

Bellevue Church

JESUS

NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME -PHIL 2:9

Lent Guide 2022



• BELLEVUE CHURCH •



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The season of fasting and prayer is always an expression of personal repentance, and intense communion with God in prayer. God is longing to bring us closer to Him this season. The question is will you let Him draw you near and embrace you? Lent is a time to prepare for renewal. The death and resurrection of Christ are true. However, without my heart and life being ready, I may not experience the depth and power of Christ's death and resurrection.

Check the ones you Will Commit To:

Disciplines

- ___ Develop a closer relationship with God.
- ___ Make God # 1 in my life.
- ___ Pray for Bellevue Church
- Personal Disciplines**
- ___ Spend time in prayer each day.
- ___ Pray for salvation for family members and friends

Personal Disciplines

List
Names
Here

- ___ Use the "Devotions for Lent" handbook daily.
- ___ Focus more on thanksgiving, rather than asking, in prayer.

Social Disciplines

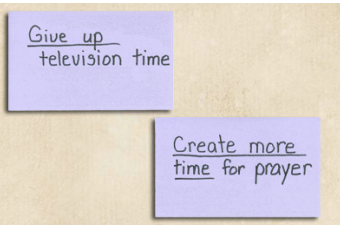
- ___ Listen and respond to Christ's call to a ministry of service.
- ___ Say "NO" to something that is a waste of money and time.

(Signed) _____

(Date) _____

What Are Your Family's Easter Traditions?

Traditions especially those children can see, hear, feel, smell and taste - provide vivid impressions on which parents can build year after year. There are many which will enrich your own family's celebration of what might be more accurately called Resurrection Day. Choose a few from this collection, share their meaning in whatever words your children will understand, and keep the ones you like as part of your family's Easter heritage.



Lent is a forty day period before Easter set aside as a season of soul-searching and repentance. The forty days reflect Jesus' withdrawal into the wilderness for his own time of spiritual reflection. Sundays, because they commemorate the Resurrection, are not counted. In the early church Lent was a special time when new converts were instructed in the faith and prepared for baptism on Easter. Your family will benefit from preparing in advance to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection. Children will cherish Easter more with anticipation sweetening the weeks before.

New Life

As Lent begins, help your children plant crocus, daffodil, or hyacinth bulbs in a bowl of sand, covering halfway. Leave in a dark closet for two months, keeping soil moist (a process known as forcing bulbs). When shoots appear, let them bask in the sun. Don't forget to leave one bulb unplanted as a reminder of how they began.

Devotions

ent can be a time of family focus on the meaning of the Christian life. You may want to commit to a regular pattern of family worship - daily, weekly, or whenever you can. Or you may post Bible verses, especially the words of Jesus, on the refrigerator, bathroom mirrors, wherever a busy family is sure to see them. Talk about them at dinner or on the way to school - especially how verses apply to events in our daily lives.

Giving Up

Traditionally, especially in Europe, during Lent there were no weddings, no dancing, no singing. No flowers or alleluia in churches. Some families may find spiritual value in giving up something for Lent - television, sweets, video games not as a penance, but as an outer symbol of dying to self during a season of spiritual reflection.

Giving

While we usually think of Christmas for gift-giving, Easter has a richer heritage. God gave His Son. Jesus gave His life. Find ways to give unconditionally: money to the homeless person on the corner, treats for those in nursing homes. Jesus told us clearly, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

Piggy Bank (Mite Box)

Help your children decorate the piggy bank. Display where everyone at home will remember to contribute their change.
Bring the piggy bank to Church. This custom can be directly related to the preceding one: giving up to give.

Pretzels

Bake your own pretzels (check your own cookbooks, library or Internet for recipe - or buy the frozen ones). Pretzels originated as early Christian Lenten treats, designed in the form of arms crossed in prayer.

NOTES

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Name Above All Names

Introduction

In Philippians 2:9 we read that God exalted Jesus to the highest place and “gave Him the name that is above every name.” In our 2022 Lenten study, we will learn about the names and titles of Jesus Christ. Each name illuminates one more exquisite aspect of His person and work, like light reveals each detail of a precious jewel.

Each of the names of Jesus not only reflects a marvelous truth about who Jesus is, His names also point to ways in which Jesus interacts with us. His names carry promise and blessings, inspire wonder and worship, and prompt service and sacrifice. As we come to understand Him more fully, we will grow to trust Him more completely to be all that His titles portray Him to be. Who He was to first century Christians of the Roman Empire, Jesus will be to twenty-first century Christians in America.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

In the next six weeks, we will see Jesus anew in the light of His names. We cannot cover all of the names and titles given to Jesus, but we will consider many of them as well as some of the passages from the Bible in which they occur. Unless otherwise noted, the biblical quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible. There are only five readings for each week, giving us an extra two days to catch up if we fall behind.

One word of warning, however. Jesus once challenged His followers with the words: “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). We must always avoid the danger of making Bible study only an academic pursuit instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to use the Word of God to teach us and transform us. Sometimes people can be fascinated with learning new things, but the Word of God demands that we not only gain “head knowledge,” but that we also put it into practice via obedience and service.

As always, it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will open the Scriptures to you and enable you to grow more deeply in your knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ.

Note: Even although Lent starts on Wednesday March 2nd, we will begin our devotions on Monday 7th March. Take the time between March 2nd and March 7th to prepare your hearts (A suggestion - read the gospel accounts of the last week of Jesus' life on earth starting with Palm Sunday)

There are six weeks of devotions end on Easter Sunday April 17th

At the back of the six weeks of devotions, you will find a section containing devotions for families with children and one for families with junior high and high school students.

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Fasting Quick Tips

Preparing Spiritually

Confess your sins to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of weakness. Forgive all who have offended you and ask forgiveness from those you may have offended (Mark 11:25; Luke 11”4, 17:3-4). Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ and reject the worldly desires that try to hinder you (Romans 12:1-2)

You are following Jesus’ example when you fast. Spend time listening to praise and worship music. Pray as often as you can throughout the day. Get away from the normal distractions as much as possible and keep your heart and mind set on seeking God’s face.

Preparing Physically

If you have health concerns, consult your doctor prior to beginning a fast and explain what you plan to do. This is especially important if you take prescription medications or have a chronic ailment. Some people should never fast without professional supervision.

How To Begin

Start with a clear goal. Why are you fasting? Do you need direction, healing, restoration of marriage or family issues? Are you fasting for the salvation of loved ones? Are you facing financial difficulties? Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Pray daily and read the Bible.

Deciding What To Fast

What you fast is up to you. It may be a full fast in which you only drink liquids, or you may desires to fast like Daniel, who only abstained from breads and meats, and drank only water. There are a few other things to focus on during this time that will help you maintain a “clean vessel”. For example, you should refrain from critical speaking, spreading negative words about or to anyone else. Also, consider limiting how much you watch TV, and how much time you spend on things that are distracting. Remember to replace that time with prayer and Bible study. That time with Jesus will produce dramatic change in your life.

Deciding How Long

Most people can easily fast from one to three days, but may feel the grace to go longer, even as much as 21 to 40 days. Use wisdom and pray for guidance. Beginners are advised to start slow.

What To Expect

When you fast, your body detoxifies, eliminating toxins from your system. This can cause mild discomfort such as headaches and irritability during withdrawal from caffeine and sugars. And naturally, you will have hunger pangs. Limit you activity as much as possible, and exercise moderately. Take time to rest. Fasting brings about miraculous results.

How To End

Don’t overeat when the time comes to end your fast. Begin eating solid foods gradually and eat smaller portions or snacks.

the Lenten Fast

INTRODUCTION

1. Fasting is mentioned 69 times in the Bible.
2. Fasting is one of the best ways to raise the spiritual tide in your life
3. Three things to ask yourself before you decide to fast:
 - a. What are the motives behind the fast?
 - b. What are the needs specifically you are fasting for?
 - c. Are you determined to minister to the Lord during this fast?
4. Zechariah 7:5 God asks the question- “Are you fasting for me?”
5. Every time you fast you get closer to God.

THERE ARE 7 REASONS AND SEVEN TYPES OF FASTS IN THE BIBLE:

Esther 4:16 “fast for me neither eat nor drink for 3 days or nights and get everyone to fast for me...”

The Bible says that God turned that crisis around

Daniel 10:2-3

This is a 21 day fast.

Daniel 10:11 “...understand the words that I speak to you....”

If you will fast-God will bring understanding.

Leviticus 23:27 The Day of Atonement, God was saying “every year I want you to set aside a certain time that you fast and seek me and here is the purpose for it- for self-examination”

This is a 1 day fast.

Judges 20

This is a powerful chapter on fasting.

Judges 20:26 “...they sat there before the Lord and fasted...”

There is something that happens when we fast and when we pray that will not happen if you don’t fast even if God told you to do it.

1 Kings 21:27-29

This is the story of Ahab who was extremely wicked. After the prophecy of Elijah against him, he humbled himself and fasted. God then said, “because he has humbled himself in fasting I will lift the judgement”

40 day fast

The number 40 is very significant in the Bible

In Noah’s day, forty days of flooding washed away the evil

Moses spent 40 years on the hind side of the desert waiting for God

Hebrew children spent 40 years in the desert

When Jesus entered the desert, he left behind all the expectations of others, all the hopes, everything. It was just Him and God. There in the desert He fasted 40 days-he did it for dominion-he did it for authority.

Isaiah 58

Fasting that pleases the Lord

Isaiah 58:12 “you will raise up a foundation for many generations”

The Lenten Fast:

Ezra 8:21-23 Three reasons to fast:

To seek of him a right way for us-God will reveal the right way.

We are fasting for our little ones-out children and grandchildren

We are fasting for our substance-our resources-our finances

We don’t want this to be religious-it is the Christian preparation for Easter.

It is a time for repentance, moderation, and spiritual discipline.

It is not about what you”have to give up” but about time set aside for reflection on Jesus, his suffering and His sacrifice, His death burial and resurrection.

Week One: His Names Reveal His Eternal Being

**“Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received its frame,
From everlasting You are God,
To endless years the same.**

**“A thousand ages in Your sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.**

**“O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Still be our guard while troubles last
And our eternal home!”**

O God, Our Help in Ages Past, verses 3, 4, and 6
By Isaac Watts

Day 1	True God	Mark 2
Day 2	Son of God	John 3
Day 3	The Word	John 1
Day 4	Creator	Colossians 1
Day 5	Author of Faith	Hebrews

TRUE GOD

MARK 2

“We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *of one Being with the Father.*” Those words from the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) express the faith of the Christian Church regarding the identity of Jesus.

Some critics question whether Jesus actually claimed to be God, but His enemies attempted to stone Him for making that very claim when He declared, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30-33). Jesus forgave sins, knowingly assuming a divine prerogative, and His enemies accused Him of blasphemy (Mark 2). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cited various commandments and then decreed a new interpretation of those laws with the words, “But I tell you...” (Matthew 5), thereby taking to Himself the divine authority to amend the God-given Law. His words and actions regarding the Sabbath exhibited that same authority. Jesus stunned His hearers when He asserted, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). Moreover, when Thomas saw the risen Jesus and cried out, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus did not correct him.

The letters of the New Testament also testify to the divinity of Jesus. In Romans 9:5, Jesus Christ is described as “God over all,” and in Titus 2:13 as “our great God and Savior.” He is called “the true God” in I John 5:20.

On the other hand, Jesus is neither identical to God the Father nor is He a second “rival God” as some ancient heresies proposed. Jesus is one with God the Father, but He is not the Father. In fact, Jesus often referred to God the Father in a manner that points to an obvious distinction between them. Theologians have noted that one can say Jesus is God, but the statement cannot be reversed to say that God is Jesus.

That takes us to the doctrine of the Trinity. God is One, but God is also Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three share the same divine nature or Being. On the night before His death, Jesus prayed that His followers would be one as He and the Father are one (John 17:11), clearly meaning *one in essence and in purpose*.

Jesus is God, and God is both imminent (near to us) and transcendent (high above and over us). Christians frequently do not keep these attributes in balance. In Martin Luther’s time, Jesus was considered so transcendent that one could only approach Him in terror or through a mediator like the Virgin Mary or one of the saints.

Today, Christians tend to drift toward the other extreme. Jesus is such a “pal” that few believers regularly experience awe in His presence. Failing to remember His holiness, His omnipotence, His greatness, and His wisdom can lead us to treat worship too casually and to regard obedience with indifference. In contrast, the Apostle John, who walked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and even fished with Jesus, was so overwhelmed in His divine presence that he “fell at His feet as though dead.” (Revelation 1:17)

Jesus is God. As God, He is worthy of our highest worship and praise, our service, our obedience, our *reverence*. Do we even know what that word means anymore?

Holy Spirit, renew in me a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of Jesus, my Lord and my God. Teach me reverence. Amen.

Week Five

Teacher (Rabbi)

- If you could ask God any question, what would you ask?
- Why didn’t God just give us straightforward, obvious answers to all of our questions in the Bible?

The Good Shepherd

- What would a ‘bad shepherd’ look like?
- What have you learned about Jesus by learning what a shepherd’s job was?

Bread of Life

- What kind of food sums up the way you see Jesus – vegetables that you just eat because they’re good for you, or a decadent dessert that you can’t wait to enjoy? Or something else?
- What goes through your mind when you receive Communion?

The Vine

- Do you tend to try and do things on your own, or rely on Jesus’ help?
- Look up the ‘fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22-23... which ones come naturally to you? Which do you KNOW you need Jesus’ help for?

The Head of the Church

- If you HAD to get rid of a body part, what would you choose? Why?
- If Jesus is the head of the church and we are its body, what body part are you?

Week Six

Amen

- Did you know what “Amen” meant before today?
- What are some other ‘church words’ that we say all the time, but don’t really think of their meaning?

Judge

- If you had to stand before God and be judged without Jesus, what do you think God would say about you?
- Do you judge other people? What group or type of people do you find hardest to love?

The Alpha and Omega

- If you had to come up with a new name for Jesus, what would it be?
- Is it easier for you to trust that God has everything under control, or to see that sin is everywhere in our world?

Bridegroom

- Why do you think God chose to describe the relationship between Jesus and the church using the bride/groom/marriage example?
- How do you think the way God intended marriage is different from the way it is viewed in our society today?

King of Kings

- How is Jesus different than any other kind of king you’ve ever heard of?
- What exactly is Jesus the king of?

Week Three

The Lion of Judah

- If you had to define yourself using an animal, what would you choose?
- If you had to define Jesus using an animal, would you have chosen a lion? Why or why not?

The Cornerstone

- If people were just to look at your life, what would they say is the most important thing to you?
- How can we know if we're building our life on Jesus or not?

Prince of Peace

- When or where do you feel the most peaceful?
- What do you worry about? How can you trust God with those worries?

The Way

- Why do you think Jesus referred to himself as THE way, instead of A way?
- How can we share the way of Jesus with people?

The Life

- When you picture heaven, what does it look like?
- How does it make you feel to know that when you know Jesus, you will never experience real death, but only eternal life with Him?

Week Four

Savior

- What would you say Jesus has saved you, personally, from?
- Who do you (or can you) pray for Jesus to save?

Redeemer

- What kind of sin do you feel the most 'enslaved' to – thoughts, words, actions, habits?
- When do you feel the most freedom?

Lamb of God

- First, Jesus is described as a lion, and now a lamb – which do you think describes him better or more completely?
- Lambs were used as a sacrifice – is there anything you have had to sacrifice because of your relationship with God? Was it worth it?

Divine Physician

- If Jesus is the divine physician, why is there still disease and sickness in our world?
- Who can you pray for God to heal today?

Mediator of the New Covenant

- Why do you think the Israelites had such a hard time keeping the 10 Commandments?
- If we have a covenant with God, what do we give and what do we get?

SON OF GOD

JOHN 3

By age twelve, Jesus had some awareness of His relationship to God the Father. He informed His worried mother, who had been searching for Him, that He needed to be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49, KJV). At His baptism, that awareness was confirmed when God said, "You are My Son" (Mark 1:11). Immediately following His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness where He was tempted. Two of the temptations attempted to cast doubt on that relationship: "If You are the Son of God..." (Luke 4:3, 9). At His trial, the high priest put the question directly to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Mark 14:61). His answer condemned Him.

In John's Gospel, we often hear Jesus refer to God as "My Father" and to Himself as the Son. In fact, the purpose of that Gospel is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

As the Son, Jesus enjoyed a special close connection to the Father. Jesus taught that "no one knows the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11:27). At the Last Supper, He explained, "All that belongs to the Father is Mine" (John 16:15). Earlier, Jesus told His opponents, "The Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does" (John 5:20).

The relationship of the divine Father and the divine Son is not easily fathomed. Jesus told His disciples, "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) and "The Son can do nothing by Himself" (John 5:19). The Athanasian Creed (4th century), which is sometimes used in the liturgy on Trinity Sunday, professes that Jesus is "equal to the Father in divinity, subordinate to the Father in humanity."

Indeed, during Jesus' ministry on earth, the Father – Son relationship was marked, not so much by privilege, but by obedience. Time and time again, Jesus insisted that He had come not to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him, i.e. His Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). In Gethsemane, the night before His death, He cried out to God, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36). "Abba" was the Aramaic word a child would use in addressing his father, similar in meaning to "daddy." There Jesus prayed, "Not what I will but what You will" (Mark 14:36), and God's will included His death on the cross.

Because of His obedience and sacrifice, Jesus offers us an amazing gift. To the ones who believe in and receive Him, He gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12). **All who believe and receive Him are God's sons and daughters!**

Amazingly, we are not children who are welcomed into the family only with much reservation. Instead, "God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir" (Galatians 4:6, 7). We, too, can enjoy an intimacy with the Father! We, too, have a heavenly inheritance awaiting us.

Our adoption into the family of God, however, is no guarantee of a trouble-free life. Quite the contrary! In Hebrews 5:8 we read concerning Jesus, "Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered." That same letter explains to us that God the Father disciplines His children through hardships (12:7). If obedience, not privilege, was true for Jesus, it is most certainly true for us as well.

Holy Father, thank You for making me Your child and for being my "Abba." Forgive me for wanting all of Your blessings while resisting hardship and obedience. Amen.

THE WORD

JOHN 1

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is called “the Word.” The term John used was the Greek “logos,” which meant far more than simply a “word.” It included the idea of reason and of mind and of wisdom. Some Greek philosophers believed the “logos” brings order to the universe and holds it all together.

The term “the Word” also had a greater meaning than merely “word” in Hebrew thought. The Targums were translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures into the language of the people (Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke). In the Targums, “the Word” (Memra) was substituted for “the Lord” whenever Scriptures told of God in human terms (anthropomorphism), as in Genesis 18 when God visited Abraham. It was “The Word” who visited Abraham. “The Memra” led the Israelites to Sinai (Exodus 13:21).

In Hebrew thinking, words themselves had a great impact. We might say, “Those are only words,” as if words in themselves have no power. The Jews, during biblical times, however, believed the spoken word carried within it the power to effect what was said. That was especially true of God’s Word. Thus, God can speak creation into existence. “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Through the prophet Isaiah, God declared that His Word “will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (55:11).

In starting his Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word...,” John connected with both Greek and Jewish readers. It was the Word, taking on human flesh, who was born in Bethlehem. Existing from all eternity, the very expression of God, His wisdom and His power were personified in Jesus.

Words communicate. In every relationship, there must be communication. Words *express* our feelings, words *reveal* who we are, and words *disclose* our desires and intentions. If we do not communicate in some way what is within us, it remains unknown and hidden. And so it is with God as well.

That “the Word” is a title of Jesus is very significant. Not only does that title tell us that Jesus reveals what God is like and discloses His will for us, the title also tells us that **God wants to communicate with us! He chooses to be the Word!** God does not remain hidden in His heavens somewhere, leaving us with the impossible task of seeking Him out. God is a communicator. God initiates the conversation. God engages us in dialog. That God *speaks* indicates His desire for relationship with His creation. That God has given us the Word demonstrates that He wants us to know Him.

Jesus is the Word of God. He both brings God’s message to us, as did the prophets, but even more, unlike the prophets, Jesus is the Message. Today we have the Bible, the written Word, to point us to Jesus and to Jesus and to communicate God’s revelation and will to us.

God the Father has also given us the gift of the Holy Spirit who continues the dialog. The Spirit communicates with each believer and with the Church, calling us to Jesus. The Spirit opens our minds to Scripture, guides us, encourages us, corrects us, and enables us to hear the voice of God. God still communicates with His people!

Lord, it is astounding that You, Maker of the universe, desire to speak with me! Teach me to listen to Your Word and to Your Spirit. Help me to understand. Amen.

Week One

True God

- How do you think you would have reacted in Jesus’ time if you heard some guy declaring himself to be God?
- Do you usually think of God as more imminent (near to us) or transcendent (high above and over us)?

Son of God

- Do you think Jesus ALWAYS knew he was the Son of God, or God revealed it to him at some point in his childhood?
- Jesus is the Son of God, but we are also referred to as God’s children... how is our relationship with God similar to and different from Jesus’ relationship with Him?

The Word

- What is the most impactful thing anyone has ever said to you – good or bad?
- What ways do you hear God’s Word best in your life?

Creator

- Do you think it is important to know that Jesus was around at the creation of the world? Why or why not?
- Do you do a good job of taking care of the creation God has given us? How can we do a better job of that as a family?

Author of the Faith

- If Jesus, the ‘author’, had to sum up your faith in a sentence, what would it be?
- If you could rewrite one thing from your past, what would you make different?

Week Two

The Image of God

- How would your view of God be different if Jesus didn’t come to earth like he did?
- We should reflect Jesus in our words, actions, and attitude... which of those do you think usually reflects Jesus the least in you? The most?

The Bright Morning Star

- What part of God’s creation shows Him most clearly to you?
- When was a dark time in your life that Jesus’ light was really important to you?

The Lord of Glory

- How would you define the word ‘glory’?
- How did Jesus receive glory through his death on the cross?

The Power and Wisdom of God

- Which is most important to you – power, or wisdom?
- What situation, relationship, or decision in your life right now do you need wisdom for?

The Righteous One

- Is Jesus taking on our sin fair? Who does it benefit most?
- Why do you think Jesus would want to do that for us?

Discussion Questions For Pre-Teens and Teenagers

While the devotions may be a little advanced for some junior high and high school aged kids, we still want to encourage them to read through them with you. You can read them out loud together. or get your child their own copy of the devotional book. Use these questions to check in everyday and help them understand what they are reading. Remember: the point of these questions is not to quiz your kids, but to help you start a discussion with them. You can always just ask, “What did you learn from today’s reading?” or, “Did you have any questions about today’s reading?” The goal here is just to talk about their faith, so if you do that, you have succeeded! You don’t need to pretend like you know all the answers to all of these questions. Just share with them what you think and listen to what they think. We are all on our own journey of faith, so your answers may be different then theirs just based on your life experience. Please really listen to your kids, and honor their thought process and answers! Maybe they even have something to teach you!

CREATOR

COLOSSIANS 1

Knowing Jesus as the Word opened the eyes of the apostles to see the role of God’s Son in creation. In Genesis 1, we read again and again, “And God said...” Psalm 33:6 teaches us, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.” Accordingly, John’s Gospel affirms, “Through Him [the Logos, the Word] all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). Hebrews 1:2 repeats that same affirmation: it was through the Son that God made the universe.

The Son was the divine Agent through whom God the Father worked. The role of the Son is comparable to a contractor who is employed by someone who wants a house built. Colossians 1:16 states that “all things were created by Him and for Him.” Even now, the Son is “sustaining all things by His powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3).

Knowing Jesus as Creator was critical in the early days of the Church. Gnosticism, a popular religion of that time, taught that the physical universe and material things were flawed at best and evil at worst and were the creation of a “lesser god.” They believed that only spirit, the opposite of matter, was good and that the highest god was pure spirit. As some Gnostics attempted to incorporate Christian truth into their own belief system, they proposed the God of the Old Testament (the Creator) as the lesser god while Jesus (who they did not believe could be truly human, i.e. “flesh and blood”) was a higher god.

For Christian believers who might have been favorably inclined to Gnosticism and to taking a negative view of the physical world and its Creator, the New Testament reiterates in strong language that creation and redemption are *both* the work of the same Lord. Jesus was not a “higher god” by virtue of non-involvement with creation. He was intimately involved in the creation. Furthermore, it is *our sin* that marred creation, not the touch of a lesser god on unholy matter.

It is essential for Christians to still remember that Jesus, the One who loves us and gave Himself for us, is the One through whom the universe was created. It is too easy to adopt an attitude, not so different from Gnosticism, which sees the universe as a cold and indifferent place and the natural world as hostile. To the contrary, God’s *love* is behind the creation. The natural world is, as God Himself declared it to be, ultimately good *because He made it*. Even when evil touches our lives, even when we suffer because of the fallen world we live in, we are assured that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Moreover, if for no other reason than the fact that Jesus is the One through whom and for whom all things were made, environmental concerns must have our attention. How dare we disregard that which our Lord has made! The stewardship of the earth and its resources, committed to Adam and Eve, continues to be our responsibility.

This earth and this universe, of course, will not last forever. The book of Revelation points to the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. **As spectacular and beautiful as this present creation is, the new creation, untouched by sin, will surely be beyond imagination!** Scripture hints at it: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him” (I Corinthians 2:9). Someday, we who belong to Jesus Christ will be privileged and blessed and no doubt awestruck to see that new creation and to explore and live in it.

Lord, open my eyes to see Your handiwork in the beautiful world around me! Amen.

AUTHOR OF THE FAITH

HEBREWS 12

The Bible starts, “In the beginning...” and Genesis 1 then relates the account of creation. Yet before the beginning, before creation, God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is. God was, is, and will be forever. Even before time began, there is God.

In eternity, before Day One of creation, God decided to create the universe and formulated a plan for His world. Outside a few verses of Scripture, there is no way we can even begin to understand the planning process undertaken by God, the Three in One. But in the Bible, we have a few clues.

Ephesians 1:4 states that God “chose us in Him before the creation of the world” but it is not only members of humanity who are chosen. We also read that Jesus, the Lamb of God, “was chosen before the creation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18-20). Revelation 13:8 describes Jesus as “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

It seems clear from these verses that God knew, that humanity, yet uncreated, would need a Savior. Apparently, sin and Fall [see Genesis 3] did not catch God by surprise. For reasons we could only speculate, God decided to allow humanity’s rebellion against Him. Nevertheless, God will not allow sin to thwart His purpose, and so in eternity, the Father and His divine Son—the Word, the One by whom and for whom the world was yet to be created—and the Holy Spirit developed “the plan” (Ephesians 1:11).

In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is called “the author and perfecter of our faith.” [The Greek actually reads of “the faith.”] Hebrews 2:10 also refers to Jesus as the author of salvation. Although the word translated “author” can also mean leader, founder, captain, or prince, one cannot help but think back to that time in eternity, long before the Son would take on human flesh, when the plan for our salvation was “authored,” the plan by which the Son would come to earth as the Lamb to give His life for His creation.

We cannot know how many millions of years passed before the incarnate Son Jesus stood in Jerusalem with the cross now so near and said, “The hour has come...Now is my heart troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour” (John 12:23, 27).

It is amazing, comforting, confusing, and humbling to learn that we too were part of the plan of salvation long before we were born, even before creation itself. Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 tell of the book of life in which believers’ names were written before history began. The word “predestined” is used in Ephesians 1:5, 11 and in Romans 8:30 to describe those whom God “foreknew” (Romans 8:29). God sees the future more clearly than we see the past and therefore knew all who would accept the gift of His grace.

Now, after countless millennia, it is our turn to run the race (Hebrews 12). We do so best by fixing our eyes on Jesus who is not only the Author of faith but our leader and captain. In the way He lived by faith, by trusting in God the Father each mile of the race, and by looking beyond the trials and suffering in this life to the goal, Jesus shows us the way to run our races. When we keep our eyes on Him, He will also “perfect” our faith, enabling us to keep running, to reach the goal, and like Paul (Philippians 3:14), to win the prize.

Lord Jesus, You knew me and loved me before the world was created. You planned for my salvation. Now help me to run my race in a way that will honor You. Amen.

Week Six: Yet To Come

Monday, April 11

Jesus is the Amen. Read **Revelation 3:14** together. Ask each person: what word do we say at the end of our prayers? (Follow up questions: what do you think ‘amen’ means? It actually means “Yes! Do it, God!” have you ever heard anyone say that at the end of a prayer?) Pray together!

Tuesday, April 12

Jesus is the Judge. Read 2 **Timothy 4:8** together. Ask each person: what do judges do? (Follow up questions: do you ever act like a judge to people? How do you think God wants us to see other people? Pray together!

Wednesday, April 13

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega. Read **Revelation 22:13** together. Ask each person: if you could go anywhere in the world right now, where would you go? (Follow up questions: How long is forever? How does it make you feel to know that God is always forever with you?) Pray together!

Thursday, April 14

Jesus is the Bridegroom. Read 2 **Corinthians 11:2** together. Ask each person: what happens at a wedding? (Follow up questions: brides and grooms make promises to each other at a wedding—what promises has God made to us?) Pray together!

Friday, April 15

Jesus is the King of Kings. Read **Revelation 19:16** together. Ask each person: what do kings do? (Follow up questions: if Jesus is our King, how should we act towards him? Did Jesus act like most kings act?) Pray together!

Family Activity April 16-17

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea—read through it before you start!)

This week, plan a family service project that is age-appropriate for ALL of the members of your family. Pick something that you can all enjoy together. You will find some ideas below. Use one of those ideas or come up with something on your own!

- Make and sell something, then donate the money to The New International University
- Make and deliver a meal for someone you know who could use some help
- Visit a nursing home and ask the nurses who doesn’t usually have visitors, then bring them some flowers and company
- Make a care package for our missionaries overseas

Week Five: Jesus And Us

Monday, April 4

Jesus is the Teacher. Read **Mark 1:22** together. Ask each person: what do teacher do? (Follow up questions: what do you think God wants to teach us? How can we teach other people about Jesus?) Pray Together!

Tuesday, April 5

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Read **John 10:11** together. Ask each person: what do people have to do to take care of their pets? (Follow up questions: Why is it important to do all these things for them? How does God take care of us (even through we’re not pets!?) Pray together!

Wednesday, April 6

Jesus is the Bread of Life. Read **John 6:35** together. Ask each person: what is your favorite food? (Follow up questions: why is food important? Why do you think Jesus called himself the ‘bread’?) Pray together!

Thursday, April 7

Jesus is the Vine. Read **John 15:5** together. Ask each person: vines are plants-what are some other kinds of plants? (Follow up questions: what do plants need to grow? What do WE need to grow in our faith? Pray together!

Friday, April 8

Jesus is the Head of the Church. Read **Ephesians 4:15** together. Ask each person: what important things are on your head? (Follow up questions: can you do anything without using your head? If God says Jesus is the head and we are his body, what part of the body are YOU?) Pray together!

Family Activity April 9-10

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea-read through it before you start!)

As a church, we pray the Lord’s prayer together to grow closer to God. Today, write your own family prayer!

Ask everyone what the word ‘disciple’ means. When everyone gives their answer, make sure they know the REAL answer- a disciple is a person who follows Jesus and learns from him everyday. Tell them that is why you have been reading the Bible and talking about Jesus so much as a family- because you are trying to be disciples.

Say, sometimes disciples have certain things they do every day to try and stay close to God. They might read the Bible at the same time every day or maybe say a certain prayer. Today, we want to write a prayer that we can say every day as a family so we can all get closer to God together, even when this study is over. ask each person to think about what they want to ask or say to God.

Make sure to include ideas from each person in your prayer. Again, it doesn’t have to be long or fancy. You might want to ask God for forgiveness or help, tell him that you need him or love him, or pray for each member of your family or a certain group of people that you all care about. Whatever you come up with as a family is awesome! Write it out or type it up and print it up somewhere(like the refrigerator) where you will see it every day and say it out loud together.

As always, close in prayer-your family prayer!

Week Two: His Names Reveal His Radiant Beauty

**“Beautiful Savior, King of creation,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Truly I’d love Thee, Truly I’d serve Thee,
Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.”**

**“Fair is the sunshine, Fair is the moonlight,
Bright the sparkling stars on high;
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
Than all the angels in the sky.”**

**“Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, Praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be thine!”**

Beautiful Savior. verses 1, 3, and 4
By Munster Gesangbuch

Day 1	The Image of God	Hebrews 1
Day 2	The Bright Morning Star	II Peter 1
Day 3	The Lord of Glory	John 17
Day 4	The Power and the Wisdom of God	I Corinthians 1
Day 5	The Righteous One	Romans 3

THE IMAGE OF GOD

HEBREWS 1

On the night before His death, Jesus told His disciples, “If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him” (John 14:7). In answer to a subsequent request from Philip to be shown the Father, Jesus replied, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14 9).

Before Jesus came, God had already revealed Himself in many ways. Nature and the world around us testify to the fact of an all-powerful creator, so much so that the Bible declares “men are without excuse” with regard to knowing there is a God and to refraining from wickedness (Romans 1:18-20). God revealed Himself at Sinai when He gave the Law through Moses. The Lord later spoke through various prophets.

Only Jesus, however, revealed God perfectly. Only Jesus could be called “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). The word translated “image” (*eikon*) was the word used for the image of the emperor on a coin (e.g. Matthew 22:20). Its meaning was stronger than a likeness, resemblance, or an outline. *Eikon* was the word used for a statue or for one’s reflection in a mirror. In Hebrews 1:3 Jesus is described as “the exact representation of His [God’s] being.” That verse uses the Greek word *charakter*. Its meaning is similar to *eikon* but also includes the idea of “distinguishing marks” or characteristics that set one person apart from another.

Jesus does not simply give us some idea of what God must be like. Jesus *shows* us God the Father—the way He thinks and acts and loves. Jesus shares God’s characteristics and reveals God’s character. We see Jesus welcome the social outcasts of His day (Matthew 9:9-12) and learn that God excludes no one who comes in repentance to Him. We hear Jesus speak of adultery and divorce (Matthew 5: 27-32) and we realize how highly God regards marriage. Again and again we see Jesus’ concern for the individual and are confident that God cares for each and every one of us. Jesus is merciful because God is.

In our society, it has become popular for people to describe themselves as “spiritual, but not into organized religion.” Many people making that claim turn God into whatever they want, believing in a god who is what *they think* God should be like. If they are familiar with the Bible, they dismiss the parts with which they disagree. If we, however, believe that Jesus is “the image of God,” we ought to seek to know Him as He chooses to reveal Himself. To that end, the study of the Bible is indispensable to discovering *the truth* about God and to dismantling our own preconceived notions about Him.

There is one more very sobering use of the word *eikon* worth mentioning. God has called us to be “conformed to the likeness [*eikon*, the image] of His Son” (Romans 8:29). As Jesus reflected the image of God the Father, so our lives should reflect His character. Our words, the way we treat others, our attitudes, and the way we conduct business can reveal Jesus to the people around us. In our service to others, in our willingness to forgive, in our courage, in our generosity, in our humility, and in our patience, people ought to see Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is determined to transform each and every one of us from the inside out so that Jesus will be seen in us. By the Holy Spirit, we “are being transformed into His likeness,” i.e. His *eikon* (II Corinthians 3:18).

Holy Spirit, transform me in whatever way You please so that, as Jesus made the Father visible, I might make Jesus visible to the world around me. Amen.

Week Four: Jesus Saves Us

Monday, March 28

Jesus is the Savior. Read **1 John 4:14** together. Ask each person: what are some things you need to do? (Follow up questions: Who are some people who help you? What can God help you with?) Pray together!

Tuesday, March 29

Jesus is the Redeemer. Read **1 Peter 1:18** together. Ask each person: If you had a million dollars, what would you buy? (Follow up questions: What is the best present you have ever gotten? If Jesus could give you a present, what do you think he would give you?) Pray together!

Wednesday, March 30

Jesus is the the Lamb of God. Read **John 1:29** together. Ask each person: what do you know about sheep? (Follow up questions: why do you think God created so many different kinds of animals? If you were God, what kind of animal would you make?) Pray together!

Thursday, March 31

Jesus is the Divine Physician. Read **Matthew 1:29** together. Ask each person: what do doctors do? (Follow up questions: how is Jesus like a doctor? Who can we pray for Jesus to heal today?) Pray together!

Friday, April 1

Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. Read **Hebrews 9:15** together. Ask each person: what is a promise? (Follow up questions: do you know what God has promised us? How do we know that God really means what he promises?) Pray together!

Family Activity April 2-3

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea-read through it before you start!)

This week we have talked about all the different things Jesus does for us. For your family activity this week, you are going to spend some time doing things for each other!

Make (or order!) a fun family dinner. Have everyone sit down at the table together and fill each person’s plate- but before you start eating, explain a special rule for tonight’s dinner. You may not put any food in your own mouth! This will probably be one of the craziest and messiest dinners you ever have...but just embrace the silliness and have fun with it! Feed each other and laugh until you are all done.

When everyone is finished, talk about what that experience was like. Ask some questions- was that easier or harder than a normal dinner? Why? Would you like it if you always had to ask someone for help to eat? Was giving someone else their food or getting your food easier? Talk about how Jesus is the perfect person to help us connect with God, because he is both God and human.

Week Three: Jesus Is Unique

Monday, March 21

Jesus is the Lion of Judah. Read **Hosea 11:10** together. Ask each person: what do you know about lions? (Follow up questions: If you could be any animal, what would you be? Why?) Pray together!

Tuesday, March 22

Jesus is the the Cornerstone. Read **Isaiah 28:16** together. Ask each person: is it easier to stand on one leg or two legs? (Follow up questions: Why? What helps you feel safe?) Pray together!

Wednesday, March 23

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Read **Isaiah 9:6** together. Ask each person: What do princes do? Do you think Jesus was like a movie prince, or different than that?) Pray together!

Thursday, March 24

Jesus is the Way. Read **John 11:25-26** together. Ask each person: what would you do if you got lost? (Follow up How do you know if you are living the way God wants? Who do you think Jesus said he is THE way, not ONE way?) Pray together!

Friday, March 25

Jesus is the Life. Read **John 11:25-26** together. Ask each person: if you had one day to do WHATEVER you want, what would you do? (Follow up questions: What do you want to be when you grow up? How can you live your life for God?) Pray together!

Family Activity March 26-27

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea-read through it before you start!)

Following Jesus means we try to be obedient to Him. Practice obedience by playing “Simon Says.” Give each person a chance to Simon and give directions. Everyone else must follow the directions...as long as they say “Simon Says” first. When someone disobeys, have them sit down. When you have one person left standing, start a new round with a new “Simon” until everyone gets a turn.

Say: if we are going to obey God, we have to know what He says first! Read John 15:12 together and find Jesus’ command. Make two lists together: one list of ways that you have followed that command this week, and one list of different ways you can do THIS week to love others.

End your time together with prayer! Pray something like, “God, we want to be obedient to you. Help us love others like you love us. Amen!”

BRIGHT MORNING STAR

II PETER 1

Before the people of Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua, a strange prophet named Balaam was hired by the king of Moab to curse the Israelites. Instead of cursing them, Balaam blessed them and in one of his oracles, he prophesied, “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). His words were later understood to refer to the Messiah, the king who was promised and for whom the people waited. Hundreds of years later, the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, looking for the newborn King. “We have seen his star in the east...” (Matthew 2:2), they explained to Herod.

We recognize the visit of the Wise Men on January 6, Epiphany, twelve days after Christmas. The word “epiphany” can mean a manifestation or revelation or even an intuitive moment, and thus, Epiphany recalls God’s revelation of the Savior to the Gentile world, in the persons of the Magi.

The star is one of the symbols of Epiphany in part because the Magi followed the star but also because a star is something that every sighted person can see, whatever their race or nation. A star cannot be claimed or hoarded by any one people and hidden from all the rest. Epiphany reminds us that Jesus came for *all* people and is the Savior of all humankind.

In Revelation 22:16, Jesus announced “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” The morning star is actually Venus. According to the website aerospaceguide.net, “Venus is the brightest object in the sky besides our sun and the moon. It is also known as the morning star because at sunrise it appears in the east.”

To understand the implications of Jesus as the Morning Star, it is necessary to know that Revelation was addressed to the Christians of that day undergoing severe persecution for their faith at the hands of Rome as well as to the people living in the Last Days. It was written for all believers living in a fallen world, a world whose values and goals not only differ from those of the Kingdom of God but are also actively opposed to them. In other words, Revelation is written for every Christian. It is written for difficult, dark times.

The beautiful Morning Star is the herald of the day. When the Morning Star appears, it means the night is almost over. Darkness will soon end. The new day is dawning!

In dark and frightening times, it is the best news to learn those times won’t last much longer. If one is assured that the hard times won’t go on forever, it is easier to endure and to not lose hope. And so Jesus gave this message to those who looked around them at what was happening and wondered if evil would triumph after all. “I am...the bright Morning Star.” Evil will soon be conquered once and for all. The darkness will flee. The Kingdom of God will soon be established, marking a new day for creation. No wonder Jesus’ next words were, “Yes, I am coming soon,” (Revelation 22:20).

In the meantime, we are instructed to “pay attention” to the words of Scripture “as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (II Peter 1:19). The Morning Star assures us that the new day is very near. God’s word brings light to our paths (Psalm 119:105) and restores our hope until the dawn arrives.

Lord Jesus, keep me from despair when I hear of distressing events in the world, when persecutions increase, and when I go through hard times. Dawn is coming! Amen.

THE LORD OF GLORY

JOHN 17

Glory is a word with many nuances. We say, “What a glorious sunrise” and mean it is beautiful and radiant. We say, “Winning the gold brought him much glory” and mean praise and fame. If we read, “The queen, in all her glory, welcomed the visiting ambassador,” we interpret it to mean she did so with grace and majesty. History speaks of “the glory of Rome,” and we know that means Rome at the peak of her achievements.

All of those understandings of glory are true of Jesus. He is “the radiance of God’s glory” (Hebrews 1:3) and the “glorious Lord” (James 2:1). In 1 Corinthians 2:8, Jesus is called “the Lord of glory.” Jesus is beautiful, radiant, majestic, and worthy of praise and honor. The apostle John testified, “We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

In the Old Testament, God’s glory was His presence dwelling with His people, often manifest in some way, like the cloud that settled on the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34). This was the “Shekinah.” (The word itself is a transliteration of the Hebrew word that meant to dwell or abide.) On the Mount of Transfiguration, the cloud appeared again. [See Mark 9.] Peter and the others “were eyewitnesses of His majesty” as Jesus “received honor and glory from God the Father” (1 Peter 1:16, 17).

In the Gospel of John, there is a very different and disturbing twist to the meaning of glory. Jesus told Andrew and Philip, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23), and then He went on to describe how a kernel of wheat must die in order to produce more. The passage concludes with His speaking of His own death. At the Last Supper, Jesus announced, “Now is the Son of Man glorified...” (John 13:31). It is clear that by “glorified,” Jesus was referring to His suffering and death on the cross.

Death on a cross was demeaning, bloody, dirty, not to mention excruciatingly painful. Jesus would not be regarded that day as a martyr, but as a misguided, albeit dangerous, would-be Messiah, surrounded not by His adoring followers but by a crowd who ridiculed Him as He was tortured. Where’s the glory in that?

In His prayer in John 17, Jesus spoke of glory - the past glory He had with the Father before creation, the present glory of the cross, and the glory He would soon re-gain. The cross was His glory because, by the cross, Jesus was bringing salvation to the world. The cross was His finest moment, the grand accomplishment of the purpose for which He had come, the achievement of His goal. It was the glorious announcement to the world that there was no length to which the love of God was not prepared to go. The Cross was also Jesus’ means of glorifying the Father in that it was His supreme act of obedience, and obedience always glorifies God.

In His prayer (verse 22), Jesus stated “I have given them the glory that You gave Me.” Like for Jesus, the glory we’ve been given includes the privilege of participating in His mission and bearing the cross. Like Jesus, we too glorify God by our obedience to His will. In Romans 8:17-19, we are told that “we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory” and “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” One day all believers will see Jesus, radiant with the glory He had with the Father before creation, and will be amazed to discover that they too “will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43).

Dear God, give me the courage to bear the cross and follow Jesus into glory. Amen.

Week Two: Beauty and Glory

Monday, March 14

Jesus is the Image of God. Read **Colossians 1:15** together. Ask each person: what does a mirror show us? (Follow up questions: Who does Jesus show us? Who should WE reflect in our lives?) Pray together!

Tuesday, March 15

Jesus is the the Bright Morning Star. Read **Revelation 22:16** together. Ask each person: what kinds of things give us light? (Follow up questions: Why is light important? How is Jesus like a light to us?) Pray together!

Wednesday, March 16

Jesus is the Lord of Glory. Read **1 Corinthians 1:28** together. Ask each person: what are some ways we can tell people they did a good job at something? (Follow up questions: Who is someone you can thank today? What should we thank God for?) Pray together!

Thursday, March 17

Jesus is the Power and Wisdom. Read **1 Corinthians 1:24** together. Ask each person: who is the strongest person you know? (Follow up questions: How do we get stronger? Who can help us when we don’t feel very strong?) Pray together!

Friday, March 18

Jesus is the Righteous One. Read **1 Peter 3:18** together. Ask each person: what happens when we do something wrong? (Follow up questions: Do we have to be perfect to follow Jesus? What should we do when we mess up?) Pray together!

Family Activity March 19-20

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea-read through it before you start!)

Our response to these amazing things that Jesus is should be to worship HIM. For this weekend’s activity, plan a family worship service. This doesn’t have to be formal, long, or look like any worship service you have ever been to.

First, ask each person in your family when they feel closest to God. Maybe it’s when praying, singing or listening to a favorite song, or doing a favorite activity like drawing, swinging, or playing basketball. For the most part, there is no wrong answer here! Obviously, if they say they feel closest to God when they’re jumping rope, because they are using all their muscles that God made. Maybe you feel closest to God when cooking, because it allows you to be creative. Remember, God made each of us unique, so each person in your family will probably have a different answer, and that’s okay!

When you know what helps each person feel close to God-do those things! Your “worship” doesn’t have to be long, perfect, or complicated. Play a song and sing or dance together, maybe read a Bible story, color or look at the sky, whatever it takes! Enjoy time as a family doing what God designed us to do-worshipping Him.

Close in prayer together. Say something like: “God, we love you and we want to get to know you better. Help us to do that! Amen!”

Week One: From Eternity

Monday, March 7

Jesus is True God. Read **1 John 5:20** together. Ask each person: what do you know about Jesus? (Follow up questions: how do we learn about Jesus? Why is it important to know Jesus?) Pray together!

Tuesday, March 8

Jesus is the Son of God. Read **John 20:31** together. Ask each person: how do you know whose child you are? (Follow up questions: why are parents important? How is God like a Father to all of us?) Pray together!

Wednesday, March 9

Jesus is the Word. Read **John 1:1** together. Ask each person what do words do for us? (Follow up questions: when is a time that words have hurt you? When is a time that words have made you feel really good?) Pray together!

Thursday, March 10

Jesus is the Creator. Read **Colossians 1:16** together. Ask each person: what are some things God made? (Follow up questions: why do you think God made us? What is your favorite part about the way God made YOU!) Pray together!

Friday, March 11

Jesus is the Author of Faith. Read **Hebrew 12:2** together. Ask each person: what does an author do? (Follow up questions: what is your favorite book? Why do you think God wants us to read His book, the Bible?) Pray together!

Family Activity March 12-13

(Remember you can adapt this to suit the needs of your family. This is just an idea-read through it before you start!)

Take a family walk outside-you could go somewhere special on a hike, or just walk around your neighborhood. Talk about how old each person in your family is. Then look around find a rock. Ask your kids how old they think the rock is. Ask them what they think the oldest thing in the WHOLE WORLD is. (any answer is okay!) Whatever they say, explain that God is even older than that! Have everyone look around-explain that Jesus was real before anything and everything you can see.

Ask them: how does that make you feel? Tell them there is a word for how that makes you feel-WONDER! Have everyone say WONDER.

Tell them there is another word to explain what wonder means-that word is WOW! Have everyone yell “WOW!” as loud as they can!

Take a minute whenever you are to pray as a family. Pray something like this” “Wow God!” Thanks for making everything and making each of us. You are awesome. We love you! Amen!”

THE POWER AND THE WISDOM OF GOD I CORINTHIANS 1

In the earliest days of the Christian Church, the apostles faced a society that found their teaching about Jesus strange and even offensive. A Jewish carpenter-turned-preacher, who died the shameful death of a criminal and came back to life, is Lord of all and offers salvation and eternal life to all who believe in Him. Paul noted that the Jews who heard him preach about Jesus wanted a powerful sign proving He is indeed the Lord. The Greeks, on the other hand, were more interested in philosophical wisdom and considered his message about Jesus to be foolish.

In that context, Paul proclaimed Jesus to be both the power of God - the Greek “*dunamis*,” from which we get the words dynamite and dynamic - and the wisdom of God - the “*sophia*” (I Corinthians 1:24).

The Greek *sophia* was theoretical, wisdom for wisdom’s sake, gained *through reason*. The true wisdom, according to the Bible, is gained *through revelation* and is shown in one’s attitude toward God.

True wisdom starts with knowledge of God and then centers on how to best live one’s life under God. James 1:5 instructs us to ask God for wisdom if we are lacking it, and the context shows us that this is not philosophical wisdom but rather an understanding of how to live and handle life’s challenges. Without denouncing all the human knowledge gained through the centuries, the Bible challenges us to consider its worth if it leaves us ignorant of the ultimate reality that is God. The atheist, no matter how many degrees he has after his name, is a fool, plain and simple (Psalm 53:1).

Certainly the wisdom and power of Jesus Christ as God and Creator are unquestionable. Colossians 2:3 describes Christ as the One “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” When Paul calls Jesus the power and wisdom of God, however, he has in mind the wisdom and power manifested in God’s amazing plan to redeem His creation and provide a way of salvation for humanity. That is the wisdom that appears so foolish to the world.

Nor does the world comprehend the power at work in and through Jesus, dying on the cross. To ordinary reason, it seems a picture of weakness and defeat. But revelation shows the Cross to be a great demonstration of power as Jesus gained victory over sin and the devil. Jesus conquered death itself!

But there is more! Jesus “**has become *for us* wisdom from God**” (I Corinthians 1:30). He is *our sophia*. And there is still more! His power, His *dunamis*, is now “at work within us,” doing “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20).

In knowing Jesus and learning from Him how to walk with God and how to live our lives in a way that brings fulfillment, we become wise. Wisdom brings us insight into the will of God for our lives and helps us discern the right way from the wrong, or merely acceptable, way. Wisdom calls us to live not for this life alone but for eternity. And when wisdom directs us to live far above and beyond that of which we are capable, we lean on the power within us to make us “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37), the power who is Jesus.

Lord Jesus, too often I try to figure things out for myself and only make things worse. When I am perplexed, I will ask You to give me wisdom. Amen.

THE RIGHTEOUS ONE

ROMANS 3

Righteousness was a quality highly valued in the ancient world. For the Greeks, the righteous person was a “model citizen,” one who did not transgress the norms of society and who fulfilled all his duties to his neighbors and fellow citizens. The Jews would add fulfilling one’s duties to God to the list. The prophets stressed ethical conduct as crucial to righteousness. The word “righteous” could also be translated as “just,” meaning the righteous person is fair in all his dealings with others.

While many men and women can be described as upstanding, there is no one who is truly righteous. God’s Word tells us “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). For that reason, anyone who is counting on one day pleading his case before God on the basis of “I was a good person” is sadly misguided and not very honest with himself about his own failings and shortcomings.

Yet there is One who is perfectly righteous. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming Messiah, the Righteous One. Even more, they foresaw that the Messiah’s righteousness would somehow benefit all people. Jeremiah 23:6 calls the Messiah “The Lord Our Righteousness.” God spoke through Isaiah (53:11) to announce that “My righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.”

The first Christians knowing Jesus to be the Messiah called Him “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14). Because He was righteous and without sin, Jesus was able to bear our iniquities and pay the price of our sin.

Justification is one of the words descriptive of what Jesus does for us. “To justify” comes from the same root word as “righteousness.” Justification, then, means to be declared righteous in God’s sight. It is to be placed in a “right” relationship with God.

We could never stand before God on the basis of our own righteousness, but Jesus is able to justify those who could never make it on their own (namely, all of us!) Righteousness, therefore is a gift of God’s grace to all who trust in Jesus. Vine’s Expository Dictionary [See the Bibliography] describes the gift on page 535:

This righteousness is unattainable by obedience to any law, or by any merit of man’s own, or any other condition than that of faith in Christ....The man who trusts in Christ becomes “the righteousness of God in Him,” 2 Cor. 5:21, i.e. becomes in Christ all that God requires a man to be, all that he could never be in himself.

We can and will be forever grateful for the gift of righteousness. It is a gift that is free to us, but it was definitely costly to the Lord. 1 Peter 3:18 makes the point without mincing words: the righteous died for the unrighteous to bring us to God. II Corinthians 5:21 is even more graphic: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

How grateful we ought to be for the righteousness of Jesus Christ! As a man, He fought His own battles with temptation while on earth, and He was victorious. Ironically, Jesus’ great victory over all temptation qualified Him to go to the Cross and die for us.

Lord Jesus, I am grateful, thankful for Your righteousness and thankful that You make me righteous as well. Amen.

As you journey along with the congregation in learning about the names of Jesus during Lent, what will your kids be learning? Of course, just seeing the example of you growing in your relationship with Jesus will help your kids’ faith. But this Lent, we want to challenge your family to take faith to a deeper level.

Here you will find a series of family devotions that coincide with the adult readings for Lent. They are broken down into age ranges, and you can feel free to adapt the questions or activities to suit the particular needs of your family. For preschool to kindergarten age kids, there is a name of Jesus, Bible verse, and questions for each day. For older elementary age kids, there are some follow up questions to continue the conversation. If you have junior high and high school kids, encourage them to read the adult devotional on their own or with you, and then use the questions provided to talk about what they have read. All of the questions are meant to be discussion STARTERS- was for you to talk about God at home. Some days you might have a great conversation, and some days you might just get silly answers. That’s okay!

Also, there is a family activity for each week that will help explain the theme of the week. Make these FUN! The point is not to have a boring lecture about God; the point is to help your kids experience God! Whether you are taking a walk as a family or watching a movie together, that purposeful time will help them understand that faith doesn’t just matter when we’re at church. but ALL the time!

Obviously, families have kids of all ages in them. You may have to pick and choose to find what works best for your family. you may have to make the conversation simpler for your younger kids, and follow up one-on-one with your older kids later. You can always have your older kids help read and guide the discussion. Take turns praying at the end of your conversations-whatever it takes to include your whole family in this experience.

Don’t get discouraged if every conversation doesn’t go as you envisioned or you miss a day. You are planting seeds in their garden of faith every time you talk about it, and God will help those small seeds to grow! Sometimes you may have an awesome conversation with your entire family over dinner, and sometimes you may be shouting the Bible verse at them as they run out the door in the morning. Don’t give up! Every little bit of effort you put into helping your kids learn about Jesus is worth it!

When Jesus stood on trial the first words addressed to him by Pilate were: “Are you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33). In the original Greek, the emphasis is on “you,” showing that the question is either one of great surprise or sarcasm. **“You** are the king of the Jews?” If Pilate were speaking our vernacular, he might have added, “You’ve got to be kidding!” The man who stood before him had already been beaten following His Jewish trial and did not appear to be anything like a king.

In Revelation 19, the scenario is much different. Jesus had told Pilate His servants would not fight to save Him, but now He is leading an army (verse 14). On Good Friday, Jesus’ own people ridiculed the very idea of His being a king, but at the end, all nations will submit to Him and “He will rule them with an iron scepter” (verse 15).

Jesus wears the title “King of kings and Lord of lords” (verse 16). The title, King of kings, designated supreme power and was given to an emperor who had many lesser kings under his authority. The King of the Persian Empire, Artaxerxes, referred to himself by that title (Ezra 7:12). Louis Brighton, in his commentary on Revelation states, “It is a name which shouts out that the Lord Christ is the universal Ruler of the entire creation, the only King and Emperor of the human race.”

At the start of His ministry, Satan tempted Jesus by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would compromise and bow before him. Jesus would indeed eventually gain all the kingdoms of the world, but He did so through His sacrifice on the Cross. Through His death, that tiny part of creation known as earth, that one part of the universe living in rebellion against God, was redeemed. Revelation 11:15 announces, “The Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”

Meanwhile, until Jesus returns, we are engaged in war. We hear echoes of war in the New Testament and especially in Revelation. In fact, the theme of the book of Revelation can be summarized in one key verse: “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers” (Revelation 17:14).

We are at war. We are reminded that we are fighting not against flesh and blood but against “powers of this dark world and...spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12). That passage goes on to describe the “armor” we need: truth, righteousness, faith, and salvation. Our sole “weapon” is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit.

Living in the comfort of the USA, we sometimes forget that there are forces at war against the followers of Christ and it may not always be our lot to escape the persecution faced by so many. We are at war, and according to the Bible, the battle will intensify as the coming of the King draws near. We have Jesus’ promise, however (Revelation 2:10): “Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

One day, the final battle will be fought and won. The Cross has already made the ultimate victory a certainty. Evil will be completely overcome. The devil, the “beast,” and all his followers will be banished to the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 15). Death will be vanquished forever. And Jesus Christ will reign as King of kings.

Come Lord Jesus and reign over us! But in the meantime, make me Your courageous soldier, dressed in spiritual armor and faithful even to the point of death! Amen.

Week Three: His Names Reveal His Uniqueness

**“How sweet the names of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear!
It Soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away all fear.”**

**“Dear name! The rock on which I build, my shield and hiding place;
My never-failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace.**

**“O Jesus shepherd, guardian, friend, my prophet Priest, and King,
My Lord, my life, my way, my end, Accept the praise I bring.**

**“How weak the effort of my heart, how cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art, I’ll praise Thee as I ought.”**

How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds, verses 1, 3, 5 and 6
By John Newton

Day 1	The Lion of Judah	Revelations 5
Day 2	The Cornerstone	I Peter 2
Day 3	Prince of Peace	Romans 5
Day 4	The Way	John 14
Day 5	The Life	John 5

LION OF JUDAH

REVELATION 5

At the climax of the movie, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the battle for Narnia is going poorly and Peter is calling for his troops to fall back. Then suddenly, the great lion Aslan, who had been put to death by the evil White Witch, appears in all his strength, vigor, and glory on a high peak overlooking the battle. He is alive! And he roars a tremendous roar. The battle continues, but it is clear Aslan's enemies are defeated and his troops now victorious. In the books by C. S. Lewis, Aslan is a picture of Jesus.

The lion, "the king of beasts," has long been symbolic of strength and courage. The lion has a dignity in its bearing. It has the ability to make men and animals alike afraid. "The lion has roared - who will not fear?" (Amos 3:8).

On occasion, the prophets compared the Lord to a mighty lion. When judgment for sin was coming on Israel, God spoke through the prophets to warn the people of the coming exile. "For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces, and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them" (Hosea 5:14). Yet the prophets also spoke of God's bringing the people back to their land. Again God was compared to a lion roaring so loudly that His children hear it from wherever they have been scattered and return trembling to Him and to their land (Hosea 11:8-11).

The title "Lion of Judah," used for Jesus in Revelation, goes back to Genesis and Jacob's blessings spoken over his sons. Genesis 49:8-12 recounts the blessing given to Judah. Judah was described as a lion that catches its prey, and then Jacob prophesied that a king will come from Judah who will gain the obedience of the nations. The "Lion of Judah" became a Messianic title for the divinely anointed King who was to come.

In Revelation 5, when it appeared that no one was worthy to open the scroll, John, who wrote down the visions in the book of Revelation, was devastated. But then he was told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah had triumphed, and He could open the scroll. When John looked up, he saw not a lion but a lamb.

Certainly not an ordinary lamb! This lamb appeared to have been killed, and yet it was alive. Not only alive, but the lamb had seven horns and seven eyes. Horns are symbolic in the Bible for authority and power. The seven eyes speak of one who is all-seeing and omniscient. The Lion/Lamb is Jesus, of course, who was handed the scroll, symbol of all the authority He was given (Matthew 28:18), now worshipped and honored in heaven.

John was the only disciple to witness the death of Jesus. John had seen Jesus at His meekest, in the midst of suffering, the sacrificial Lamb of God. It is a much different scene he witnessed here!

Some scholars propose that Revelation 5 is Christ's coronation on Ascension Day, the day He returned to heaven. John saw Jesus highly exalted. He saw Jesus in His strength, more than able to establish His Kingdom and to crush every force opposing His rule. While still the Lamb, Jesus is the Lion of Judah!

One day the Lion will roar! "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a loud shout..." (1 Thessalonians 4:16 - KJV). Even the dead will hear it and rise. The Lion's shout will bring great joy to His own and terror to everyone else (Revelation 1:7; 6:16). Victory is at hand! Vindication is near!

Lord, remind me again and again of the truth expressed in the words of the old hymn, "That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet." Amen.

THE BRIDEGROOM

EPHESIANS 5

Bridegroom is yet another title Jesus appropriates for Himself. In answering a question from John the Baptist's followers as to why His own disciples did not fast (Matthew 9:14), Jesus replied that wedding guests do not fast while the bridegroom is present.

In the Old Testament, God is the divine Bridegroom with Israel as His bride. When the people practiced idolatry, the prophets condemned them for their *adultery* and described God's sorrow over their unfaithfulness. When Israel desired alliances with other nations, the prophets decried her harlotry. Jesus called the people of Israel in His own time an "adulterous" generation (Mark 8:38).

The imagery of divine marriage is carried into the New Testament with Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His bride. In first century Israel, an engagement was as binding as a marriage, breakable only by divorce. When the time for the wedding came, the groom would go to the bride's home to get her and take her to his home where the guests would join them for the wedding supper. The Church is now "engaged" to Jesus Christ, and believers eagerly look for His return when He will come for us, His Bride, and bring us to the wedding feast described in Revelation 19.

The love of Jesus for His bride is expressed in Ephesians 5:25 – 27:

...Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Paul expressed a similar thought when he wrote to the Christians in Corinth: "I have promised you to one husband, to Christ," stressing that they not be led astray from their "sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (II Corinthians 11:2, 3).

As a groom expresses vows to his bride, Jesus has made numerous promises to us, recorded in the Bible. We also commit ourselves to Him and *to Him alone*, allowing no one and no thing in our lives to come before Him. [See Matthew 10:37 – 39]

Similar to the image of the Vine and the branches, the picture of Jesus as Bridegroom and the Church as Bride speaks of a very close union. Among the many ways to view the relation of God to His people (e.g. king and subject, shepherd and sheep), the relationship of a lover and his beloved is the most intimate, stressing a close communion and oneness. The picture of bride and groom is one of shared love, of joyful anticipation, of time spent immersed in one another. And such can be the experience of every Christian with Jesus!

That beautiful intimacy is cultivated when we truly worship (as opposed to merely "attending church") and when we spend time each day with Jesus in the Word and in prayer. God's Word gives us a wonderful promise in that regard: "Come near to God and He will come near to you" (James 4:8). Our love grows as we ponder Jesus' sufferings for us and when we meditate one by one on all His amazing attributes and names. And as we sing in our liturgy, in Holy Communion we are given "a foretaste of the feast to come," the wedding supper of the Lord Jesus and His bride!

Lord Jesus, I love You and ask to love You even more. Show me how to fellowship with You here and now and make me ready for Your return. Amen.

In Revelation 22:13, Jesus introduces Himself using three pairs of titles.

The Beginning and the End is a title in reference to creation. The words denote points in time, the origin of the universe and its eventual end. The Lord Jesus is there at the beginning as the Source of all life and at the end as its Goal, the One from whom all things came and the One to whom all history, all time, is moving, the consummation.

What is true of creation as a whole is true for each of our lives individually. From the time of our conception, through our infancy and young childhood, we have been under the watchful eye of the Lord Jesus. Through the years of maturing, in the freedom of young adulthood, and into middle age, we are in His hands. The Lord is still with us as “retired” turns into elderly. One day, we will hear His call to come home. He is our beginning and our ending, and from start to finish, Jesus can see us through.

The First and the Last as a title for Jesus likely refers to His death and resurrection. Jesus was the first to be raised from the dead to live forevermore. Jesus was also the last of the people of God to know death in all of its horror. Because He conquered death, Jesus could promise that anyone who believes in Him “has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24) - past tense. When believers die, they simply “fall asleep” to awaken to eternal life with Him forever.

Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. English speakers too use the alphabet’s first and last letters symbolically when we say “from A to Z.” Both in Greek and in English, that phrase conveys the meaning of *completeness*. We might say, for example, “We covered the material from A to Z.” In Jesus, all the attributes of divinity - holiness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and all the others - are present, from A to Z. ***There is nothing lacking in Jesus Christ.***

“From A to Z” speaks of comprehensiveness. To understand Jesus to be the Alpha and the Omega is to know that everything we truly need can be found in Him. Jesus promised, “Seek and you will find,” (Matthew 7:7), and the fact is that once we have “found” Jesus, our seeking will come to an end. We will have found light and life, mercy and love, purpose and power, truth and meaning, peace and joy, and everything else that He comes to give us in abundance! Jesus truly is and forever will be our “all in all.”

Alpha and Omega also point to the eternal nature of God who is above and beyond time and to His sovereignty which extends over past, present, and future. **All history is under His dominion, and He is directing it to its goal.**

That would have been a most encouraging message to the Christians living under the terrible persecution of the Roman Empire. That message, so clear in Revelation, continues to encourage Christians living in any frightening times. In declaring that He is the Alpha and the Omega, Jesus affirmed that all history is moving along according to plan, *His* plan. One day we will see that *history* is indeed *His story*. Alpha and Omega promises that no matter how strong evil appears to be now, it cannot stop the march of history as it moves to its culmination: His return and His reign.

Lord Jesus, may I always find comfort and courage in remembering that You are the Alpha and the Omega. You are all that I will ever need. Amen.

When enemies threatened Israel, the people often put their hope in alliances with other nations instead of trusting the Lord. When God’s prophets warned of coming judgment, they ignored their message, preferring to listen to false prophets who preached victory and peace. The people based their confidence on lies and built their lives on false premises. With a foundation like that, it is only a matter of time before it all crumbles.

The Lord responded with an offer of a much better way to build their lives. “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed (Isaiah 28:16). Jesus taught something similar in His parable about building on the rock of His words versus building on sand (see Luke 6).

The fulfillment of Isaiah 28:16 is Jesus Christ. He is the “tested” stone, tested by the temptations and suffering He endured, and as God’s Son, He is certainly a “precious” cornerstone. In I Peter 2, Jesus is also described as the living Stone, chosen by God.

I Peter 2, Jesus is the foundation on which the Church is built. It is not a dead building, but a living Church made up of all believers. Each of us was placed in that “building” in the exact place God wants us to be. We are “living stones,” or as one writer put it, we are “chips off the old Block,” meaning Christ! [Lockyer, page 132. See the Bibliography.]

The meaning of the word translated “cornerstone” is not completely clear. In some passages, it clearly indicates the foundation of the building. Paul called Jesus the foundation on which the apostles were building (I Corinthians 3:11). In other passages, the cornerstone is the crucial stone that joins two walls. Jesus as the “chief cornerstone” holds the whole building together (Ephesians 2: 20, 21). In that context, the two “walls” that are joined are the Jews and the Gentiles, coming together into one Church in Christ.

Understanding Jesus as the Cornerstone who holds the Church together puts matters in the proper perspective. It is not the authority of bishops or one’s denominational affiliation that is important. It is allegiance to Jesus. Jesus is the One who declared that He would build His Church (Matthew 16:18), and Jesus is the One who unites us.

Understanding Jesus as the Cornerstone, the “sure foundation,” is also essential. Even Christians are not always careful about the foundations on which we are building our lives. On what are we building our hopes, our confidence, our future? It is not difficult to build on a lie, on something we want so badly to be true. But then we are devastated when everything comes crashing down around us. We often want to build on things that appear tangible (e.g. money, education, corporate job), and we hope that foundation will hold when our world is shaken. **Only building on Jesus and His Word is a sure thing.**

Some people have never really questioned the assumptions on which their lives are built. They believe in Jesus but have never considered whether they are building on His Word or on values they have picked up from family and friends or even on the philosophies of this world which infiltrate our thinking so easily through education or the media.

But Jesus is the only One on whom we can depend 100%, beyond all doubt, when all else comes unglued, unhinged. The one who trusts in Him, who builds on Him, will never be dismayed or put to shame (Isaiah 28:16; I Peter 2:6).

Lord Jesus, may I only and always build my life upon You and Your Word. Amen.

PRINCE OF PEACE

The Greek word for peace (*eirene*) occurs in every book of the New Testament except one: I John. Nations and individuals alike long for peace, and too often it eludes us. While the most common meaning of peace is the absence of war or turmoil, the biblical understanding is much deeper and much broader.

The Hebrew concept of peace (*shalom*) was very broad indeed. *Shalom* meant harmony in one's life and relationships, security, health, prosperity, completeness, well-being. It was always understood to be the gift of God. The coming Messiah was to bring *shalom* and so He would be called the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The peace Jesus came to bring, however, is a different sort of peace. Jesus came to make peace between God and humanity. Because of sin, humanity was at odds, at enmity, with God. We stood guilty before God, deserving punishment, like criminals before a judge. Moreover, even if given a second chance, we could do nothing but fail again. In that state, there could be no peace with God and certainly no experience of peace.

Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we have been justified through faith. Therefore, as Romans 5:1 affirms, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." There is no longer an estrangement between God and those who believe in Jesus. There has been a reconciliation (Romans 5:11), and now there is peace.

Once we enter that experience of peace, we can receive the full measure of peace Jesus brings. Jesus told His disciples that the peace He was leaving them was "My peace," not the kind of peace that the world gives (John 14:27). The peace that the world gives is often short-lived. Nations might compromise in order to agree on a treaty, but the hostilities between them still threaten to surface. A person might feel at peace on a rare day when there is no turmoil only to lose that peace when circumstances change.

The peace that Jesus gives is *His own peace*. Unlike *Shalom*, His peace did not mean a freedom *from* trouble, but peace *in the midst of it*. He even stated quite bluntly, "In the world, you will have trouble" (John 16:33). In the night before His death, when Jesus bequeathed His gift of peace, His own peace was rooted "*in a calm undeviating devotion to the will of God. Like the compass of a ship, which steadily points north no matter how the ship may be rocked in a storm, Jesus' mind was at rest because of His trust in the Father.*" [Tenney, page 225. See the Bibliography.] This is inner peace regardless of people or circumstances. It is trust and confidence in God. Such peace is not for the wicked, the Bible tells us (Isaiah 57:20, 21). They are like the waves of the sea and cannot rest.

Philippians 4:6, 7 instructs us on how to make the Lord's peace our own:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ.

Jesus not only brings us peace with God and inner personal peace, He also breaks down the walls between people. [See Ephesians 2.] In Him we work toward reconciliation and peace between individuals, races, and nationalities. Jesus is the Peacemaker Supreme!

Lord, I will refuse to be anxious but instead will bring my concerns to You. Please fill my life with Your peace and send me forth as a peacemaker. Amen.

ROMANS 5

JUDGE

II CORINTHIANS 5

"He will come again to judge the living and the dead." Those words of the Apostles' Creed remind us of another title of Jesus: the Judge. The themes of judgment, reward, and punishment are well-represented in the Bible from the Old Testament prophets to the parables of Jesus. In James 5:9 as in II Timothy 4:8, Jesus is called the Judge.

Jesus said in John 5:22, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." Jesus later seemed to contradict Himself: "I did not come to judge the world, but to save it" (John 12:47). He clarified this, however, when He explained in the next verse that the "very word which I spoke will condemn him [the one who refuses to believe in Him] at the last day." In other words, if a person is condemned, it is that person's own sins and decision to reject God's grace that placed him or her under judgment.

There appear to be two different occasions when people will stand before Christ, the Judge. At the end of time, all the dead are raised to stand before "the great white throne" to be judged (Revelation 20:11-15). "Books" are opened, sentence will be passed and punishment meted out. The names of all who have accepted the gift of salvation offered to humanity by Jesus are written in the book of life, and they are *already* acquitted. All who believe in Jesus will *not* be condemned (John 5:24). Eternal life is theirs.

The Bible describes another event when Christians will stand before the Judge but for a different purpose. In II Corinthians 5:9, 10, Paul wrote of our desire to please Christ and then gave one of the motives for doing so: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body." The parable of the talents points to that same event (Matthew 25:14 – 30). In Romans 14:12, we are told that "each of us will give an account of himself to God."

The "judgment seat" here is not "the great white throne" of Revelation. The Greek word here is different. It is *bema*, an elevated platform that would be found in a Greek court of law. It could also be used for the place from which a judge would watch an athletic event, disqualifying any cheaters and in the end, handing out the prizes to the winners.

This judgment is about rewards. It is about faithfulness. It is about how we used the time and resources given to us. It is not about our sins, which are forever gone, but it is about what we have done for Jesus. Colossians 3:23, 24 tells us that *whatever work we do*, we are to do it all for Him. The Apostle Paul explained that he practices self-discipline so that "after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (I Corinthians 9:24-27). While no believer should fear losing his salvation, according to I Corinthians 3:13-15, it is possible to forfeit any and all rewards. *A sobering thought!*

What place do we give to serving the Lord in our lives? Do my interests come first? Does Jesus receive only the time or the money or the energy that is left after I have satisfied my own desires? When an opportunity opens up for service, do I excuse myself, leaving it for someone else? Am I concerned for the poor? For justice? To what extent do I pray, give, and work to see the Gospel message spread around the world? We might avoid those questions now, but someday we will answer questions like them face-to-face with Jesus. While we will *never* lose His love, we might not hear the words we long to hear: "**Well done, good and faithful servant**" (Matthew 25:21).

Lord, help me to live in such a way that I will not be embarrassed to stand before You on that day. Amen.

The Hebrew word *Amen*, a transliteration of the Hebrew, is a rare word because it is basically the same in any language into which it has been introduced. Meaning to confirm, support, or affirm, Amen became a word expressing complete agreement with what had been said, like saying "How true!" today. It could also be translated, "Let it be so!" In I Kings 1, when David described how Solomon was to succeed him, Benaiah responded "Amen!" thus expressing strong approval of David's plan. Saying "Amen" is also comparable to our hearing truly great news and shouting "Yes!"

Martin Luther defined Amen as meaning "Yes, it shall be so," and he said we conclude our prayers with "Amen" because we are certain God will hear us. We are certain because He has promised to do so.

During His ministry, Jesus often prefaced His statements with the words, "Amen, Amen," translated "Verily, verily" in the King James and as "I tell you the truth" in the New International Version (NIV). In John 13, we see those words in verses 16, 20, 21, and 38, but also in Mark 9:1 and in other places in the Gospels. Jesus used the word "Amen" to emphasize the certainty and the absolute truthfulness of what He was about to say. It is as if Jesus were saying, "Listen! What I am about to say is the absolute truth!"

"The Amen" is another of the self-designations chosen by Jesus. "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Revelation 3:14). In Isaiah 65:16, the prophet spoke of the "God of truth" or literally in the Hebrew, the God of Amen. By referring to Himself as the Amen, Jesus is once again stating, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6).

II Corinthians 1:20 gives us a more expansive understanding of Jesus as the Amen: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (New King James). **Jesus is "the Amen" to the will and promises of God.** He affirms each promise and gives the "Yes, it shall be so" to the Father's will.

Jesus does not, however, merely give a verbal affirmation to the promises and will of God. One might say that **Jesus, as the Amen, is the executor of that will.** An executor of a will is the one who personally sees to it that all the provisions of that will are carried out completely, that each specification is put in force. An executor makes certain that the desires of the writer of the will are followed. Think of government. By the Constitution, the Executive Branch says in effect, "Yes, it shall be so" to the laws enacted by the Legislative Branch, taking responsibility for "executing" the will of Congress.

The Bible is full of promises yet to be fulfilled. God has an amazing plan yet to be executed for all creation, and all creation "waits in eager expectation" for what lies ahead (Romans 8:18-25). There are no "ifs, ands, or buts." It's a "done deal," a certainty. It shall be so. In the meantime, "we wait for it patiently."

Jesus, the Amen, will bring about that amazing future described in Scripture. All of the promises of God will find their fulfillment in and through Him. Even now, He is preparing a place for us in His Father's house (John 14:2)! Jesus has done and will do whatever is necessary to bring the eternal plan to its completion. How blessed we are to have a part in that plan and to know the future, *our* future, is secure!

Lord, I stand in wonder at the vision of what is to come, but I need never ask, "How is all of this possible?" You, Lord, will accomplish it! Amen! Yes! It shall be so!

One of the words the Bible uses to describe people is "lost." Because of sin, we cannot find the right road through life and have little sense of direction. We cannot build a road to God although most religions try to do so. Jesus compared people to lost sheep.

When Jesus spoke to the disciples about His Father's home and about returning to Him, He added the comment, "You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:4). Thomas complained that since they didn't know where He was going, they certainly could not know the way. Jesus replied, "I am the way...."

Jesus neither drew them a map nor did He give directions to a pathway. He simply stated, "I am the way." Walking with Jesus, we are no longer lost. Jesus is the way into the presence of God while we live on earth, and when we die, He is the way to heaven. If we want to be near to God, we have the way to do so in Jesus.

The Book of Hebrews contrasts the old pattern of worship established under Moses with the new. The Tabernacle had one room called the "the Most Holy Place." It was set off with a heavy curtain so that no one would see into that space or presume to enter God's presence. Now, however, "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body" (Hebrews 10:19, 20). The passage then invites us to draw near to God.

The "new" way is Jesus, of course. On Good Friday the curtain in the Temple was ripped supernaturally from top to bottom, opening the way into the Most Holy Place. Likewise, Jesus' body was torn on the cross, opening the way into God's presence by His death. Jesus is the "living" way because now He lives forever. In his commentary, Warren Wiersbe expressed the privilege that is now ours:

We have an "open invitation" to enter the presence of God. The old covenant high priest *visited* the Holy of Holies once a year, but we are invited to *dwell in the presence of God* every moment of each day. [Emphasis is his.]

There is a "catch" if one chooses to call it that. Jesus is *the* way, as in the *only* way. Americans, perhaps with the value we place on individual freedom, demand options. We like doing things "our own way." We believe everyone is entitled to choose his own way.

But when it comes to approaching God and to entering heaven, there are not multiple options. All roads do not lead to heaven. One spirituality is not as good as another. Other than Jesus, Peter explained (Acts 4:12), "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." I John 5:12 states it clearly: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." Jesus Himself said (John 14:6), "No one comes to the Father except through Me."

That leads some people to accuse Christianity of intolerance and exclusiveness, but we rejoice that God provided a Way into His presence at all! God could have chosen to leave us cut off from Him forever. Jesus, the Way, is His gracious gift, available to all.

Lord God, thank You for giving us a Way to come to You. Give me the desire to live in Your presence every day of my life here as well as forever. Amen.

Week Four: His Names Reveal His Saving Work

“I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us from the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus to wash my crimson stains
Clean in his blood most precious till not a spot remains.”

“I lay my wants on Jesus, all fullness dwells in Him;
He heals all my diseases; my soul he does redeem.
I lay my griefs on Jesus, my burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases; He all my sorrows shares. “

“I rest my soul on Jesus, this weary soul of mine;
His right hand me embraces; I on his breast recline.
I love the names of Jesus, Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes His name abroad is poured.”

I Lay My Sins on Jesus, verses 1, 2, and 3
By Horatius Bonar

Day 1	Savior	Luke 2
Day 2	Redeemer	I Peter 1
Day 3	Lamb of God	Isaiah 53
Day 4	Divine Physician	Mathew 8
Day 5	Mediator of the New Covenant	Hebrews 8

Week Six: His Names Reveal His Coming Reign

“Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne;
Hark, how the heav’nly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who dies for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless king through all eternity.”

“Crown Him the Lord of peace, whose pow’r a scepter sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease, absorbed in prayer and praise.
His reign shall know no end, and round his pierced feet
Fair flow’rs of paradise extend their fragrance ever sweet.”

“Crown Him the Lord of years, the potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail! For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity.”

Crown Him with Many Crowns, verse 1, 5, and 6
By Matthew Bridges

Day 1	True Amen	Revelations 3
Day 2	Judge	II Corinthians 5
Day 3	Alpha & Omega	Revelation 22
Day 4	The Bridgeroom	Ephesians 5
Day 5	King of Kings	Revelation 19

HEAD OF THE CHURCH

EPHESIANS 4

One of the pictures of the Church in the New Testament is the Church as the Body of Christ. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians (12:27), "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it." Trying to end any competition among members as to who had the most important gift or task, Paul insisted that we all have different gifts and roles within the Church in the same way that the different parts of a body have their own specific functions. Every part is important and vital in its own way.

Given that picture of the Church, we see that Jesus is the Head of the Church, His Body (Colossians 1:18). Once again, we have an image of the union of Jesus and the people who place their faith in Him. A head does not exist without the accompanying body, and vice versa. They are one, sharing blood and oxygen and nerves. Where the head is, the body is also. Wherever the body is, the head is there too. That is why Ephesians 2:6 can speak of the Church as already seated "in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

The word "head" denotes leadership and authority as in "the head of state." It is, of course, the head or the brain that directs the parts of the body and controls their activities. Calling Jesus the Head of the Church is to say He is its Leader, giving the Church its purpose and setting its direction. No goal that the Church proposes is worth pursuing if it is not part of the mission Christ has given us. No work in which the Church engages without His leadership can possibly have any lasting (i.e. eternal) value. In His Body, such busyness is only so much "spastic" activity. The head must guide the body.

It is the head that looks to the needs of its body. If there are any signs of illness, potential remedies are studied and a decision made regarding treatment. The head takes measures to protect the body from danger and harm. Jesus Christ does the same for His Church.

The Lord has chosen to give His Church a crucial role in His work. As a head can accomplish none of its plans without a body, so Jesus is dependent on the Church to do His work on earth. If there are children to be taught, the Lord calls people to serve as Sunday School teachers. Where there are people without food, the Lord directs His Church to provide for them. If there are needs for which money is required, He calls on His members to give. **We are to be the physical presence of Christ in the world**, ministering to people as He did and as He still desires to do through His Body.

That is an amazing privilege and an awesome responsibility for us as part of His Body, the Church! Someone once said that God has no hands but ours. If anyone decides not to obey the directives of the Head, that particular task will either be given to someone else at a personal loss to the one who refused it or else, it simply will not get done at all. Anyone who has suffered an injury, one that causes a part of one's body to not respond to the brain's commands the way it should, knows how frustrating that can be.

The picture of Christ as the Head and the Church as His Body is also a warning to anyone who claims he does not need to be part of the Church to belong to Christ. That person is like a severed body part, which is basically useless, if not grotesque. People simply do not have fingers or feet that are not connected to the body, although some children like keeping their surgically removed tonsils or appendix in a jar. *To belong to Christ is to be part of His Church, His Body.* We are connected to Him and to one another.

Lord, help me to find my place in Your Body, the Church, and to always obey Your directives. Amen.

THE LIFE

JOHN 5

Jesus is "the Way, the Truth *and the Life*" (John 14:6). Given His role in creation, all life certainly does have its origin in Him. The life we share with the rest of creation, however, has a beginning and it also has an end called death. The soul, in itself, has no immortal nature. Our souls did not exist before we were born and they will not continue forever apart from us. The Bible is clear: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Into our sentenced-to-death world, Jesus came with the Good News. Again and again, we hear His promise of life for those who believe in Him. The word "life" is said to appear 36 times in the Gospel of John and at least 11 times in John with the adjective "eternal." In John 6:40 and elsewhere, Jesus promised, "...everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life."

"Eternal" is one of those things beyond our capacity as human beings to truly grasp. When the Bible speaks of "eternal life" it means far more than life that goes on forever. As many have pointed out, unending life could be as much a curse as it might be a blessing. Eternity is not the endless continuation of time; eternity is the *absence* of time or perhaps the antithesis of time with no past or future, only the now. The biblical adjective "eternal" is not about quantity as much as it is the quality of indestructibility.

On page 35 of *New Testament Word* William Barclay wrote:

The essence of the word *aionios* [the Greek word for "eternal"] is that it is the word of the eternal order as contrasted with the order of this world; it is the word of deity as contrasted with humanity; essentially it is the word which can properly be applied to no one other than God. *Aionios* is the word which describes nothing less and nothing other than the life of God.

When we know Jesus and believe in Him, He gives us that amazing life, eternal life, life that death can *never* destroy. Eternal life is not merely existing forever but living in another dimension, on a completely different order. Christian faith can never be reduced to a philosophy or to rules for living or to rituals. Christianity is a Person. Christianity is Jesus Christ, who is "The Life" and who enters our lives with His own divine life.

That is why Jesus can make that totally incredible claim: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me *will never die*" (John 11:25, 26). There is no death to those who believe, who trust Jesus to be who He says He is and to do what He says He will do. Death is a falling asleep (I Thessalonians 4:13), and we will awaken in His presence.

Someone once compared death to a ship sailing away from land. The people on the shore watch as it slips from their view and say "She's gone." There is sorrow as we feel the loss of the one we love. But as the ship disappears on the horizon, it comes into view by the people on another shore far away, and with joy they shout, "Here she comes!" Her arrival is celebrated in grand fashion as only a homecoming can be.

Of course we grieve at funerals. Even Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. But because Jesus is "The Life," we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Our sorrow is mingled with joy as we try to envision life that is eternal, beyond tears and pain, beyond death.

Loving Lord, there are no words adequate to express gratitude for such a gift. Amen.

Savior, a favorite title for Jesus among Christians, was a title bestowed on many different heroes. In various inscriptions around the Roman Empire, Julius Caesar was called savior. A savior was one who rescued the people from an enemy and brought peace and security. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word "savior" was used for the judges whom God raised up to rescue Israel before there was a king. Nehemiah 9:27 (KJV) speaks of these saviors (sometimes translated "deliverers").

The meaning of the word "savior" [soter in Greek] went far beyond the spiritual. Besides rescuing people from an enemy, a savior might pull a drowning child out of a river or restore a sick person to health. A savior might lead a family safely through a dangerous wilderness. The Greek word "savior" could also be translated "benefactor." Today, we might thank someone who came through for us with the words, "You saved my

All the extensive meanings of the word "savior" find fulfillment in Jesus. Although our English Bibles often translate the Greek word "save" with various other words (e.g. heal, make whole, deliver, rescue), all through the Gospels we see Jesus at work *saving* people and making them whole. By His death and resurrection, Jesus saved us from sin, from guilt, from death, from the grip of Satan, from judgment, and according to I Thessalonians 1:10, from the coming wrath.

Hebrews 7:25 states that Jesus "is able to save *completely* those who come to God through Him." The King James Version reads "able to save...to the uttermost." In other words, Jesus can save totally, perfectly, 100%. There is not one effect of sin or its aftermath from which Jesus is unable to save us. Jesus can rescue us from anything that threatens our relationship with Him. While He does not always pull us out of a difficult situation, He will certainly see us through it. [See Isaiah 43:1-3.]

"To the uttermost" also means that Jesus will see the job of saving us through to the end. He is not about to give up on any one of us who have placed our trust in Him. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus never does a job halfway. He has the power and wisdom to complete what He began in you. He will not leave anything undone.

Moreover, **there is no one beyond Jesus' ability to save.** "The Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of *the world*" (I John 4:14). Every race, every nation, young and old, from the godliest saint to the most despicable sinner - Jesus came to be Savior of us all! Even His Name - Jesus - teaches us that He is the Savior. The name Jesus means "God is salvation" or "God rescues." *No one* is a hopeless case to Jesus!

And it is all by grace! "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Grace means we do nothing to earn it. (All of our good works would never be good enough.) All that is left for us to do is to receive the gift by faith, by taking Jesus at His word and staking our all on Him.

Then we discover that the adventure is only beginning! Our Savior will work that salvation in and through our lives, repairing the damage caused by sin and fitting us for service to God and neighbor.

Lord Jesus, You are my Savior! Save me from anything that would separate me from You. Deliver me from evil. Complete what You have begun in me. Amen.

As Jesus and His disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told them, "I am the vine; you are the branches" (John 15:5). In both the title "Bread of Life" and "The Vine," Jesus pointed to a close intimacy between Himself and His followers. Bread enters one's body, its nutrients becoming part of the body's cells. The relationship of vine and branch likewise is one in which the life of the vine flows into the branches. The call of Jesus is a call to union. He invites us to share His very life, to be one with Him.

It is not optional. Jesus commanded us, "Remain in Me" (John 15:4) and promised, "I will remain in you." Union with Christ is not reserved for "super saints," the holy among us. No believer can decline His call with the excuse "I'm not really the pious type." A branch that isn't connected to the vine cannot bear fruit, and if a branch cannot bear fruit, then it is useless. Its wood is not good for anything. [See Ezekiel 15.] A branch not connected to the vine will wither up. Such useless branches are gathered up and tossed into the fire (John 15:6). As Jesus stated, "Apart from Me you can do nothing."

The word translated "remain" in the New International Version is translated "abide" in the King James. "Continue" is sometimes used. Warren Wiersbe, in his New Testament commentary, defined abide: "to keep in fellowship with Christ so that His life can work in and through us to produce fruit." [Page 284. See the Bibliography.]

The question of how one keeps in fellowship was answered by Jesus Himself. We are to obey His commands, and the command He mentioned specifically was to love one another (John 15:10, 12). In addition, the study of God's Word, prayer, worship, openness to the Holy Spirit, and the Sacrament of Holy Communion are certainly all means by which we stay connected to Jesus, allowing His life to enter ours. When we remain in fellowship with Jesus Christ, united with Him, the result is "fruit"!

It is not a matter of extreme effort on the part of the branch. A branch need not try harder and harder to produce the desired fruit. The life of the vine within the branch produces the fruit. The branch needs to do one thing: abide in the vine. Too often Christians try so hard to be patient or to exercise self-control only to be frustrated by repeated failures. Our efforts are better put to the one task that is vital, and that is remaining in Christ, staying close to Him. The life of Jesus in us will then produce His traits in us.

Galatians 5:22, 23 gives us a list of the "fruit of the Spirit." Colossians 1:10 calls "good works" the fruit we bear. Philippians 1:11 names "righteousness." In John 15, Jesus speaks of the benefits of abiding in Him: answered prayer (verse 7) and joy (verse 11).

Fruit does not appear overnight. Fruit grows fairly slowly, and even after it appears, it must still ripen. We can be too hard on ourselves when we don't see immediate results or when we feel not enough is happening in us. We need to relax and trust the process!

Meanwhile, the gardener actively prunes the branches in order to bring forth the best possible harvest. When we see the work of God, the Gardener (John 15:1), in us - the "human" branches - in the image of pruning, we realize that some of our most difficult experiences have been used by the Lord to enable us to bear even more fruit. As painful as that might be, it's helpful to remember that the Divine Gardener cherishes each branch, knows what He is doing, and has a wonderful purpose in mind for your life and mine!

Holy Spirit, make me diligent in my goal to constantly abide in Jesus. Amen.

BREAD OF LIFE

JOHN 6

Food is essential to life. One can forego many things that are sometimes considered necessities, but one cannot live for a long time without food. People who cannot eat for one reason or another are given feeding tubes so that life can continue. All living beings *must* have food.

Given the absolute necessity of food, when Jesus declared “I am the Bread of Life,” He was making an incredible claim. He was basically saying, “Like food for the hungry, I am the only One who can satisfy hunger and satisfy it so completely that the one who ‘feeds’ on Me will never hunger again. I am the only One who can sustain life and sustain it forever. As there can be no life without food, there can be no true life without Me.” Jesus Christ is *the* Bread of Life.

In John 6, the 5,000 people who were fed by Jesus with one small lunch misunderstood Him, thinking only of His ability to meet their physical needs. While the Lord is concerned with our need for “daily bread,” Jesus wanted the people to focus instead on the deeper significance of that miracle and to believe in Him because He is indeed the food that “endures to eternal life” (John 6:26, 27).

When Jesus told the people “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man ...you have no life in you,” (John 6:53), the people misunderstood again, interpreting His words literally. They took offense, but Jesus’ words had a deeper meaning. During His temptations in the desert, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every *word* that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). And Jesus is indeed *the Word made flesh* (John 1:14), the Word we hear and believe, the Word we “digest,” the Word that enters our inner being and becomes a part of us. John 6:53 also foreshadows the bread of Holy Communion: “Take and eat; this is my body.”

As the Bread of Life, Jesus made two incredible promises. He promised that those who come to Him “will never go hungry” (John 6:35), and He assured us that “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (John 6:51).

To hunger certainly goes beyond being physically hungry. We are sometimes surprised to learn that the wealthiest people or those who have achieved fame or power are among the most “hungry” people. They sometimes confess that something is missing, that all they have gained has failed to satisfy them. The hunger for “something more” is common to all humanity, and we try to satisfy it in many ways, both good and bad: friends, drugs, education, community work, pornography, chocolate. **Even fulfilling activities, however, cannot fill that place in our lives that only God can fill.**

Although scholars debate the exact quote of 17th century French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal, the words do describe the human experience: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” St. Augustine (354-430) said it this way: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” Only Jesus Christ can fill that emptiness and satisfy our spiritual hunger. And as we live and grow in relationship with Him, as we feast on the Bread of Life, we find a deep satisfaction with which nothing else can compare.

Lord God, forgive me for trying to satisfy my hunger with anything else but You. Please nourish, strengthen, and sustain me, now and forever. Amen.

REDEEMER

I PETER 1

Under Old Testament Law, there was a provision to aid those who had fallen upon hard times. If a person needed to sell the family land to secure funds or if in desperation, he needed to sell himself into slavery, a close relative could act as a redeemer (Leviticus 25:25, 48), buying the land back or purchasing the slave’s freedom. Similarly, the Greek word “redeem” meant to buy a slave, especially with the intent to set him free.

To understand Jesus as the Redeemer, we need to start by realizing how completely humanity is enslaved by sin. Sin can be compared to a disease from which we can find no cure or to an addiction which controls us. No one can simply stop sinning by an act of will. Even in the people considered most saintly, there may be a self-righteous attitude or well-hidden bitterness. There may be hidden sins, sinful habits, sinful attitudes, or sparks of rebellion against God within us that no one but God can see.

Because of sin, we are also in bondage to death. Death may be postponed by medical science, but no one can escape it. Hebrews 2:15 speaks of the slavery in which our fear of death has kept us. In the years before we die, we are enslaved by the infirmities of aging, frustrated by bodies that no longer do all that we will them to do. Even in good health, many people are trapped, according to I Peter 1:18, in an empty way of life.

From all that would enslave us, Jesus came to redeem us, to set us free. Jesus paid the price for our redemption with His own blood on the cross. It was a costly price indeed! Had there been some means of our freeing ourselves, His death would not have been necessary, but we were helpless to do so, powerless, as Romans 5:6 makes clear.

Some theologians have debated the question “To whom was the payment made?” The price of redemption is better understood, according to biblical scholar William Barclay, in the same way one might speak of national freedom coming at a heavy price. There is an actual price that is paid, but it is not literally paid to someone or something. Likewise, redemption is a picture of what Jesus did for us, a picture that highlights the enormous cost of setting us free.

The act of redemption was complete on the Cross. Jesus cried out in triumph, “It is finished!” before He died. Forgiveness can be ours right now. The power of sin is broken. Yet, the process of redemption is ongoing as we continue to be set free from the various individual forms of bondage in which we each labor. We can experience growing freedom as we allow the Lord to touch the areas of our lives that are still under the control of habits or attitudes or sin against which we are (admit it!) helpless.

There is redemption yet to come! Death cannot hold us anymore! Death will not be the end of life, and the life we *will* live will no longer be subject to illness, weakness, or disability. Philippians 3:21 anticipates the time when the Lord, our Redeemer, “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” Romans 8:23 refers to that same hope, stating that we eagerly await “the redemption of our bodies.” According to verse 22, *the whole creation itself will then be redeemed!* As we see the signs beginning to unfold, signaling the return of the Lord, we are told by Jesus Himself (Luke 21:28) to “stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near,” the consummation of His redeeming work.

Lord Jesus, my Redeemer, help me to be honest about the areas of my life in which I still struggle to gain control. Set me free from all that enslaves me. Amen.

LAMB OF GOD

ISAIAH 53

When John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to the people, he called Him “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That title would have said “sacrifice” to his hearers, bringing to mind the passage from Isaiah 53: “He was led like a lamb to the

In Leviticus, the appropriate sacrifices are explained. Many of the sacrifices, including the one for Passover, required a lamb whose blood was to be shed.

The concepts behind the sacrificial system are not easily comprehended today. One of the effects of sacrifice is “propitiation.” In the Greek world, this meant the angry gods, who really didn’t care that much for humanity in the first place, were appeased or pacified by some gift. The New Testament uses that same word to describe Christ’s work on the cross in Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2. The New International Version uses the words “atoning sacrifice” instead, perhaps to avoid giving a false impression of God.

God definitely does *not* have a disdain for humanity nor a desire to punish us. We do not desperately need to change God’s mind about us to secure mercy. Quite the contrary! Jesus’ death did not *change* God’s attitude to humanity; the cross shows us what His attitude has been all along, i.e. one of grace and love. After all, God Himself provided the sacrifice! Propitiation in the Bible means that Christ’s sacrifice satisfies the judicial demand that a penalty be paid when the law is broken. The Cross is the means by which God justifies us while remaining true to His holy and righteous nature.

“Atonement” has a similar definition, but it also incorporates the idea of sins being *covered* with the blood of the sacrifice. According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* [See the Bibliography], it isn’t clear whether that means the blood hides sin from God’s view or it washes sin away. The latter understanding seems correct. We see this in God’s amazing offer (Isaiah 1:18): “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Revelation 1:5 (KJV) says that Jesus “washed us from our sins in His own blood.” 1 John 1:7 (also KJV) assures us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Knowing exactly *how* the sacrifice of Jesus is efficacious is beyond our comprehension. We simply take God at His Word that it is through Jesus’ sacrifice that He offers salvation to all who believe. Because of the blood of Jesus, the Lamb, although we do not know how, we are justified, made righteous in God’s sight. Our sins are gone!

God forbid that we ever take His forgiveness for granted and assume we can live any way we please. Jesus did not shed His blood so that we could go on sinning, presuming on His grace. Standing at the foot of the Cross, looking up at the bleeding Sacrifice, should move us to daily confession and repentance.

At the same time, Jesus did not suffer so that we would perpetually grieve over our sins and berate ourselves for the pain we caused Him to bear. No! Kneel before the Lamb in confession, but then stand up guilt-free, even when it seems like that is “too easy” and that we should have to pay something for our sin. No! Jesus paid it all! We can walk in peace of forgiveness, in the joy of being washed clean, in the confidence of saints!

Lord, I praise and thank You! I am washed clean! My sins are gone! Amen! Amen!

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

JOHN 10

The “Good Shepherd” is how Jesus perceived Himself. It is a title He chose to describe His mission. The shepherd image would have been easily understood by people in Judea in the first century although not so easily by urban Americans today.

Shepherds in Judea developed a relationship with their sheep which were kept for their wool and not for their meat. Although some lambs were used for sacrifice, most were kept for many years. Shepherds gave names to their sheep. In John 10, Jesus, our shepherd, assures us that He knows each and every one of us, His sheep, by name. He knows our individual strengths, weaknesses, traits, fears, and needs.

The job of a shepherd in Jesus’ time was a demanding one. The shepherd was the only protection the sheep had against predators which, in that area in 30 A.D., included wolves and lions. When Jesus said the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, He was pointing to His own voluntary death by drawing an example from real life. A shepherd might indeed give his life defending the flock.

At night, the sheep were gathered together in a cave or in an enclosure with only one entrance/exit, and the shepherd himself lay down across the opening so that nothing could get in to harm the sheep without meeting the shepherd first, nor could any sheep escape. The shepherd literally was, as Jesus said in John 10:7, the door or gate for the sheep.

The shepherd always led the flock, going before them to check for any dangers along the way, and the sheep followed. It is no small comfort knowing that Jesus still goes before us and He knows exactly what we will encounter tomorrow. Nothing surprises Him, and even if we feel ill-equipped to deal with the trials we face, He knows how to see us through anything that is in our path.

The shepherd had to know where to find pasture and water, as both were scarce in Judea, and he had to know how far each sheep could travel without becoming exhausted. Jesus, likewise, knows just how much each one of us can bear. The sheep for their part only had to learn to trust their shepherd, to recognize his voice, and to follow him anywhere.

The shepherd had to track strays as sheep are inclined to wander off. Jesus compared His mission in seeking the lost, seeking those who have wandered far away from God, to the shepherd looking for that one lost lamb (Matthew 18:12, 13). Each and every one of the flock was important to the shepherd, and even the loss of one was unacceptable.

The shepherd tended to the health of the sheep. Each night as the sheep entered the enclosure where they were to spend the night, the shepherd examined each one, running his hand along them, checking for any injuries, wounds, or parasites. In the evening, in our personal time of prayer, it is wise to allow the Lord to do the same with us: to tend any injuries we acquired during the day, to cleanse us from any sin, to rid us of the “parasites” that cling to us in the form of bad attitudes, and to pour healing balm onto our hurts and wounds. ***Our Good Shepherd stands ready to do that very thing for us***

Martin Luther said, “In this single little word ‘shepherd,’ there are gathered together in one [word] almost all the good and comforting things we praise in God.” [*The Lutheran Study Bible*, page 1801. See the bibliography.] This is most certainly true!

Lord Jesus, teach me to recognize Your voice and to follow You anywhere! Amen.

TEACHER

MARK 1

During Jesus' ministry on earth, He was commonly addressed as Rabbi or Teacher. Rabbi, a title showing respect, was used by pupils when speaking to their teacher. It could also be translated as "Master." Teaching was one of the three key activities of Jesus' ministry, along with preaching and healing (Matthew 4:23), and His followers and His enemies alike recognized His role as a teacher.

Compared to other teachers, there was something different about this Rabbi. He taught *with authority*. The people at the synagogue in Capernaum recognized it (Mark 1:22) as did the people in the Temple (John 7:14, 15). Even the Temple guards, sent to arrest Him, had to admit, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46).

The scribes in Jesus' day had authority to teach the Mosaic Law, but in teaching, they cited previous scholars to reinforce their views. As the Word Incarnate, as the Truth, Jesus spoke with certainty of what He knew within Himself. People must have sensed that. Furthermore, His words must have affected them in unaccustomed ways. His words were never of the "in one ear and out the other" variety. On the contrary, His words carried the weight of truth. They undoubtedly took hold of the people in such a way that each listener knew he was being addressed personally by the One who knew him very well, pressing a decision on what to do about what was heard. Some hearers became disciples, while some turned hostile, but no one could stay neutral.

Jesus had a distinct style to His teaching. He was skilled in using familiar objects to illustrate His message. Mustard seeds, salt, the light of a lamp, a speck in one's eye, the birds of the air, the flowers of the field: all were pictures Jesus used to make a point. The meanings of His figures of speech, however, were not always deciphered by His hearers (John 10:6). In fact, the Greek term for "figure of speech" meant "veiled saying."

Jesus frequently taught via parables, stories told to make a key point. They are not necessarily allegories (in which everything in the story represents something or someone), but Jesus did interpret some of His parables that way as we can see in Matthew 13 and the Parables of the Sower and of the Weeds. The parables made remembering the lessons Jesus taught much easier.

Matthew 13 also gives Jesus' reason for using parables. Jesus knew there are people who refuse to believe. It is not God who closes their ears to the truth; it is their own choice. If they once opened their ears, they would risk hearing the truth, and then they would be forced to respond. A response of faith would, in turn, open the way for God to change their hearts and their lives, and that is exactly what they did *not* want to happen.

Hence, Jesus spoke in parables. Those who wanted to hear the truth would pursue the message of the parables, pondering them and digging deeply into their meaning. Those who had already closed their minds to Jesus and His message could dismiss the parables as simple stories with little significance and with nothing pertinent to say to them.

Although the title "Teacher" was rarely used for Jesus after His resurrection and ascension, Jesus continues to teach us today through the Bible and through the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). And He still teaches with authority.

Lord Jesus, Your words have the power to call me, convict me, challenge me, comfort me. It is Your will that they never leave me unchanged. That is my will too. Amen.

DIVINE PHYSICIAN

MATTHEW 8

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Those three words summarize the work of Jesus as He began His ministry: teaching, preaching, and healing. Each task was integral to the work He came to do.

The salvation that is presented to us in Scripture is comprehensive, touching the *whole* person - body, mind, and spirit. One of the meanings of savior is "healer," and "to save" in both Greek and Hebrew can also mean "to heal."

In the Bible, there is a close connection between sin and sickness. This is NOT to say that the person who is ill is necessarily being punished for some sin. The story of Job teaches us that is not true. Jesus, when asked about the sin behind a man's blindness, replied that his blindness was not the result of someone's sin (John 9). Nevertheless, sickness is an outcome of the fallen and sinful world in which we live, and Jesus the Savior came to deal with *all* of the effects of sin.

The Old Testament pictured the coming Messiah as a healer. When John the Baptist had questions about Jesus [see Matthew 11:1-6], Jesus replied by paraphrasing Isaiah 35:5, 6. He pointed to His miracles to show that He was indeed fulfilling prophecy. The healings in Matthew 8 demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53:4, the prophecy of God's Servant, whose sufferings were to bring not only forgiveness but healing as well.

It is important to realize that when Jesus healed the sick, it was not a "mind over body" phenomenon. It was not the power of positive thinking. In fact, to call His miracles "faith healings" is not accurate. It was the *power of God* that healed each person, not faith, although faith enabled the person to receive what Jesus offered.

Jesus still offers so much! He is the Savior who can make us whole. He is the Physician who came to mend broken lives. He can repair the damage done by sin at the spiritual, emotional, *and* physical level. When the Pharisees criticized Him for associating with "sinners" (Luke 5:30-31), Jesus corrected them: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

When we come to the Lord in repentance, we are assured immediate and complete forgiveness. Physical healing, on the other hand, does not always come as an answer to prayer, and that sometimes causes us to question God's willingness to heal. We cannot always discern *why* God continues to permit sickness and disease, but He does invite us to *come to Him with all of our needs*. ("Ask!" Matthew 7:7.) Accordingly, we come to Him with prayers for healing for those who are ill and for those who are broken and for all who need to be made whole, including ourselves.

In the Kingdom of God, there is perfect restoration to the way God intended life to be. Jesus, teaching and preaching about the Kingdom, healed people, not only out of compassion, but also to show us that health is the way life is supposed to be and will be again under the reign of the King. For now, we get sick, and most of the time, we get well. The Lord, our Physician, sometimes favors us with miraculous healings, and sometimes healing does not come. But one day, when the Kingdom of God comes in all its fullness, there will be no more sickness, no more pain, and no more death.

Lord Jesus, in faith I come to You seeking help and healing for (names). Amen.

When Jesus dined with His disciples for the last time, anticipating His death on the cross only hours away, He interrupted the normal dinner rituals and gave them the bread and wine of Holy Communion for the very first time. As He handed them the cup, He declared, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood...” (Luke 22:20).

A covenant is a contract between two parties. It forms a bond of some type. It could even be a treaty between two nations. Covenants specified mutual obligations and rights, and they were “sealed” or ratified in some way, perhaps with an exchange of gifts or with a common meal or with the offering of a sacrifice.

The “old” covenant was the one God had made with His people at Mt. Sinai when He gave them the Law. The people of Israel were to obey the Law, and God in return would be their God and would bless them, prospering the nation and bringing them peace. The problem, of course, was that the people never did fully obey the covenant and instead, turned away from the Lord and followed their own paths.

Jesus brought the “new” covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and ratified by His blood on the cross. Hebrews 7:22 and 8:6 state it is better than and superior to the old covenant. The old covenant prescribed a code of conduct while the new calls for faith. Trying to live by keeping all the Law brings guilt while living by faith in Jesus results in being made righteous (justification). The new covenant changes us *from the inside out*.

Jesus is both the Mediator of this new covenant and its Guarantor. As the Mediator, Jesus brought God and humanity back together again. In Christ, “God was reconciling the world to Himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). As a mediator, Jesus was well able to represent both parties in the covenant because He alone is “true God *and* true man.” Hebrews 9:15 shows us God’s purpose: “For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.” Under the new covenant, we have not the threat of condemnation but the promise of eternal life.

In Hebrews 7:22 (KJV), Jesus is called the “surety” of the covenant. He is, in other words, the Guarantor of that covenant, guaranteeing that the terms of the covenant will be fulfilled completely. The word in Greek for “surety” or guarantor referred to a person who would never break his word but would honor the guarantee even if at great cost to himself. Co-signing a loan and agreeing to pay it off if the borrower loses her job, or maybe posting bail, could be contemporary examples.

Jesus is the Guarantor of the new covenant. He personally guarantees that what the new covenant offers, namely a new relationship with God based not on obedience to laws but on God’s grace and our faith, is real. As the Son of God, He can make that guarantee.

There might be times when we look at ourselves and wonder if we are good enough to “make it” when we arrive at heaven’s gates. Jesus *guarantees* us that it is not our good works that will be the determining factor. We might question now and then if God really does love us or is even aware of us. Again, Jesus *guarantees* that He does and is. Doubts may sometimes make us question whether there is life after death. Jesus *guarantees* that in His Father’s house, a place has been prepared for us. He stakes His life on it.

Father, I am grateful for the new covenant, written in the blood of Jesus, and for His guarantee of all its provisions. Forgive me for doubting something so certain. Amen.

Week Five: His Names Reveal Who He Is For Us

**“I know that my Redeemer lives!
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my ever-living Head!”**

**“He lives triumphant from the grave!
He lives eternally to save;
He lives exalted, throned above;
He lives to rule his Church in love.”**

**“He lives to grant me rich supply;
He lives to guide me with his eye;
He lives to comfort me when faint;
He lives to hear my soul’s complaint.**

**“He lives to bless me with his love;
He lives to plead for me above;
He lives my hungry soul to feed;
He lives to help in time of need”**

**“He lives, all glory to his name!
He lives, my Savior, still same;
What joy this blest assurance gives:
I know that my Redeemer lives!”**

I Know that My Redeemer Lives! Verses 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8
By Samuel Medley

Day 1	Teacher	Mark 1
Day 2	The Good Shepherd	John 10
Day 3	Bread of Life	John 6
Day 4	The Vine	John 15
Day 5	The Head of Church	Ephesians 4