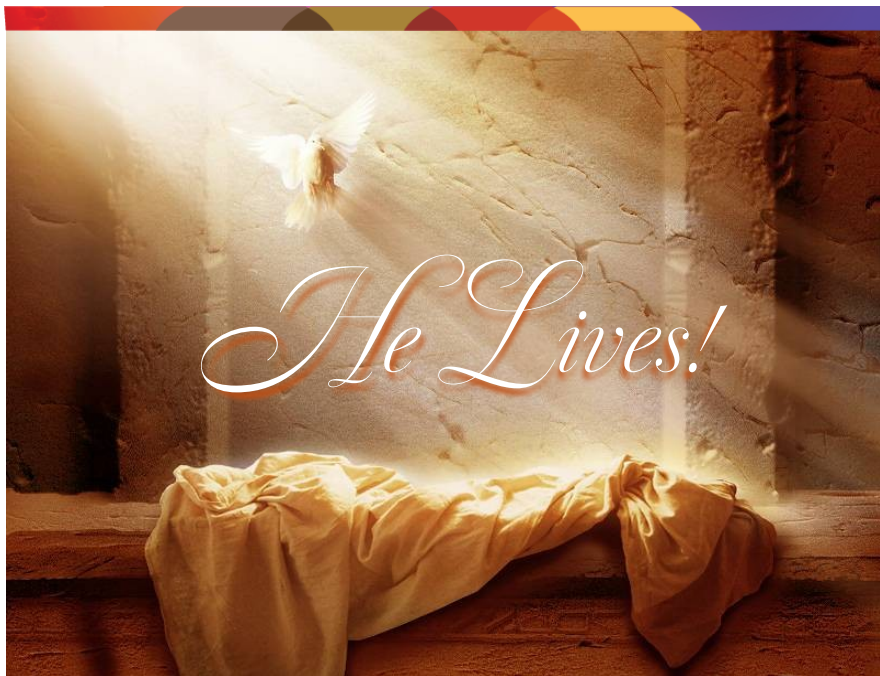
In God We Trust

Rev. Shari Rates

Scripture Reference: Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

Growing up we may have played the game, “Hide and Go Seek”. There was always great comfort in either not being the first one tagged, or finding a hiding spot that was too good to be true, and everyone asking, “Where are you?” Second to being found was someone pointing to where you were hiding after they were caught. The lessons of trust and distrust commenced for life in those moments. In today’s text we hear the plea of the Psalmist seeking refuge from danger. Commentaries share that David may have been fleeing from Saul. Whatever the reason, in our lifetime we have perhaps experienced hardships, setbacks, setups, or faced situations and circumstances that have left us feeling penned in with little to no escape. Still, we are assured that there is hope! When we surrender to God’s reliant power, He swoops in and saves us from any and all impending troubles. Simply let go and let God serve as Your rock and fortress. “Trust and never doubt, He will truly bring you out!”

Prayer: Lord; help us to remember that no matter what we go through Your ever-present help is always there to protect us. May we help others see Your light along dark paths of fear in uncertainties. Amen.



Sunday, April 20, 2025

Happy Resurrection Sunday!

Acknowledgments

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Rev. Dr. Derrick Rhodes, clergy, and staff

Planning Team: Bonnie Askew, Cynthia Holland, and Eddie Phillips

Clergy Lead: Rev. Genetha Rice-Singleton

Administrative: Devonna Dowdell

Editing Team: Bonnie Askew, Eddie Phillips and Angela McClung

Graphics/Layout/Print Production, Promotion: Winsome Jean

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