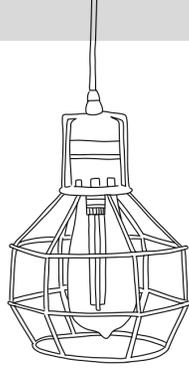




DECREASE

a lenten study guide

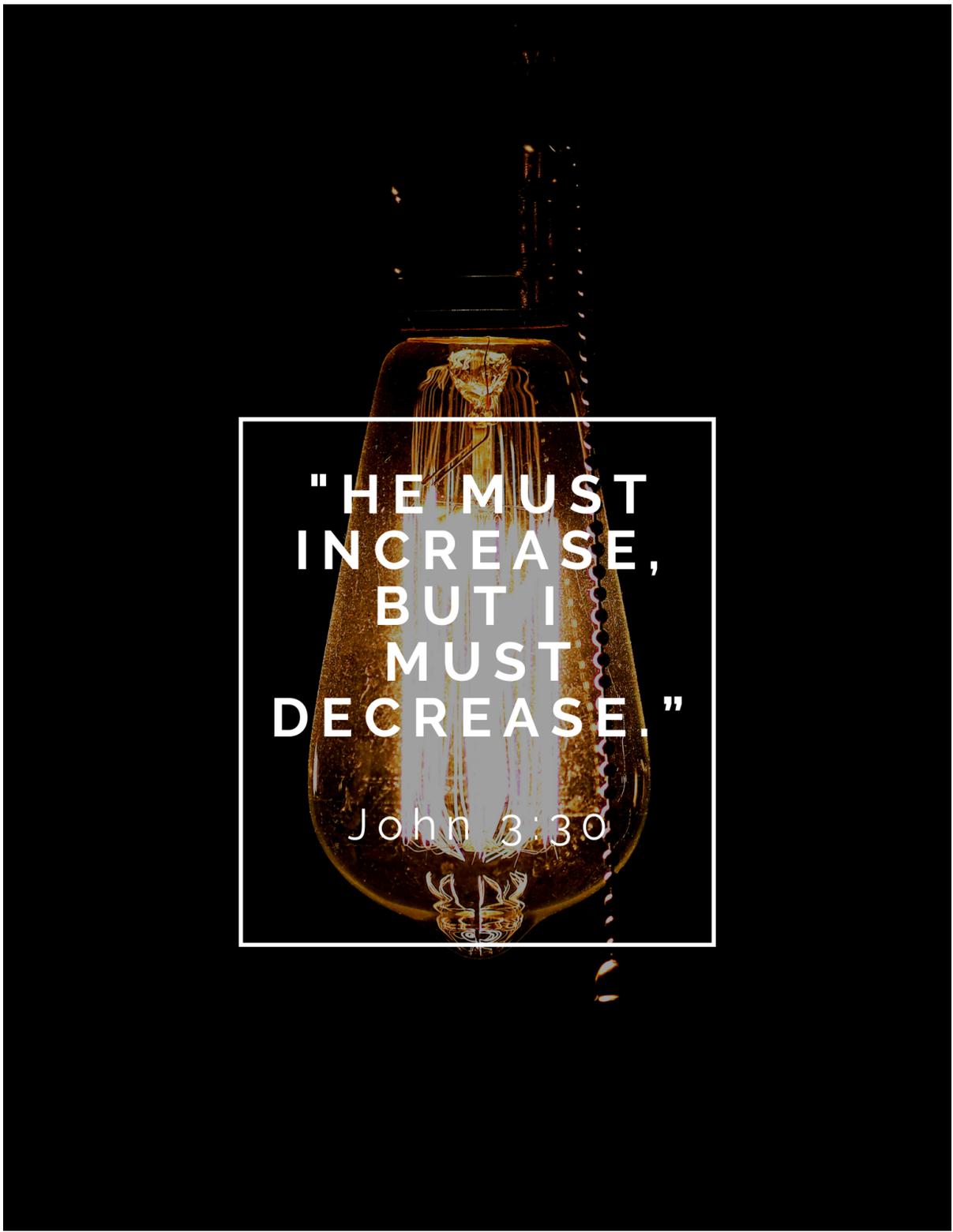


DECREASE

THE WATER'S EDGE LENT 2021 SERIES

"He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:30

Decrease. It's not always something we look at positively. To many, giving up things we have or things we do means giving up and giving up means...defeat. And, when it comes to the season of Lent, giving up becomes a task to be completed. Instead of looking at it as a fast, it just becomes something we want to get over, well...fast. But, what if we didn't look at giving up as a task or something to be ashamed of? What if we looked at decrease as a way to trigger our hearts into motion? What if by giving up the things that weigh down our minds, we increased our capacity to engage our hearts with Jesus? As we decrease ourselves, we increase Christ. This Lent, The Water's Edge invites you to join us for Decrease.

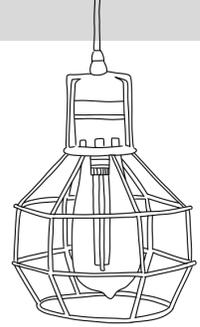


"HE MUST
INCREASE,
BUT I
MUST
DECREASE."

John 3:30

AN INVITATION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE



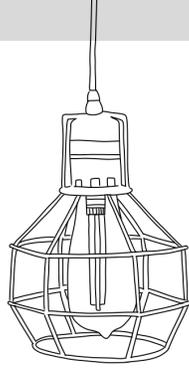
Beginning on Ash Wednesday, February 17th, The Water's Edge invites you to embark on a journey of decrease with us. Over the next 40 days, WE will decrease the things in our lives that block out the light. Not just any light. His light. As WE fast from these things together, our prayer is that WE will increase our awareness of His presence in our lives.

Each day, WE invite you to use this study guide - individually, as a family, with friends or with your House Church - to lead you through the day's practices. In this guide you will find:

- Fasting From - Over the next 40 days (Sundays are for Sabbath and are excluded), WE will fast from a specific thing/activity each day. As WE decrease these things from our lives, let us replace the space they once filled with Jesus.
- Gratitude - Start today with gratitude. What are three things you are grateful for?
- Prayer - Share with God what is on your heart today.
- Fasting Reflection/Examen - How did God reveal himself to you during your fast? How did you see your relationship with God increase during your decrease of other things?
- Read & Respond - Read today's scripture selection. As you read, immerse yourself in the story and write down any thoughts, questions or reflections you have.
- Let Your Mind Wonder - Questions to ponder.
- Kairos - A place to journal how God has been working in you through the fasting.
- Thinking Out Loud - Weekly Devotions written by members of The Water's Edge Community.
- Prayers & Blessings - to help you on your journey.

If you have any questions about this guide or the Decrease series, let me know. You can email me at michele@weomaha.com.

With Joy,
Michele



BEGIN WITH A PRAYER

Use this space to write out a prayer as you begin this Lent study. What do you hope to accomplish? What praise would you like to offer to God as you begin? In what way do you hope to increase His place in your life?

Remember - this is YOUR prayer. There is no wrong way or right way to pray. Just pray what is on your heart.

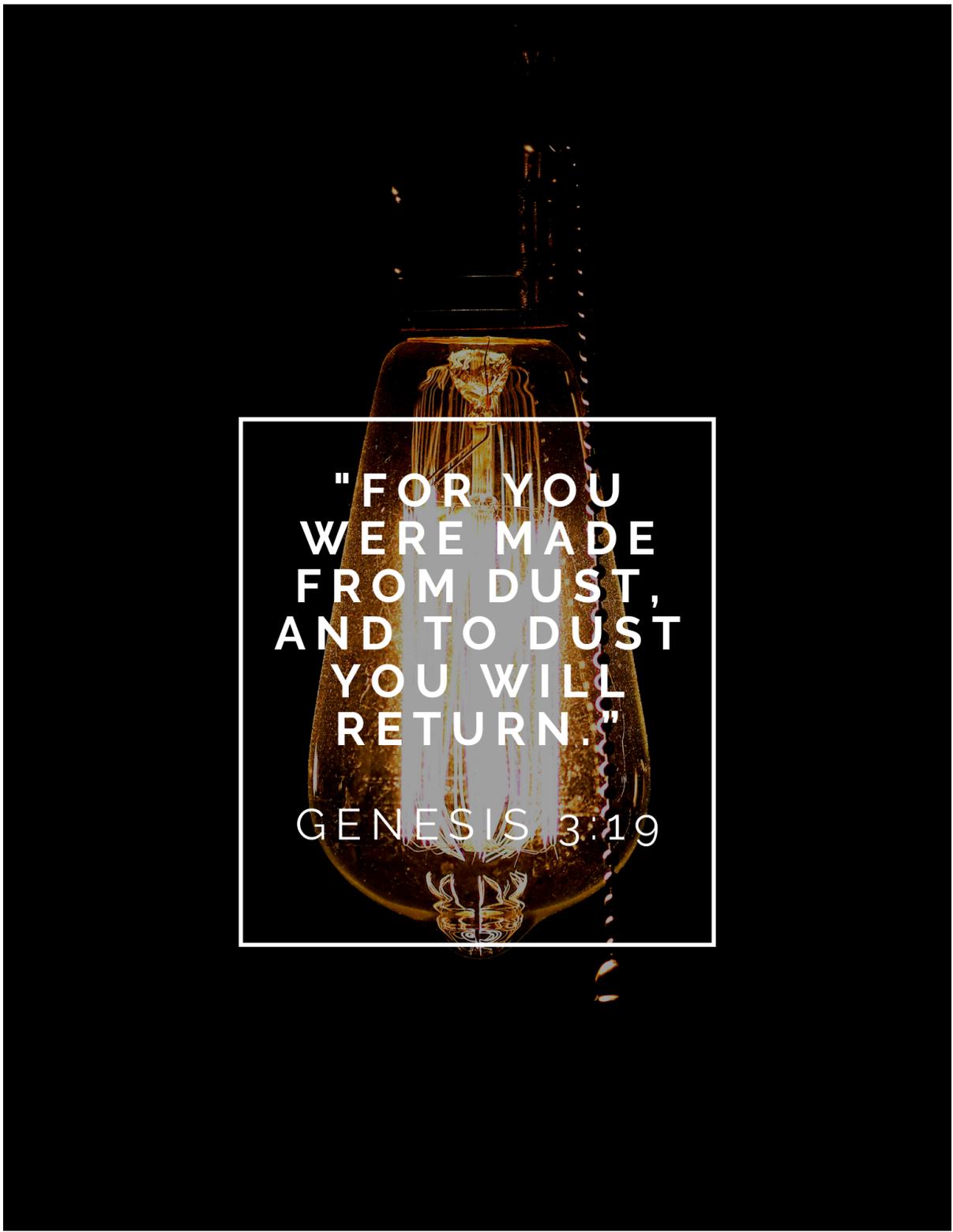


WEEK 1

FEBRUARY 17TH - FEBRUARY 20TH

DATES TO NOTE

ASH WEDNESDAY - FEBRUARY 17TH

A glowing lightbulb is centered against a black background. The lightbulb is illuminated from within, creating a warm, golden glow. The filament is visible, and the glass of the bulb is slightly textured. A white square border is superimposed over the center of the lightbulb, containing text.

"FOR YOU
WERE MADE
FROM DUST,
AND TO DUST
YOU WILL
RETURN."

GENESIS 3:19

A PRAYER FOR ASH WEDNESDAY

FROM PRAYERS FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

BY CRAIG FINNESTAD

Dear God,

It is Lent. A season of renewal.

Days of reflection. Nights of replenishment.

Weeks of repairing and refocusing. Ending in a day of resurrection and rebirth.

Grant me discipline. Discipline to be faithful.

Discipline to hunger for Your Word.

Discipline to thirst for conversation and quiet time with You.

Discipline to love what You love and to love like You love.

Teach me again that discipline yields a rich harvest of grace and peace.

Remove any obstacles between us and move me closer to You.

Bless me with repentance.

To turn away from anything that distances me from You.

To turn from lust to love.

To turn from fear to freedom.

To turn from jealousy to justice.

To turn from selfishness to service.

To turn from haughtiness to humility.

To turn from gluttony and greed to goodness and grace.

To turn from doubting and depression to depending fully on You.

To turn from worshipping counterfeit gods to worshipping You.

Help me repent of my sins and turn to You, so my sins are wiped away.

Remind me of my mortality.

I was created from dust and to dust I shall return.

My time in the world You created is limited.

Help me make the most of it.

Let Your dreams for me be my dreams for me.

Make my purposes clear. Give me a passion for my purposes.

And let me know that this world is not my permanent home.

Your Kingdom; Your heart is my true and eternal dwelling place.

You are faithful to me.

Re-create me in Your image so I am faithful to You and others.

Do something in me during this season.

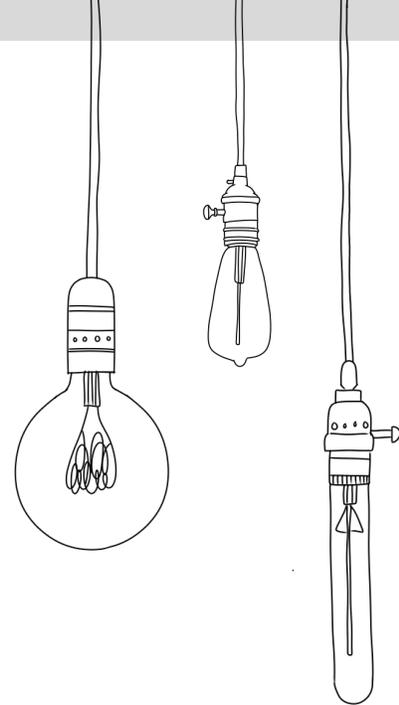
Do something small and do something big.

And as You do something in me, do something through me.

Bless me and make me a blessing to others and to the world.

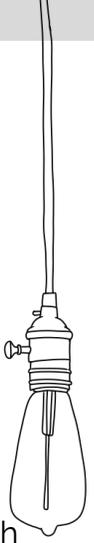
Let me experience the resurrection of Christ.

Resurrect me. Give me a rebirth. Raise me to new levels of life.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY CRAIG FINNESTAD



In many cultures there is an ancient custom of giving a tenth of each year's income to some holy use. For Christians to observe the forty days of Lent is to do the same thing with roughly a tenth of each year's days. After being baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus went off alone into the wilderness where he spent forty days asking himself the question what it meant to be Jesus. During Lent, Christians are supposed to ask one way or another what it means to be themselves.

- If you had to bet everything you have on whether there is a God or whether there isn't, which side would get your money and why?
- When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like and what do you see in it that you most deplore?
- If you had only one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in twenty-five words or less?
- Of all the things you have done in your life, which is the one you would most like to undo? Which is the one that makes you happiest to remember?

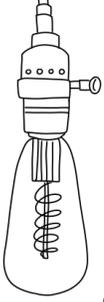
To hear yourself try to answer questions like these is to begin to hear something not only of who you are but of both what you are becoming and what you are failing to become. It can be a pretty depressing business all in all, but if sackcloth and ashes are at the start of it, something like Easter may be at the end. (From *Wishful Thinking* by Frederick Buechner)

So, here's the deal: Some people give up wine or soda or chocolate or eating beef on Friday. Nothing is evil about such practices. A little sacrifice never hurt anybody and the body may be grateful for a little less alcohol, sugar, or fat. But do any of the above promote lasting real life change? Probably not. These practices have more to do with obligation and ritual than it does an authentic desire to connect with God.

What do you most deplore about yourself? What is it in the next 40 days that you can do to rid yourself of these self-destructive behaviors? That seems more beneficial than not drinking coffee.

What is it in the next 40 days that you can do to give yourself to the world and have the time of your life in the process? That seems more exciting than not going to Sonic. I pray during this season that you grow closer to God and closer to the world.

FEBRUARY 17TH



Today I Will Fast From:

VIEWING LENT AS A PROJECT

So often, we look at Lent as a project. 40 days to just mark off of our "to-do" list. We focus on what we are giving up, rather than what we gain. Today, WE challenge you to fast from viewing Lent as a project. Instead, focus your energy in remaining present with Jesus. Instead of reading the scriptures as assignments, use your imagination and place yourself in the story. Take in the sights, sounds and emotions. Fast Lent as a project and enter this season as an experience.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

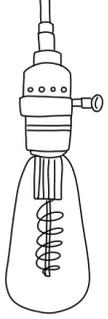
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
12:1-11

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 18TH



Today I Will Fast From:

REGRETS

Regrets, we all have them. Things we wish we would have done. Things we wish we never did. So often, our new beginnings are masked by the regrets of the past. Today, WE fast regret. WE will not feed it. WE will not give it space. Instead, let us cling to the promise of His mercy and grace. Let us linger on the promise of Jesus from Revelation 21:5:

"I am making everything new!"

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen

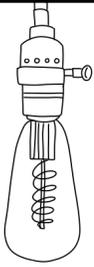
Read:

JOHN

12:12-19

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 19TH



Today I Will Fast From:

COLLECTING PRAISE

It feels good to be praised for a job well done. To be recognized for something we did. But, when our lives begin to revolve around other people's praise, our days can feel empty and pointless when we don't receive it. And, what happens when we fail to give praise to the One who truly deserves it all?

Today, WE fast from collecting praise. Let us redirect those compliments and lay them at the feet of Jesus. The One for whom all praise is due. Receive affirmations from others graciously, but, as the day comes to a close, offer those praises back to Jesus.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen

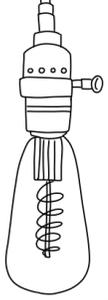
Read:

JOHN

12:20-28

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 20TH



Today I Will Fast From:

ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

Tonight, WE invite you to fast from artificial light. Unplug from the power grid for an hour and allow yourself to wander in the darkness of Lent. Whether it be by candlelight or moonlight, reflect on the darkness and Jesus' promise to always overcome it.

In the darkness, offer a prayer and bask in the glow of new life of resurrection that comes with this season.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

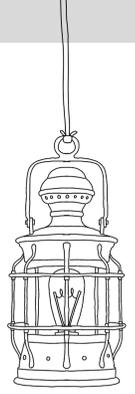
JOHN
12:29-36

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- Why are you setting aside forty days to reflect on Jesus' death and resurrection? What do you see as the possibilities of this season?
- Do you find Lent to be more of a task to get through or something you experience? Explain.
- What do you think it means to decrease so that you may increase God? What are some ways you can do this?
- Is there someone you know who is a good example of decreasing themselves to increase God? What qualities about them do you admire?

"That's what Ash Wednesday is all about. It is a truth-telling moment. A moment to allow ourselves to name the distance in our lives between what we are and what we say we believe and grieve it." - Andrew Arndt



KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"He pursues us in love. He's not trying to find us; He always knows where we are. Rather, He goes with us as we find ourselves again."- Bob Goff



WEEK 2
FEBRUARY 22ND - FEBRUARY 27TH

BLESSING THAT UNDOES US

JAN RICHARDSON

On the day
you are wearing
your uncertainty
like a cloak
and your sureness
goes before you
like a shield
or like a sword,

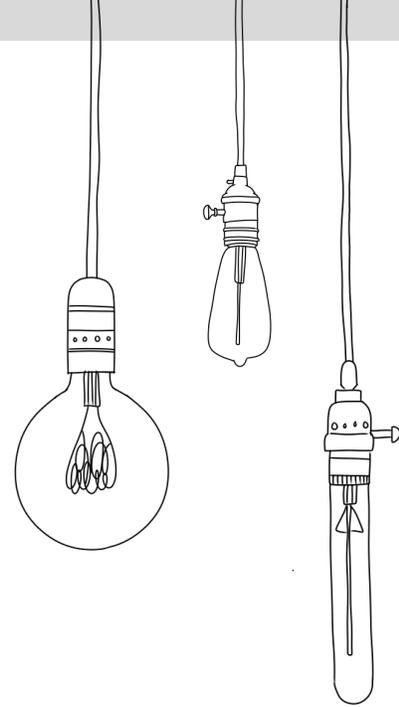
May the sound of God's name
spill from your lips
as you have never heard before.

May your knowing
be undone.
May mystery
confound your
understanding.

May the divine
rain down
In strange syllables
yet with ancient familiarity,
a knowing borne,

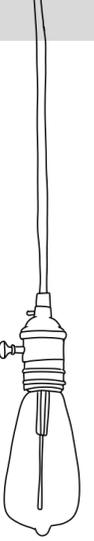
In the blood,
the ear,
the tongue,
bringing clarity
that comes
not in stone
or in steel
but in fire, in flame.

May there come
one searing word--
enough to set
your heart ablaze,
enough to make you
whole again.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY PEGGY BRENDEL



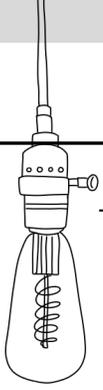
Lent reminds us that it is time for us to prepare for Easter. We turn our minds to the story of Jesus and the ultimate sacrifice that was made to save us. How do we begin to understand the love that God has for us? John 3:16 says it all – “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

As a parent these words express a sacrifice that I cannot even imagine. Giving up one of my children! When I think of Lent, I am humbled that God loved us so much that he could do this for us. It is at this point I begin to think about the power of God's love. How can I show my devotion to God? Should I sacrifice something? How can I make my faith stronger?

Prayer comes to my mind. As a young girl, I was taught to go to God in prayer and ask him to guide me through my life. Talking and listening to God can help me make some of these decisions. Another way I seek guidance is by reading the Bible and using it to help me answer these questions.

How can you prepare for Lent? Maybe it's praying or reading the Bible. God wants to help us become stronger in our faith. Feel his arms around you and let him guide you!

God, we thank You and praise You for sending Your Son Jesus to pay for our sins. Help us to remember all You do for us in our daily lives. Give us the strength to trust and obey You always! In Jesus' name, Amen.



Today I Will Fast From:

TIDY FAITH

With faith comes questions. With faith comes uncertainty. Yet, when these things arise, we often place them in a box. Because, after all, there is no room for questions if we truly believe, right?

Today, WE fast from making our faith tidy. WE will allow it to be messy. WE will ask questions. WE will offer them as a prayer. And, WE will let go of the notion that faith can be tamed and be made to fit neatly on a shelf.

FEBRUARY 22ND

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

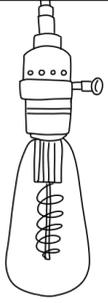
Read:

JOHN

12:37-43

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 23RD



Today I Will Fast From:

DOWNPLAYING SORROW

Jesus felt sorrow. He did not distance himself from it. Instead, He allowed it space. He gave it a place and, in solitude and prayer, he acknowledged it.

Today, WE honor the losses in our lives by fasting from downplaying our sorrow. WE will slow down and be present with our emotions. Let us spend time with Jesus, sitting with our sorrow and allowing it to work through us as He works within us.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

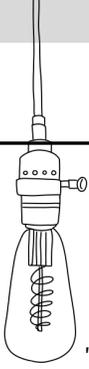
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

12:44-50

Response to today's reading:



Today I Will Fast From:

A MEAL

"And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."
(Matthew 6:16-18)

Today, WE fast from a meal. Jesus fasted. He fasted and prayed for forty days in the wilderness. He taught his followers to fast and pray. As WE ache to eat an earthly meal, let it kindle an ache that leads us to Jesus. Let it loosen what binds us to worldly things and connect us to that which is eternal.

FEBRUARY 24TH

Gratitude:

Prayer:

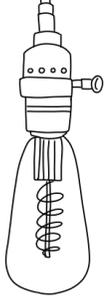
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
13:1-7

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 25TH



Today I Will Fast From:

FIXING IT

When something goes wrong, it's human nature to fix it. Things. Problems. People. We want so much to make things better, that we sometimes fail to see we are doing more harm than good. We fail to realize that so often, our supportive presence is all that is needed.

Today, let us fast from fixing it. Let us allow the broken to be broken for a day. Whether it be a tool or a heart, let us refrain from making it better and allow it to just be broken.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

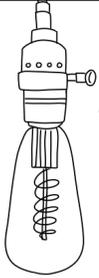
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
13:8-17

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 26TH



Today I Will Fast From:

RATIONALISM

Facts. It's something we all need at some time or another. Facts back things up. Facts prove things. Facts rationalize the irrational.

Today, WE fast from the need to rationalize things. If it cannot be backed up by cold, hard facts, let's not look at it as a "leap of faith." Let's see it for what it is....FAITH.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

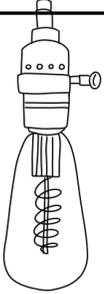
Read:

JOHN

13:18-30

Response to today's reading:

FEBRUARY 27TH



Today I Will Fast From:

AVOIDANCE

When faced with the unknown, what do you do? Do you busy yourself? Eat more? Sleep more?

Today, let's fast from avoidance by asking God to quiet the behaviors in our lives that we default to in uncertain and stressful times. Let us decrease these behaviors and increase our reliance on our Father to see us through tough situations.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

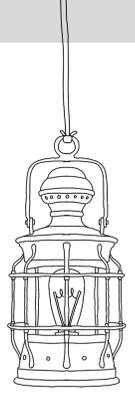
JOHN
13:31-36

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- When it comes to your faith, would you describe it as "messy" or "tidy?" Explain your answer.

- What would it look like to allow your faith to get messy?

- What questions about your faith are you afraid to ask? What has keeps you from asking them?

- How has your background influenced your view of what faith should look like? How has your view changed as your faith has grown?

- How will you allow your faith to get "messy" at times?

"Prayer is where the action is."

-John Wesley



KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"Everything in life has its own time. There is time to celebrate and there is time to mourn. This is the time for reflection and transformation. Let us look within and change into what we ought to be." -Aaron Saul



WEEK 3
MARCH 1ST - MARCH 6TH

BLESSING THE BODY

JAN RICHARDSON

This blessing takes
one look at you
and all it can say is
holy.

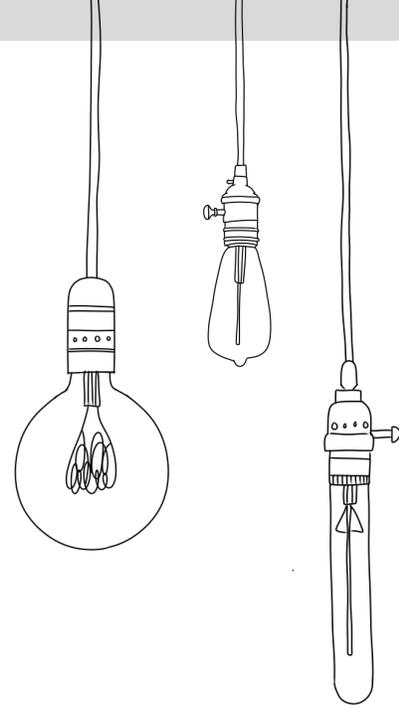
Holy hands.
Holy face.
Holy feet.
Holy everything
in between.

Holy even in pain.
Holy even when weary.
In brokenness, holy.
In shame, holy still.

Holy in delight.
Holy in distress.
Holy when being born.
Holy when we lay it down
at the hour of our death.

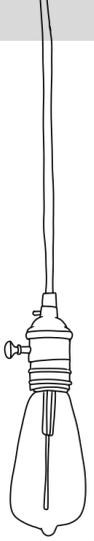
So, friend,
open your eyes
(holy eyes).
For one moment
see what this blessing sees,
this blessing that knows
how you have been formed
and knit together
in wonder and
in love.

Welcome this blessing
that folds its hands
in prayer
when it meets you;
receive this blessing
that wants to kneel
in reverence
before you:
you who are
temple,
sanctuary,
home for God
in this world.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY DOUG GIFFIN



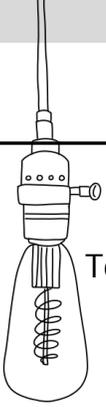
I don't know anyone (at least that I'm aware of) who likes to be told "no." I don't think I know anyone else who likes being denied things. Who doesn't want their perceived needs met? Who doesn't want to have what they want? So why are we going to be talking about decrease during lent? Why is the whole season about giving something up we already have? Maybe it's to make room for something else, something much better.

About five years ago, just for fun, I gave up something every week for a year. Yep, you read that right, 52 weeks of "Let's take that away, and oh by the way, let's take that other thing away too." Sound twisted? Maybe. What did I give up? Well, everything from t.v. to candy to drive-thru to feeling guilty about past failures. And how was it? Honestly, not glorious, but interesting.

I found out the material stuff (yes, even pop and candy) was easier than the stuff between my ears. I found it much easier to walk away from a habit, like answering emails after 5:00, than thinking I can do everything. I discovered the letting go of time-eaters like t.v. liberated me to read more books. In fact the t.v. thing is something that's stayed with me to this day. I still watch, but I find myself asking if this is really how I want to spend this snippet of my life. Most often it's not and I go looking for something more meaningful, something that builds me up, bears fruit if you will. John 15 says: "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you."

It's my prayer for you during Lent that your decrease will be increase, that less of you, will be more of God, more of Jesus.

MARCH 1ST



Today I Will Fast From:

ANGER

"I'm so angry." The words sometimes slip out of mouths before we even know what we are angry about. We jump to conclusions which lead us toward a path of harsh words, thoughts and feelings.

Today, let us fast from anger. When we feel it begin to take root, let us take a deep breath and...pray. Pray for renewed hearts, attitudes and mindsets. Pray we may let go of what is bringing us to anger.

Gratitude:

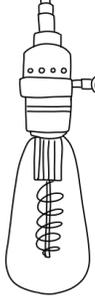
Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
14:1-14

Response to today's reading:



Today I Will Fast From:

ISOLATION

We were made for community. Today, fast isolation. Meet a friend for lunch, Facetime a relative, talk to a neighbor or converse with a co-worker. Make it your goal today to link and be linked. To need and be needed. To see and be seen. Instead of giving in to the feeling that no one wants to be around you, nurture those relationships that God has brought into your life.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

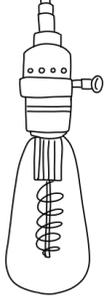
Read:

JOHN

14:15-22

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 3RD



Today I Will Fast From:

STINGINESS

Love doesn't calculate. It doesn't keep a tally. So, today, fast stinginess. Give lavishly to someone who cannot return the favor. Be it with words, actions, time, finances or whatever else you have to give.

Don't let stinginess play a role in how you love others.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

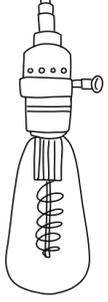
Read:

JOHN

14:23-31

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 4TH



Today I Will Fast From:

BEING A SPECTATOR

Don't just worship from the sidelines, be active in it. Today, fast spiritual spectatorship. How? Make a plan to attend worship in-person. Fully immerse yourself in the experience.

Don't hesitate when it comes to your relationship with Jesus. Go all in. Ask questions. Join a House Church. Join a Bible Study. Sign up to serve. When you actively engage in worship, you actively engage in your faith.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

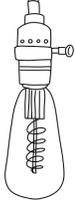
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
15:1-17

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 5TH



Today I Will Fast From:

SPIRITUAL SELF-PROTECTION

Protecting ourselves from suffering is normal. But, ironically, suffering frees us from the need for self-protection. Because with pain comes the chance to trust, hope and love. Today, WE fast from self-protection. WE ask God to open our eyes to the moments we shy away from Him.

As the day comes to a close, take a look at the ways where you tried to protect yourself from where God was leading you. What was the situation? Why were you trying to protect yourself? What did allowing God to work through the situation feel like? How did it play out?

Gratitude:

Prayer:

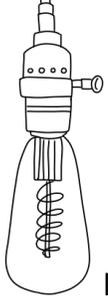
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
15:18-16:4

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 6TH



Today I Will Fast From:

SELF-INDULGENCE

Indulging in things we like isn't always a bad thing. Sometimes, it is nice to enjoy the things we, well...enjoy. But, when self-indulgence becomes a way of comforting ourselves, we begin to distance ourselves from the one who can truly bring comfort - Jesus. Rough day at work? A slice of cake will make me feel better. Kids going nuts? I'll just hit the golf course to unwind.

Today, WE fast from self-indulgence. Instead of seeking comfort in things and activities, WE will indulge in His presence in our lives. Instead of reaching for that last brownie, WE will reach for Him.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

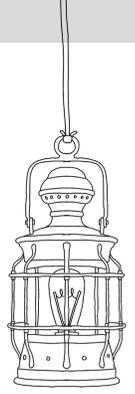
JOHN
16:5-16

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- How do you engage in spiritual self-protection? Why do you think you do this?
- Has there been a time when you felt God was calling you to do something, yet you chose to ignore it because of the pain it might cause? What went through your mind as you made this decision? How did you rationalize choosing self-protection over what God was calling you to do?
- Jesus did not shy away from suffering. In fact, He chose the opposite to bring us closer to Him; and, ultimately, to save us. How can your own suffering help bring others to Christ?
- Think of a time when you followed where God was leading you. What did allowing God to work through the situation feel like? How did it play out?

"Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in Him a source of sustenance beyond food." - Dallas Willard



KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty, not because God is mean or fault-finding or finger-pointing but because he wants us to know the joy of being cleaned out, ready for all the good things he now has in store." - N.T. Wright



WEEK 4
MARCH 8TH - MARCH 13TH

BACK TO YOU

MICHELE BONEWELL

Father,

Today is a gift.
A gift that only You can give.

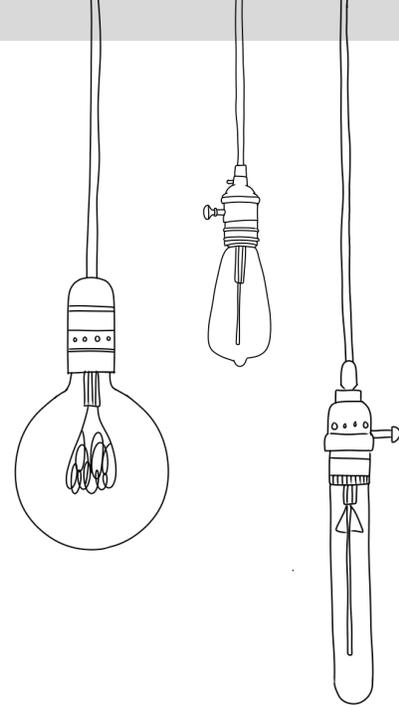
The gift of new beginnings.
Fresh starts.

Thank you for this gift,
I accept it wholeheartedly and...
Surrender it to You.

Use this day as You will.
Use it for Your will.
Use me as You will,
For Your will.

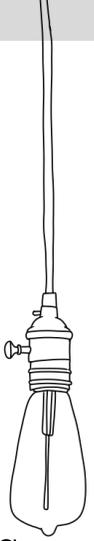
Today.
Tomorrow.
Always and...
In all ways.

Amen.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY CHAD SCHUCHMANN



Did you know fasting is mentioned 77 times in the Bible? Kings, Queens, Disciples, Apostles, Prophets and even Jesus fasted. In every case, the fasting was purposeful. The aim was to give something up so that something new (understanding, perspective, strength, hope, or growth) can be gained from God.

During the season of Lent, the practice of giving something up, of fasting, is common. We might eliminate certain foods we know aren't good for us, cut out meals, or even give up food completely for a time. But fasting doesn't have to be just from food. It's about discipline, about removing one thing in order to gain something better.

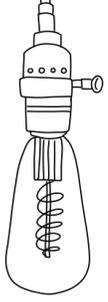
Our purpose in fasting is, by choosing to give up something that gets in the way of us growing in our relationship with God, we create the opportunity to deepen our relationship with God.

The opportunity created through fasting presents itself not just in what you give up, but also through the TIME you gain.

- Time to sit in your car and talk with God about your day before heading into the office; instead of impatiently waiting those extra 5 minutes in line at the coffee shop.
- Time to listen to a sermon or podcast; instead of rushing through the fast food line during your 30 minute break.
- Time to slow down, read your Bible, or follow a devotional before bed instead of scrolling through Facebook.

Throughout 40 days of Lent, finding just 15 minutes a day by fasting from something else adds up to 10 hours. If you could discover 10 hours to spend with God, how could you use that to gain and grow in your relationship with God over the time you create by choosing to fast from something this Lent?

MARCH 8TH



Today I Will Fast From:

APATHY

Today, WE fast from disconnection emotionally. From others, from life and from situations we face.

Today, WE ask God to awaken us from sleeping through life. WE ask Him to light a fire of concern within us so that we may love others fully.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
16:17-33

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 9TH



Today I Will Fast From:

APPEARANCES

Today, WE fast all appearances. WE fast from putting up facades.

Be it with words or actions, let us shy away from exaggerating or belittling our real selves. Let us keep from inflating or deflating ourselves for the sake of being liked by others. Let us speak up when we think we should be silent. Let us observe when others expect us to boast. And let us ask Jesus to help us shy away from the illusions we would rather leave behind.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

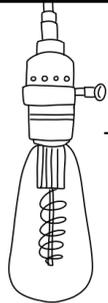
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
17:1-5

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 10TH



Today I Will Fast From:

REVISIONISM

Today, let's live our stories honestly. Let's fast from revising to make it what we think it should be. Today, WE ask God to keep us from telling the "white lies" that we feel help us control our narratives.

Today, WE fast from revisionism and walk in truth.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
17:6-19

Response to today's reading:



Today I Will Fast From:

IDOLATRY

Idols are interesting because we can turn anything into one. Often, they are good things – like food, games, even family and marriage. The problem comes when we raise the value of the things God has given to bless us and turn them into things we worship.

Today, WE fast from idolatry. WE ask God to reveal the things we can't live without and lay them at the feet of Christ. WE confess that we've loved that thing more than Him. WE ask Him to be the true King of our lives and WE put that thing WE love so much in its rightful place – at His feet.

MARCH 11TH

Gratitude:

Prayer:

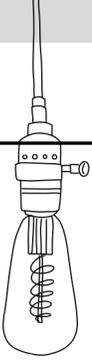
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
17:20-26

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 12TH



Today I Will Fast From:

PREMATURE RESOLUTION

Sometimes it's easier to let something go than to resolve it. But skipping to the end is not healthy. Processes can be troublesome, but as much as we would rather skip to the end, to live in truth, we must allow the process to run its course.

Today, let's fast premature resolution. Resist tidying up instead of running the course. Push through resistance, pass around resentment, press past resignation and enter into a willfill partnership with God.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
18:1-11

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 13TH



Today I Will Fast From:

NOISE

Today, set aside one hour to fast from noise. Turn off your phone. Turn off your television. Turn off anything that buzzes, beeps or blips.

Then, pay attention to your response. Are you restless? Or do you find the silence restful? Are you easily distracted? Ask God to reveal to you the power the noise of the world has in your life. Then, ask Him to reveal His voice in the silence.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

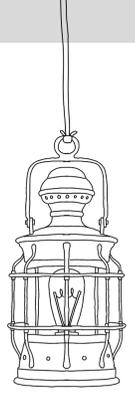
18:12-14

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- When faced with silence, how do you respond? Do you welcome it? Is it uncomfortable?
- Why do you think it is so hard to allow ourselves to experience silence?
- How do you think noise - any noise - interferes with your relationship with Christ?
- Jesus often retreated to a quiet place to spend time with God. How can doing the same increase your awareness of Him?
- How will you allow yourself to encounter silence each day?

"Apart from the cross, there is no other ladder by which we may go to heaven." - St. Rose of Lima



KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy."

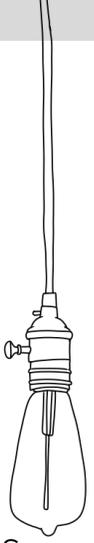
- Pope Francis



WEEK 5
MARCH 15TH - MARCH 20TH

THINKING OUT LOUD

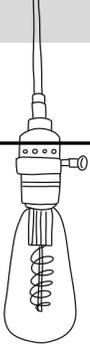
A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY LEANDRA ESLER



I've tried a variety of Lenten practices. I've tried avoiding things like pop, chocolate, fast food, and social media. I've tried adding things like devotionals, exercise, and better sleep. Some were successful and others were disappointments. Some were the beginning of new habits and others I couldn't wait to rush back to on Easter morning. Yet, I realized these practices weren't helping me grow closer to God or look more like Jesus. I wanted a practice of fasting that was God-centered, as opposed to a self-improvement plan.

Each year, I would brainstorm ways to do something meaningful for Lent. A pastor from Scotland helped point me in the right direction. Reverend Andrew Bonar writes, "Fasting is abstaining from anything that hinders prayer". Throughout scripture, we see people fasting in order to better connect to God through prayer. They weren't simply practicing self-discipline. They were clearing the way to hear from God.

Lent is more than a season to start a good habit or break a bad one. Lent is a season of turning down the noise so that we can better listen to God. We can fast from the things that get too much of our attention and redirect that attention towards God. We can fast from noisy distractions and practice focus. We can fast from the people pleasing that keeps us overly busy or the self-reliance that keeps us from reaching out to God. Lent is a season for listening and fasting is the tool that helps us listen more intentionally.



Today I Will Fast From:

ARMCHAIR JESUS

Jesus is not aloof. He doesn't just watch and make statements about what He thinks you should do. Or how you should have handled yourself. Jesus is with you...always. In all things. He walks where you walk. Experiences what you experience. He doesn't offer you hypothetical, armchair advice. Instead, He offers himself.

Today, fast the notions of Armchair Jesus. Remember, sharing life is much easier when you believe you have shared ground - even when it is Jesus you are sharing your life with.

MARCH 15TH

Gratitude:

Prayer:

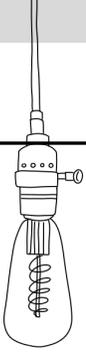
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
18:15-18

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 16TH



Today I Will Fast From:

NEUTRALITY

Deny self or deny Jesus. There is no in-between. No neutral ground. We have to choose a side. Today, fast neutrality. In life - all areas - choose Jesus over self and commit to living at The Cross.

Living at The Cross is a call to decrease. Not to forget ourselves, but to live and die for the one who gives us life.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

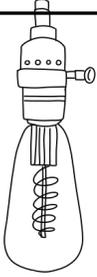
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
18:19-24

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 17TH



Today I Will Fast From:

DENIAL

Today, WE fast denial. WE will be honest with ourselves so WE can be honest with God.

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He did not deny His emotions, instead, He ushered them to their safest position - behind God's will.

“Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”

-Luke 22:42

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

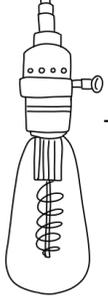
Read:

JOHN

18:25-27

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 18TH



Today I Will Fast From:

COMPARISON

Today, WE fast comparison. The value of our narratives is not determined on what WE perceive others realities to be.

Instead of giving into our jealousy, let us pray for those we assume have it better than us. Likewise, let us pray for those we deem to be "lesser" than us.

Gratitude:

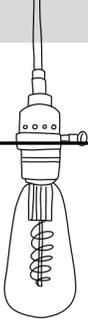
Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
18:28-32

Response to today's reading:



MARCH 19TH

Today I Will Fast From:

DISCONTENTMENT

More. More. More. We always want more. More money. More time. More material things. More at work. More. More. More.

Today, WE fast from daydreaming of all the "mores" that distract us. Let go of discontentment and refuse to give it space in your head and space in your heart.

Each time WE find ourselves longing for more, WE will offer up a prayer of gratitude to the God who provides all the "more" WE will ever need.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

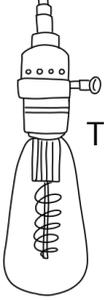
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
18:33-40

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 20TH



Today I Will Fast From:

FORMULAS

Formulas. Spreadsheets. Neat little boxes. It's easy for us to default to these things in life. The "always" and the "nevers." Formulas that allow us to toe the line.

Today, WE fast from formulizing Jesus. WE will let go of restricted freedom and embrace prayerful discernment as WE seek God's way to do life.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

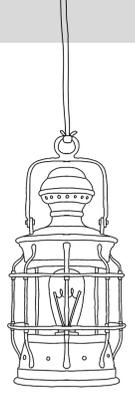
JOHN
19:1-6

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- What is your view of Jesus' role in your life? Do you find He is an active participant or is He just watching it all play out? Explain.
- Jesus offers himself to us daily. How can you offer yourself more fully to Him?
- What can you do to stop viewing Jesus as an armchair quarterback and realize He is an active participant in your life?
- Think back to a time you felt Jesus was just watching. Looking back, can you now see He was participating? How so?

"Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one's flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, kindles the true light of chastity." - St. Augustine



KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; it is hearing with the spirit, with your whole being." -

Fr. Thomas Merton



WEEK 6

MARCH 22ND - MARCH 27TH

DATES TO NOTE

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 28TH

A PRAYER TO BREATHE

FROM A RHYTHM OF PRAYER

BY SARAH BESSEY

(From Matthew 11:28-30)

Inhale: Humble and gentle One,
Exhale: you are rest for my soul.

(From John 15)

Inhale: True Vine and Gardener,
Exhale: I abide in You.

(From Romans 8:38-39)

Inhale: Nothing can separate me,
Exhale: from the love of God.

(From Psalm 46:10)

Inhale: Be still.
Exhale: and know you are God.

(From Matthew 6:10)

Inhale: On earth
Exhale: as it is in heaven.

(From 2 Corinthians 12:9)

Inhale: Your grace
Exhale: is enough for me.

(From 1 John)

Inhale: There is no fear
Exhale: in your Love.

(From Psalm 23)

Inhale: I will not be afraid
Exhale: for You are with me.

(From Psalm 46:1)

Inhale: You are our refuge
Exhale: and our strength.

(From Psalm 74:16)

Inhale: Both day and night.
Exhale: belong to You.

(From Psalm 91:1)

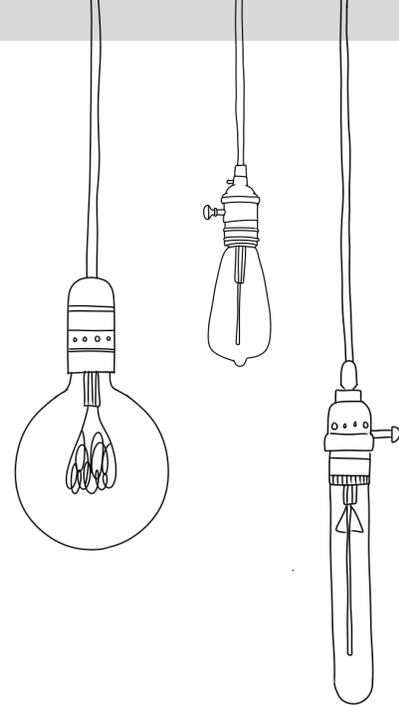
Inhale: I find rest
Exhale: in Your shelter.

(From Psalm 103:4-5)

Inhale: You surround me with love.
Exhale: and tender mercies.
Inhale: You fill my life
Exhale: with good things.

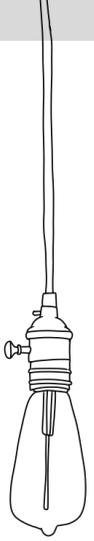
(From Philippians 4:7)

Inhale: Peace of Christ,
Exhale: guard my heart and mind.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY MICHELE BONEWELL



Lent. A time of repentance and renewal. A time to turn away from worldly things and turn to Jesus. A few years ago, my little guy, Felix, and I were talking about Lent and its meaning. We had just sat down for donuts and coffee (well, hot chocolate for him. That child needs no caffeine.) when he asked me what Lent was all about.

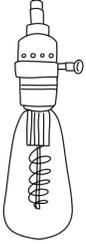
That morning, as people came in and out of Lamar's, we had a long talk about what it meant to turn away from the things that keep us from Jesus. Not just sin, but things that distract us. Things that we don't even realize distract us. He gave me some great examples like...homework and taking out the trash. Throughout the rest of the conversation, he asked questions and I answered the best I could.

As our talk began to end, he looked at me with his big brown eyes and I noticed they were filled with tears. When I asked what was wrong, he said, "Mommy, I don't want to ever forget that I need Jesus. And, sometimes, I do. But, Mommy, He always waits for me."

It's easy to forget. Easy to try to do it all on our own. Easy to get caught up in the things that bring us instant gratification. Easy to think our mistakes determine our worth and that our brokenness makes us worthless.

But, at the end of the day, Felix was right. Jesus waits for us. He waits for us...To look for Him...To turn back to Him...To let go of the things that hold us back from Him. He waits. He always waits. And, when we are ready, He welcomes us. Fully. Completely. Every single time.

MARCH 22ND



Today I Will Fast From:

INTIMIDATION

Today, let's fast intimidation by not letting fear get the best of us. When fear begins to bully us, let's pause and pray:

Jesus,
You have already embraced everything
that I fear. Fear cannot have a
hold on me.
Amen.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
19:7-16

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 23RD



Today I Will Fast From:

SELF-CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence has its place. But, when it blinds our confidence in God, it becomes a hindrance to us. David prayed:

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."
(Psalm 139:23-24)

Today, WE fast self-confidence. WE will look past our views of ourselves and rely on God's promise to guide us.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

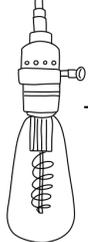
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
19:17-27

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 24TH



Today I Will Fast From:

MOCKING JESUS

Mock Jesus? Why would someone ever do that? But it happens. When WE would rather look good than uphold the truth. When WE quiet our beliefs to keep from other's judgements. We may not be openly mocking Jesus with words, but we do it with our actions.

Today, WE free ourselves from the ways WE mock Jesus. WE will honor His name through our words, actions and deeds.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

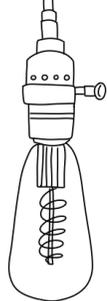
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
19:28-37

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 25TH



Today I Will Fast From:

ADDITION

Jesus is enough. Period.

His blood was shed for our salvation.
He is enough.

Today, let's honor Jesus' sacrifice by proclaiming Jesus is enough. Let's fast from adding anything to our lives today. Avoid spending money. Avoid adding anything to your calendar. In saying "no," let us say "yes" to honoring God.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

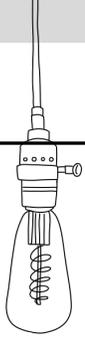
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

19:38-42

Response to today's reading:



Today I Will Fast From:

WILLFUL SIN

Jesus died for our sins. Yet, we still sin. What benefit do we receive from willfully choosing to sin?

Today, WE fast from willful sin and make a step toward loving Jesus in a way that compels us to walk away from sin. To stop where we can and seek help where we cannot.

Today, WE pray:

Jesus,
Forgive me. Heal me.
Send help where I need it.
And, strengthen my love for You.
Amen.

MARCH 26TH

Gratitude:

Prayer:

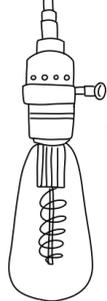
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
20:1-9

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 27TH



Today I Will Fast From:

CRITICISM

Today, fast criticism.

Remember, each person you encounter, Jesus knows by name. Like you, they are a child of God.

Seek to know more. Seek to assume less. And, instead of offering criticism, offer a prayer.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

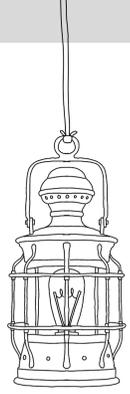
20:10-18

Response to today's reading:

LET YOUR MIND WONDER...

Questions To Ask Yourself

Work through the questions below on your own, with your family, with friends or within your House Church.



- What things do you add to your life to give it more value? Why do you think these things add value?
- "Jesus is enough." Do you find yourself believing this statement? Is it apparent in your actions? Why or why not?
- When Jesus entered the streets of Jerusalem, the people shouted, "Hosanna!" In that moment, He was enough. He was their king. Yet, days later, they yelled "crucify Him!" One minute, He was enough, the next, not so much. If we are honest, we are all guilty of this. How do you change this behavior? How do you accept that Jesus is enough in all circumstances?
- What steps can you take to stop adding stuff and start adding Jesus to your life?
- "Jesus is enough." How can you live out this statement?

"O Lord, make this Lenten season different from the other ones.
Let me find you again. Amen" - Henri Nouwen

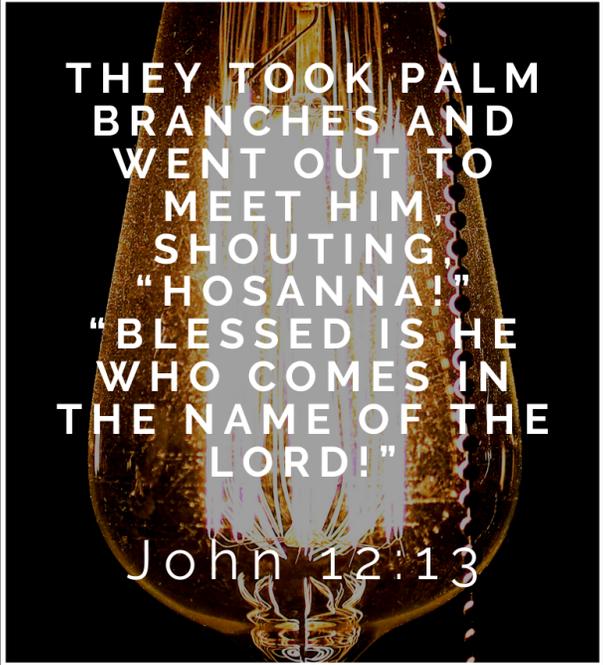


KAIROS

Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but He does what is still more wonderful: He makes saints out of sinners." -Soren Kierkegaard

A glowing lightbulb is centered against a black background. The lightbulb is illuminated from within, creating a warm, golden glow. A white rectangular border is superimposed over the middle of the lightbulb, containing text. The text is in a clean, white, sans-serif font. The background of the entire image is black, which makes the glowing lightbulb stand out prominently.

THEY TOOK PALM
BRANCHES AND
WENT OUT TO
MEET HIM,
SHOUTING,
"HOSANNA!"
"BLESSED IS HE
WHO COMES IN
THE NAME OF THE
LORD!"

John 12:13

A PRAYER FOR PALM SUNDAY

FROM PRAYERS FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

BY CRAIG FINNESTAD

Dear God,

It's Palm Sunday.

Jesus entered a defiant city on a donkey to people shouting "Hosanna."

Enter my disobedient heart.

Replace my pride with humility.

Release me. Rescue me.

Form in me a deep desire to trust You more fully.

Forge in me the strength to listen to and respond to Your voice.

May I say "yes" to Your plans and promises.

May I say "no" to the competing shallow securities of this world.

Eliminate prideful attitudes that separate me from community with others
and distance me from closeness and intimacy with You.

Eradicate my behavior of constantly comparing myself with others
and teach me that my worth and value in life are gifts from You.

Rescue me from the double standard of singing "Hosanna" in worship
and shouting "crucify him" at work, with friends, and even at home.

Release me from the hypocrisy of worshipping You with my words at church but
denying You with my actions in the community.

Prevent me from holding on to habits that are harmful to me and hurtful to others.

Let the destructive parts of my life die and disappear.

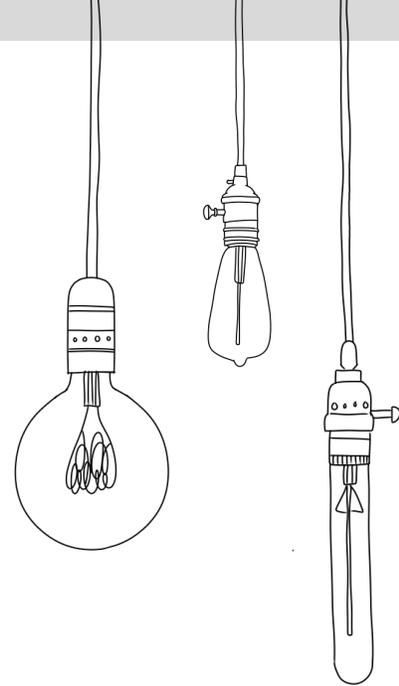
Prepare me for resurrection and new life that comes as a gift from You.

Let reconstruction begin and make me alive again!

You entered a holy city to people waving palm branches and waiting for a King.

Enter my life to make me holy, victorious, and obedient to the King of all Kings.

Amen.





WEEK 7
MARCH 29TH - APRIL 3RD

DATES TO NOTE
MAUNDY THURSDAY - APRIL 1ST
GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 2ND
EASTER - APRIL 4TH

BENEDICTION FROM A RHYTHM OF PRAYER BY SARAH BESSEY

God of prayers for parking spots and prisons,
Of hospitals and holidays,
Of anger and angels,
Of traveling mercies and tired ones,
Of decolonization and deconstruction,
Of wilderness and wander,
Of feasts and ferocity,
Of goodness and grief,
We come to you today
With our whole selves.

God of our honest prayers and
More honest silences,
Open our eyes to see and
Our ears to hear and
Our hearts to understand
How you are already here with us.

God, gather us as
A hen gathers her chicks
And let us catch our breath for
One hot second and remember
How you hold the whole world
In your kind, capable, wise hands,
Including us.

Spirit, when we cannot part the weeds
Of our own traditions and old languages,
When the old pathways of prayer feel choked
With briars and thorns,
Would you make a path in the wilderness
For us to find you in new ways, new words,
New practices, new permissions?
Would you meet us in the wilderness and
Set out a feast?
We are hungry and thirsty.

We are grateful for (mostly) every moment
That brought us here to
You.
Help us to sink down into your Love
To push our roots down into that marvellous Love.
And be planted within your power and grace
As we practice loving this world as you have
Loved this world.

May we laugh harder
Because we have learned
To let ourselves weep with you.
May we see and know and name Beauty
Because we have learned
To bring the ugliness to you.

Surprise us and startle us.
We're open to all the weird ways you want to
Speak—in us and to us and through us.

May we be Peacemakers,
Joy-bringers, Truth-tellers, Status-Quo-Disrupters,
Wanderers, Wonderers, and Misfits to our Time (because of
Resolute contentment),
Who never settle for the sit-down-and-shut-up life
But rise up in your
She-who-the-Son-sets-free-is-free-indeed
Birthright of freedom.

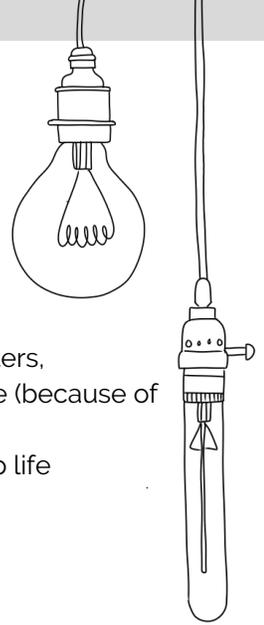
May we be the ones who come close to you
Because of our vulnerability and not
Because of our false certainties;
Teach us to lay down our masks and pretenses.
You tore down the veil between us and the Holy of Holies,
Keep our hands from rehangng that curtain.

Give us opportunities to practice mercy and courage
(This may backfire but we're feeling bold now.)
Call us to humility, confession, and repentance even when
Pride feels more comfortable and superior.
Teach us how to rest, how to abide, and how
To light candles and be satisfied.
Don't let us get away with divorcing our prayers
From our politics and policies and practices.
May we love our neighbors."

"May we learn to sit with you,
In silence,
And know it is enough to know you
And be known by you
And know ourselves.
Teach us to pray, God, as you have always
Welcomed us to pray:
fully human, fully yours, fully held,
And fully loved.

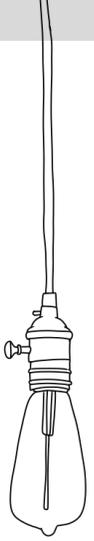
We will tell you the truth of our lives
And of this world.
And we will listen to the truth you speak back to us
The truth of our belovedness,
Of your justice,
Of your faithfulness,
Of love.
And say
Let it be so,
Let it be in me.

Amen.



THINKING OUT LOUD

A LENTEN DEVOTION
BY CRAIG FINNESTAD



Holy Week Explained

Maundy Thursday

Maundy is from the Latin “mandatum,” the first word of Jesus’ teaching from John 13:34 – “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus was sharing his last meal with the twelve men who would be responsible for taking the Gospel to the nations. No time for small talk. Not even time for good stuff. Only his best words. “I’m going to make this simple. You need to remember this: Love others as I have loved you.”

Good Friday

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. What He really gave us, of course, was Himself. He experienced pain, humiliation, and death so we can experience love, forgiveness, and life. The world hasn’t been the same since and your world doesn’t have to be the same ever again. No single word or collection of words could ever describe this day. So “good” will have to do.

Saturday

The other days have a name: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday. Saturday is just Saturday which is more than enough. It was a day of darkness when Satan celebrated victory over God and dominion over the world. In the epic game of chess against the Almighty One Himself – Satan delivered a surprising, come-from-behind checkmate. Hope he enjoys it while it lasts because he gets a surprise tomorrow: the King still has another move.

Easter

It begins in the despair of the dark caused by the sin of the world and the hatred of many. Fear was widespread. Satan delighted in Christ’s death. But it’s Easter morning and Satan’s party comes to an abrupt ending when he discovers the once defeated man has emerged from the tomb. Christ is alive. It was the day death died. Checkmate. Hope overcomes despair. Light silences darkness. Grace forgives sin. Love replaces hate. Faith calms fears. Life resurrects death.

MARCH 29TH



Today I Will Fast From:

LIKENING YOURSELF TO JOB

Suffering happens. WE all go through tough times. And, for many of us, it may seem like if it weren't for bad luck, we would have no luck at all.

Today, fast from likening yourself to Job. Remember, tough times are not punishment nor are they tests from God. As you go through your day, accept adversity as a way to draw near to your Father.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

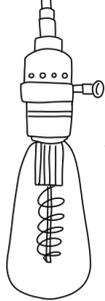
Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN
20:19-23

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 30TH



Today I Will Fast From:

WITHHOLDING

Today, fast from withholding.

Ask God to reveal any areas in your life where you are withholding love from Him, others or yourself. As He opens your eyes to these areas, take a step toward offering Jesus all that you have reserved for yourself.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

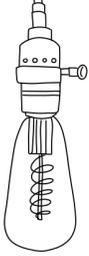
Read:

JOHN

20:24-31

Response to today's reading:

MARCH 31ST



Today I Will Fast From:

YOUR VOICE

Today, honor the sacrifice of Jesus with your silence. Just as we do to honor the fallen in times of tragedy, honor Jesus by fasting from your voice for a moment.

If you find your mind wandering, redirect your thoughts back to Jesus. Silently offer your gratitude and praise for His loving sacrifice.

While today WE remain silent, soon, WE will rejoice.

Gratitude:

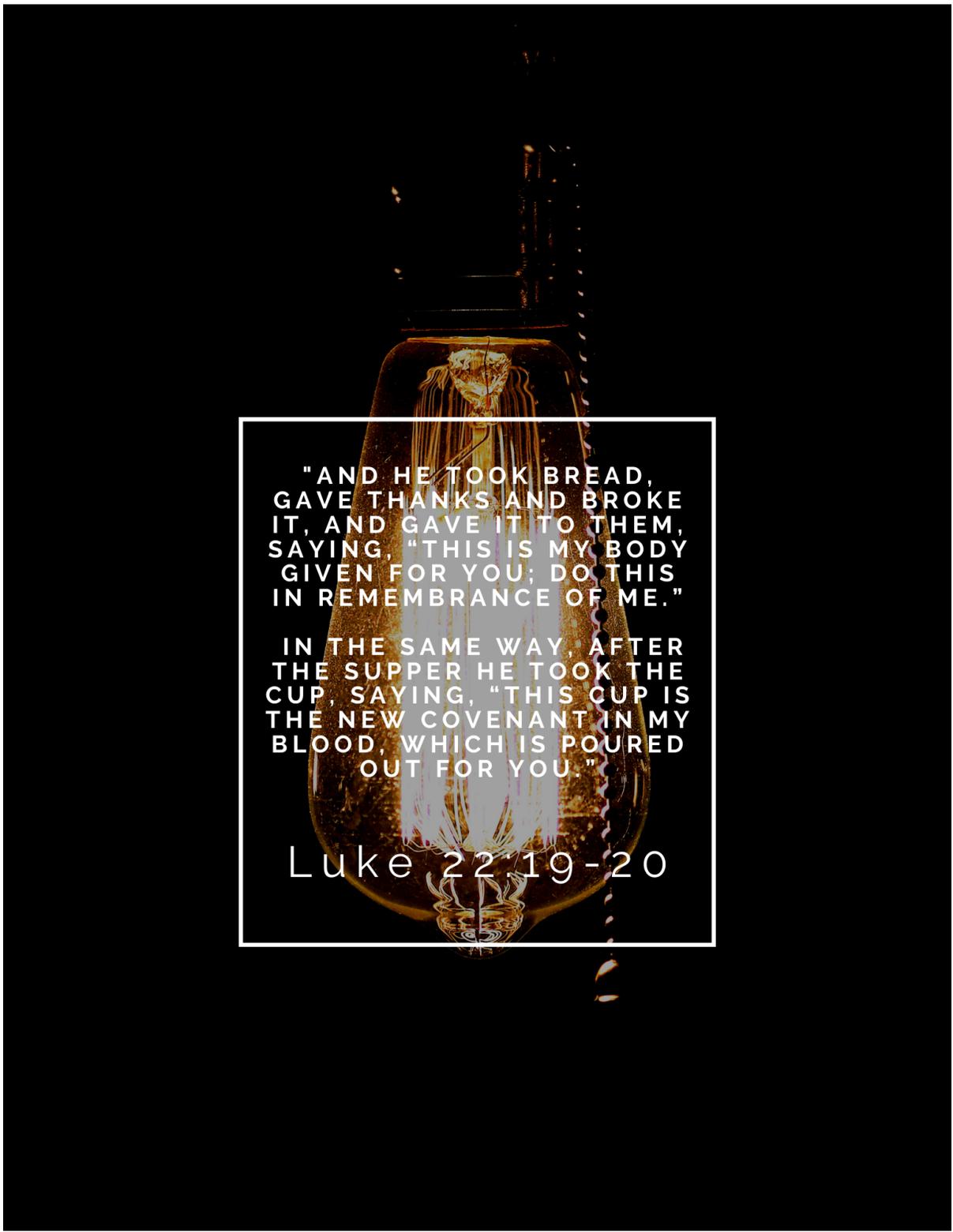
Prayer:

Reflect:

Read:

JOHN
21:1-9

Response to today's reading:



"AND HE TOOK BREAD,
GAVE THANKS AND BROKE
IT, AND GAVE IT TO THEM,
SAYING, "THIS IS MY BODY
GIVEN FOR YOU; DO THIS
IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME."

IN THE SAME WAY, AFTER
THE SUPPER HE TOOK THE
CUP, SAYING, "THIS CUP IS
THE NEW COVENANT IN MY
BLOOD, WHICH IS POURED
OUT FOR YOU."

Luke 22:19-20

BLESSING YOU CANNOT TURN BACK

A MAUNDY THURSDAY BLESSING

BY JAN RICHARDSON

As if you could
stop this blessing
from washing
over you.

As if you could
turn it back,
could return it
from your body
to the bowl,
from the bowl
to the pitcher,
from the pitcher
to the hand
that set this blessing
on its way.

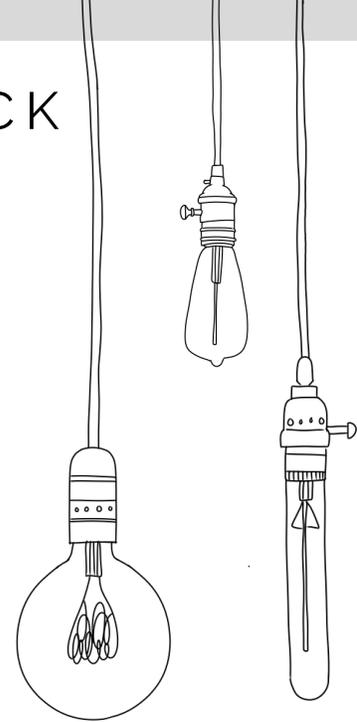
As if you could
change the course
by which this blessing
flows.

As if you could
control how it
pours over you—
unbidden,
unsought,
unasked,

yet startling
in the way
it matches the need
you did not know
you had.

As if you could
become undrenched.

As if you could
resist gathering it up
in your two hands
and letting your body
follow the arc
this blessing makes.



APRIL 1ST



Today I Will Fast From:

ESCAPISM

It's nice to escape. To allow ourselves a chance to daydream. A chance to hideout with our daydreams.

But, distractions aren't always healthy. Especially when used to "check out" when what is needed is our presence.

Today, instead of distracting yourself with activity, just be still. Yes. Be still. Address God directly. Take your concerns to Him. Embrace discomfort as a way to grow closer to Him.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

21:10-14

Response to today's reading:



IT IS
FINISHED.

"I THIRST FOR YOU"

A LETTER FROM MOTHER TERESA

I THIRST FOR YOU. It is true. I stand at the door of your heart, day and night. Even when you are not listening, even when you doubt it could be Me, I am there: waiting for even the smallest signal of your response, even the smallest suggestion of an invitation that will permit Me to enter.

I want you to know that each time you invite Me, I do come always, without fail. Silent and invisible I come, yet with a power and a love most infinite, bringing the many gifts of My Spirit. I come with My mercy, with My desire to forgive and heal you, with a love for you that goes beyond your comprehension. A love in each detail, so grand like the love I have received from My Father "I have loved all of you as the Father has loved me..." John 15:10 I come longing to console you and give you strength, to lift you up and bind all your wounds. I bring you My light, to dispel your darkness and all your doubts. I come with My power, that allows me to carry you: with My grace, to touch your heart and transform your life. I come with My peace, to calm your soul.

I know you like the palm of my hand. I know everything about you. Even the hairs of your head I have counted. Nothing in your life is unimportant to Me. I have followed you through the years and I have always loved you even when you have strayed. I know every one of your problems. I know your needs and your worries and yes, I know all your sins. But I tell you again that I love you, not for what you have or ceased to do, I love you for you, for the beauty and the dignity My Father gave you by creating you in His own image. It is a dignity you have often forgotten, a beauty you have tarnished by sin. But I love you as you are, and I have shed My Blood to rescue you. If you only ask Me with faith, My grace will touch all that needs changing in your life: I will give you the strength to free yourself from sin and from all its destructive power.

I know what is in your heart, I know your loneliness and all your wounds, the rejections, the judgments, the humiliations, I carried it all before you. And I carried it all for you, so you could share My strength and My victory. I know, above all, your need for love, how much you are thirsting for love and tenderness. Yet, how many times have you desired to satisfy your thirst in vain, seeking that love with selfishness, trying to fill the void within you with passing pleasures, with the even greater emptiness of sin. Do you thirst for love? "Come to Me all you who thirst ..." (John 7:37). I will satisfy you and fill you. Do you thirst to be loved? I love you more than you can imagine ... to the point of dying on a cross for you.

I THIRST FOR YOU. Yes, that is the only way to even begin to describe My love for you. I THIRST FOR YOU. I thirst to love you and to be loved by you. So precious are you to Me that I THIRST FOR YOU. Come to Me, and I will fill your heart and heal your wounds. I will make you a new creation and give you peace even in your trials. I THIRST FOR YOU. You must never doubt My mercy, My desire to forgive, My longing to bless you and live My life in you, and that I accept you no matter what you have done. I THIRST FOR YOU. If you feel of little value before the eyes of the world, it doesn't matter. There is no one that interests me in the whole world than you. I THIRST FOR YOU. Open up to Me, come to Me, thirst for Me, give me your life. I will prove to you how important you are for My Heart.

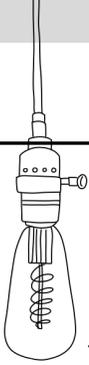
Don't you realize that My Father already has a perfect plan to transform your life, beginning from this moment? Trust in Me. Ask Me every day to enter and take charge of your life and I will. I promise you before My Father in Heaven that I will work miracles in your life. Why would I do this? Because I THIRST FOR YOU. All I ask of you is that you entrust yourself to Me completely. I will do all the rest.

From this moment, now, I behold the place My Father has prepared for you in My Kingdom. Remember that you are a pilgrim in this life traveling back home. Sin can never satisfy you, or bring the peace you seek. All that you have sought outside of Me has only left you more empty, so do not tie yourself to the things of this world; above all, do not run from Me when you fall. Come to Me without delay because, when you give Me your sins, you give Me the joy of being your Savior. There is nothing I cannot forgive and heal; so come now, and unburden your soul.

No matter how far you have strayed without a destination, no matter how often you have forgotten Me, no matter how many crosses you bear in this life; I want you to always remember, one thing that will never change. I THIRST FOR YOU – just you, as you are. You don't need to change to believe in My love, for it will be your confidence in that love that will make you change. You forget Me, and yet I am seeking you every moment of the day – standing before the doors of your heart and calling. Do you find this difficult to believe? If so, look at the Cross, look at My Heart that was pierced for you. Have you not understood My Cross? Then listen again to the words I spoke there, for they tell you clearly why I endured all this for you: "...I THIRST" (John 19: 28) YES, I THIRST FOR YOU. As the rest of the psalm, I was praying says of Me: "... I waited uselessly for compassion, I waited for someone to console me and I did not find it." (Psalm 69: 20). All your life I have been desiring your love. I've never ceased searching for your love and longing to be loved by you in return. You have tried many things in your goal to be happy. Why not try opening up for Me your heart, right now, more than you ever have before?

When you finally open the doors of your heart and you finally come close enough, you will then hear Me say again and again, not in mere human words but in spirit: "No matter what you have done, I love you for your own sake. Come to Me with your misery and your sins, with your problems and needs, and with all your desire to be loved. I stand at the door of your heart and call...Open to Me, for I THIRST FOR YOU..." "Jesus is God, therefore His Love and His Thirst are infinite. He, the Creator of the universe, asked for the love of his creatures. He has thirst for our love ...These words: "I THIRST" ... Do they echo in our soul?

APRIL 2ND



Today I Will Fast From:

GUARDING TOMBS

Jesus saved us because we desperately need it. WE have been given new life because He lives. Yet, so often, we stand watch over the things that have died in our lives. The things that once served us well but are now gone. We hold on to past mistakes allowing shame to hold us back.

Today, stop guarding the tombs of the past. Roll away the stone to reveal the tomb is empty. Jesus conquered death.

And, in doing so, frees us from our pasts. Those things are no longer there. They have been replaced by hope. By faith. And by....love.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

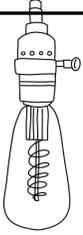
Read:

JOHN

21:15-19

Response to today's reading:

APRIL 3RD



Today I Will Fast From:

FASTING

Today, WE fast fasting to rejoice in the resurrection of our Savior.

WE hope this time of decrease has led you to a place of increase.

Increased hope.
Increased faith.
Increased capacity to love, serve, see, and celebrate Jesus.

Tomorrow, WE celebrate.

Christ has died.
Christ has risen.
Christ will come again.

Gratitude:

Prayer:

Fasting Reflection/Examen:

Read:

JOHN

21:20-25

Response to today's reading:

THEREFORE I WILL HOPE

A BLESSING FOR HOLY SATURDAY

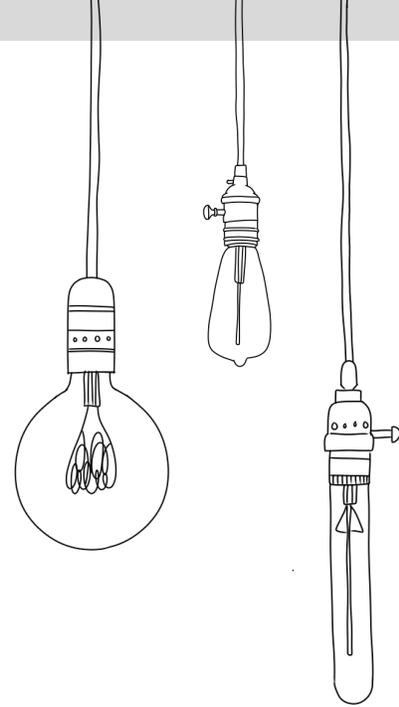
BY JAN RICHARDSON

I have no cause
to linger beside
this place of death,

no reason
to keep vigil
where life has left,

and yet I cannot go,
cannot bring myself
to cleave myself
from here,

can only pray
that this waiting
might yet be a blessing
and this grieving
yet a blessing
and this stone
yet a blessing
and this silence
yet a blessing
still.





KAIROS

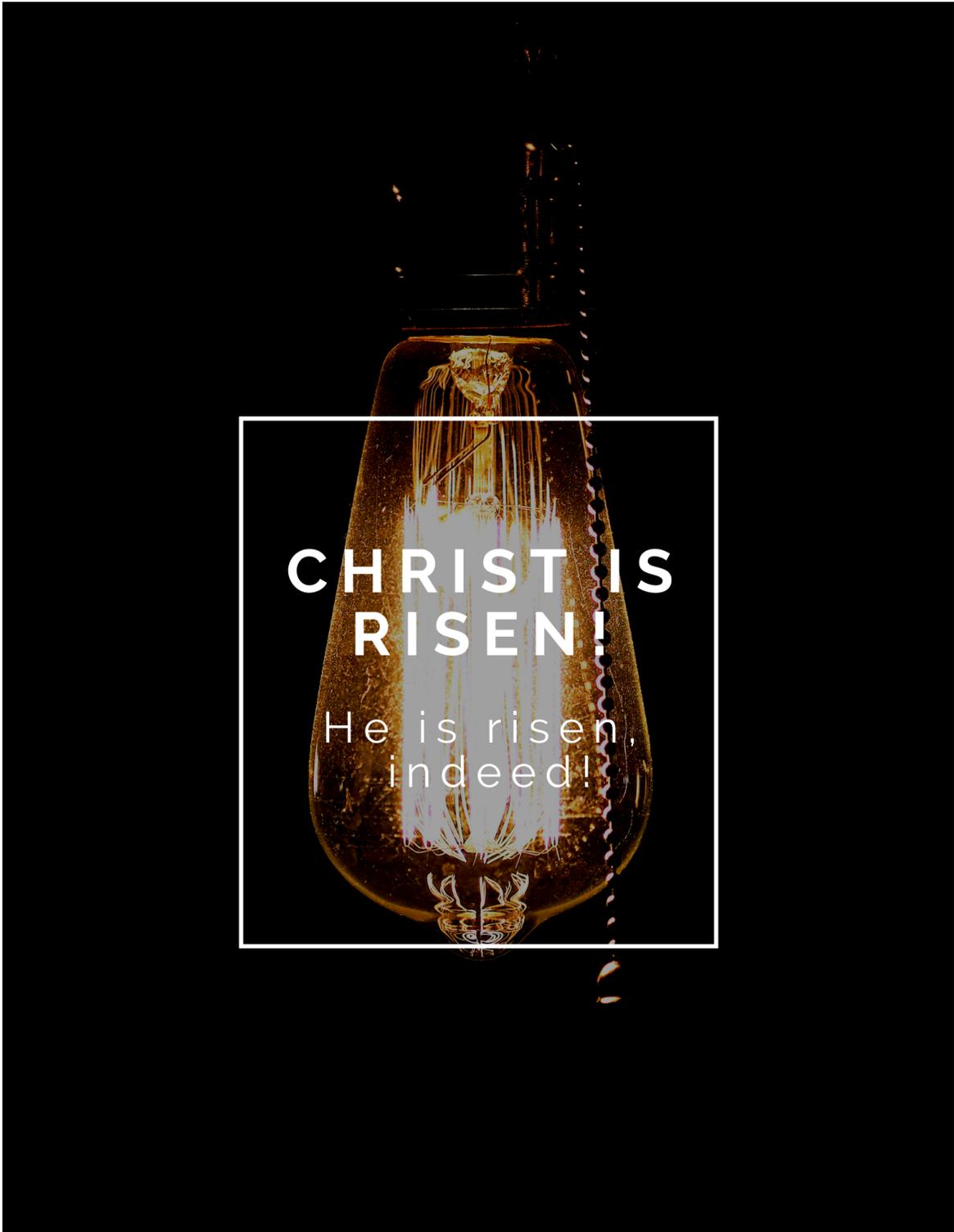
Hearing His Voice

As you worked through this week's decrease, how did you see God increase? How have you heard His voice speak to you? What were you doing? What was said/read/done? What do you believe God was saying through this?

"Look for the light. The light at your feet. And follow it. And when you know it's right to hold on, hold on. Grip tightly until your hands are sore.

But don't let go."

-Annie F. Downs



A PRAYER FOR EASTER

FROM PRAYERS FROM THE WATER'S EDGE

BY CRAIG FINNESTAD

Dear God,

The morning begins with darkness and despair.

My transgressions. The sins of the world. The hatred of many.

Fear is widespread. Satan delights in Christ's death.

My worries. The helplessness of the world. The hopelessness of many.

But it's Easter.

Satan's party has come to an abrupt and amazing ending.

The bruised and lifeless man has emerged from the tomb.

Christ is alive again!

It's a new day.

Faith calms fears. Love replaces hate.

Goodness repairs evil. Light overtakes darkness.

Grace forgives sin. Life resurrects death.

I celebrate this day.

It is a day You have made. I rejoice!

The day Jesus rose from the dead.

Neither death nor life will ever be the same again.

The day death died.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

The tomb couldn't hold Jesus.

Nor can it hold those of us who follow him.

You redeemed the world.

The cross was once a symbol of disgrace.

It now represents restoration and hope.

Erase my mistakes and fill me with Your grace.

You comforted the world.

When the fatality and fragility of Friday comes into my life -

Remind me of the sweetness and salvation of Easter morning.

Heal my brokenness and let me begin again.

You changed the world.

You gave direction to the searching.

You forgave the prostitute of her sin.

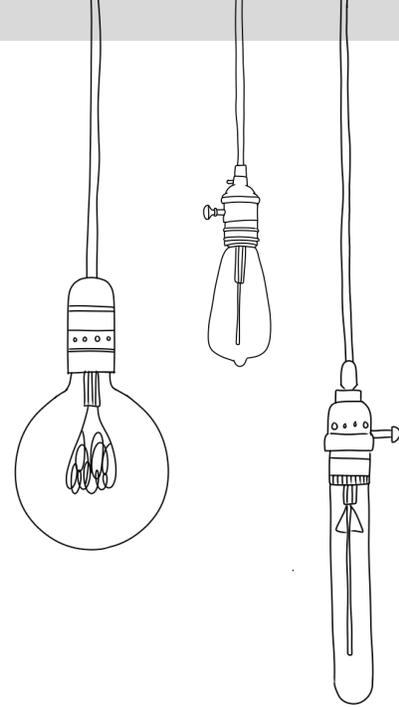
You raised Lazarus from the dead.

Enter my world and change my world.

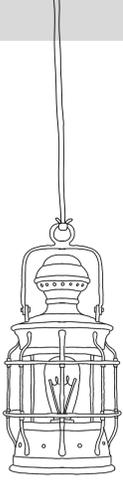
Give me focus and direct my path.

Forgive me of my failings and sins.

Resurrect me to new levels of life - now and forever.

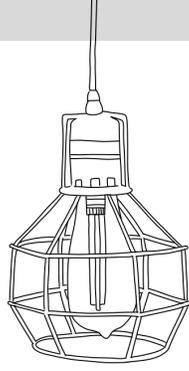


Amen.



I WILL REMEMBER..

Write down anything that you want to remember from this journey, questions you may have or things you want to continue. Anything you want. This is your space.



END WITH A PRAYER

Use this space to write out a prayer as you end this Lent study. What would you like to continue from this study? How would you like to continue to decrease yourself to increase Him?

Remember - this is YOUR prayer. There is no wrong way or right way to pray. Just pray what is on your heart.



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