

The background is a watercolor wash with warm, earthy tones. It features a gradient from light beige and cream at the bottom to deep orange, terracotta, and hints of purple and red at the top. The texture is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

Easter

DEVOTIONAL 2019





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PREFACE

Slow down and remember.

One of the most mentioned sins in the Old Testament is the sin of “forgetfulness.” The people of Israel would often forget the ways in which God had provided for them, delivered them, rescued them. When their minds weren’t on those things, mistakes were often repeated and turmoil followed.

This week leading up to Easter is an opportunity to remember and reflect on the most important deliverance in the history of the world: the death and resurrection of Jesus. In much the same way as old Israel, when we keep our minds on God’s greatness, providence, and mercy in our lives, growth follows.

Each day you will find a short scripture reading (NIV is printed) and devotional content. Our prayer is that you personally engage with God this week through this devotional, no matter where you are in your familiarity with church. We are praying for you as you spend time with God this week.

Day 1

LUKE 19:28-40

²⁸ After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” ⁴⁰ “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

The stars are out tonight, but there's no moon to be seen. It's dark, but the dim glow of a street lamp bounces off the houses behind mine. I can see the outline of trees rising into the horizon. They're backlit, somehow, I guess by the light pollution of other towns out of sight.

When I can't sleep, I step outside on my patio. It's serene, in a way, a stark contrast to laying on my pillow straining for the arms of slumber to finally capture me. That's weird, right? How sitting on the concrete steps behind my house can be more peaceful than my bed sometimes.

I think about how God came to Abraham in a vision one night. Told him to look at the sky and count the stars. I'm envious of what that view must have looked like, without the busyness and hustle that surrounds us here. It must have been stunning.

I wonder if Abraham, sometimes tossing and turning, yearning for sleep, would step outside and look at the sky just to be reminded. Reminded of God's greatness, His creativity, and His promises.

I step outside to remind myself how small I am. That I don't have anything figured out. That I am but one person in a sea of people on a rock in an endless sea of rocks. But there is a plan, and it will not be stopped. God will be glorified, even if we all fall silent.

Day 2

MARK 12:41-44

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

Motive is everything.

Pastor and author Tim Keller tells an apocryphal story about Jesus in his book, *The Prodigal God*. It's not in the Bible and may not be true, but it does illustrate the character of Jesus. The disciples are with Jesus about to start their day of walking. He tells them to pick up a stone and bring it with them. Peter, being the rational type and knowing there was a lot of walking ahead of them, found a fairly small rock and put it in his man satchel.

They walked until lunch time when Jesus had everybody get their stones out. He waved his hands over them and the stones turned to bread. This was their lunch and Peter's was quite small.

After lunch, Jesus told everybody to pick up another stone. Peter, being the rational type and hungry from his meager lunch, found a small boulder. They walked and walked. Peter struggled and perspired from the hauling of his rock dinner. But he knew it would be worth it.

Around dinner, Jesus stopped them next to a river. He had everybody get their stones out. He then told them to throw them in the water, which they did. And then he just kept on walking.

The disciples, and in particular Peter, stood there dumbfounded. Jesus sighed and turned around knowing their hearts.

“What are you doing? Let's keep walking.” Reading the looks on their faces, He asked, “Who were you carrying the stone for?”

Motive is everything.

We're so adept at doing “good” things. Helping a neighbor. “Serving” at church. Donating money to a cause. Being friendly with people. We sweat and struggle over these things. These “stones” we carry, the why behind it all is what matters most.

Day 3

MARK 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Every day, God willing, you wake up and you put your feet on the floor. From that point, you set out on a path for the day, and God willing, your feet return you to the same place at the end of the day. This is life as we know it. This is our day.

Some of these paths take us to coffee, to work, to school, to our friends, to the grocery store. Some of them take us simply around our house, tending to the needs of the children and home we've been blessed with. They take us into conflict and peace, turmoil and pleasure, comfort and unease. Regardless, most days these paths bump us into other people. People who are on their own paths.

Jesus walked a path too. He spent time with God, set out for the day and did the next right thing. He called disciples to Himself. He healed people. He prayed. He taught. He loved. He had compassion. He rested. He thought. He did all these human things.

Routine is great. It keeps us efficient and useful. Ignorance of the people around us for the sake of our agenda is not. We so easily put on the blinders and focus on our goals and lists. It's only when our goals become His goals that this changes. Nothing matters more than what we do with those paths. This teacher of the law began to understand. A single act of real love towards God or another is better than a thousand right acts carried out for the sake of following rules.

Day 4

MARK 14:1-9

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

The previous owners of my current home, well, they did the best they could. The inside is fine, completely suitable for living. The patio out back, however, is what I would call “endearing”. It is homemade, constructed of bricks. It has bumps and low spots. It’s certainly not level. And in the summer months, the crabgrass does a wonderful job of filling in the cracks between the bricks. This would be easily taken care of by some herbicide, but I just never seem to get around to it. It always starts the same, with one hearty plant, peeping its bright green leaf through whatever medium lies between the bricks. Then another appears. And another.

It’s almost like the others are waiting for that first one to let them know it’s okay to stand out. That it’s okay to be different. That we all come from the same wonderful ground.

I haven’t yet learned to be this kind of person. But I have an immense admiration and respect for those who have. It’s never easy to be the first.

The first to rail against popular opinion. The first to do the right thing when everyone else seems numb.

The first to apologize. The first to take a humble stance.

The first to do the right thing even when it hurts.

This woman at Bethany, she knew of only One worthy of the kind of worship she was made to give. So she gave it. With no

regard for what others might think or how they may respond to her, she poured her worship out.

Day 5

MARK 14:27-31

²⁷ “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written:
“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—
before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me
three times.”

³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with
you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

It’s difficult, at times, to know where to stand. There are moments, far too many, that I know I’m comfortable. And I don’t want to move. Even when I’m called to step forward, backward, sideways...anywhere but idle...the calm and ease of the place I’m standing numbs my senses and keeps my eyes

heavy. Like my head on my pillow moments before the alarm goes off, I'm held asleep.

There are other times, still, that I am overcome. The love of God stretches before me like the sea, above me like the sky, and His power is tangible behind me like the mountains. There is a sense that no matter where I move, He moves before me. Above all, despite whatever discomfort lies in the moving, I am held.

We can't always be sure that we will be comfortable, but at least we know we are held. We belong to Him. And we are made for His glory, that His name be made known, as far as the seas stretch and the skies cover.

This is the love found even in Jesus' words to Peter the night of His arrest. Peter was going to fall, and the loving Savior knew it. And even then, we find an immeasurable grace.

Day 6

MATTHEW 27:27-31

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.

²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said.

³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

The very first time I felt guilt was brief, but memorable. I was at the grocery store with my mom and couldn't have been more than six years old. While she was busy in the checkout lane, I eyed a roll of Certs in the impulse buy section. I quietly reached up and shoved them in my pocket. As we I walked out, I kept my hand in my pocket, rolling my heist between my fingers.

It was invigorating.

When we got home, I disappeared to my room and put the mints on my bed. That's when it hit me. At the age of six, I didn't know what to call it, but I've come to learn since then it's called petty theft. I had committed a crime. For a moment, I felt guilt. Then I ate all of those mints at once. They were delicious.

It's funny the things we remember. Especially when it comes to regret.

I've had a life full of it, and if we're honest, we all have. Of course, the mistakes we've made have led us to where we are now. For some of us, that's great. For others, not so much. As flawed humans, the longer we live, the longer that list becomes.

The effort we put forth in school.

The failures in friendships.

The failures in our careers.

The failures in marriage.

The failures in parenting.

We just wish we would have done some things differently.

The pull in our culture is to focus our attention individually, on ourselves. And to an extent, sure, by all means, we are responsible for our actions.

But we were created by a Master Planner who holds all of our individual journeys in His gracious hands. And whose power works greatest in our weakness.

Like the soldiers around Jesus on this day, we will mock His name, spit on His face, and craft many different crowns to push on His head. And yet, He remains, forgiving us for our ignorance and faithfully singing His victory over us.

Day 7

JOHN 19:30-37

³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”

I love to write about the God who makes all things new, the restorative, reformative, transformational God who sent His son to this earth to die on my behalf. I love to think about Him. I love to talk about Him. The words so effortlessly roll off my tongue and spring out of my mind. It's an easy thing to do.

Living out His newness, surrendering to His restoration, being the object of His transformation...that has been undeniably and unequivocally difficult. It always is.

I think that is because the truly life-changing, mind conforming, heart transforming things come in hideous and unimaginable disguises. The many shapes the paths to new life come in are so foreign, and honestly so undesirable, we are often left breathless at the pain of their entrance into our lives. We often never see it coming. I've spent time with people who have experienced tragedy, loss, unforeseen changes in their lives. I've experienced some of this myself.

Real change starts with real heartache.

It starts as things like confusion, shock, grief, anger and sadness. But it's these very emotions that point us to Jesus. Where we look first when these things happen says a lot about who we are. It won't feel good immediately. It might even feel like death. But looking to Jesus looks a lot like a death to myself. And that is where change begins.

Day 8

MATTHEW 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

It was awkward for me. I can still feel that hand in mine. His skin was soft but there was a rigidness to it, like a hand that didn't know how to be held. Something broke in me during the time I spent with him. On the upper floor of the Kidane Mihret Orphanage, things break often. Hearts, mostly.

I'd like to think he received the love I gave that day, but I can't be certain. I know God heard the prayers I prayed over him asking for healing, for a healed body and a mind free of any disability, but those haven't been answered yet. At the end of the day, all we can do is throw love out there. It might get returned. It might not. But if we're worried about the return on love, is that what it is?

I've met a lot of people like that boy's hand. They just don't know how to be held. Some of it is poor self-image. Some of it is an image that's inflated. Some of it is misplaced identity. Love gets ignored, rejected, mishandled and neglected for a lot of reasons. Some just don't know what to do with it.

Compassion doesn't care, though. Compassion sees potential, weighs it, casts off any selfish motives and determines that giving love is always worth the risk and the cost.

Hold the hand, whether it knows how to be held or not. It's always worth the reach.

After all, is that not what Christ has done for every created human? Today, of all days, we look upward and are reminded of His loving reach, an unrelenting pursuit of you and me, and the victory we have in Jesus. We don't always know how to be held, but He still stands free from the confines of a defeated tomb, reaching.





LifePoint Church
1701 Emory Road (Route 91)
Reisterstown, Maryland 21136

410-239-4700

lifepointchurch.us