

Highland Park
Presbyterian Church

HELD TOGETHER

Scripture Meditations
for the Season of Lent

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CALENDAR

More details at
hppres.org/lent

FEBRUARY 14

Ash Wednesday

12 & 6:30 pm, Sanctuary

MARCH 24

Palm Sunday

8:15, 9:30, & 11 am Our Children's Choirs will lead the procession with waving palms in our 11 am Sanctuary service. There will also be a petting zoo from 9 am–1 pm on the Front Lawn.

MARCH 25–28

Holy Week Prayer

8 am, Wynne Chapel Join us Monday–Thursday for daily prayer gatherings.

MARCH 25–31

Prayer Vigil

Sign up for a one-hour slot during Holy Week as we seek to have a continuous presence of prayer in our building leading up to Easter.

MARCH 28

Maundy Thursday: Highlander Concert

7 pm, Sanctuary Join us for a service of communion and musical reflection as we prepare our hearts for Easter's resurrection and commemorate the final moments of Jesus' earthly life.

MARCH 29

Good Friday: Highlander Concert

7 pm, Sanctuary The final moments of Jesus' suffering and death are portrayed in *St. John's Passion*, revealing a sense of faith, hope, and love even while witnessing the earthly death of the savior.



MARCH 31

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunrise

6:30 am • Front Lawn

Classical

8:15, 9:30, & 11 am • Sanctuary

Contemporary

9:30 & 11 am • Elliott Hall

HPPRES.ORG/EASTER

INTRODUCTION

Our world can leave us quite scattered and uncertain, not knowing how to hold things together for whatever may come next. For many of us, the illusion of being able to hold things together has been stripped away. For others, we have long known our powerlessness to hold it all together. So, what do we do when we cannot keep things together—from falling through the cracks, or slipping through our fingers? How do we hold on, let alone hold things together?

We **recall** God's goodness and faithfulness through our lives and in the lives of others.

We **receive** the words of Scripture, which tell us of God's compassion, forgiveness, care, counsel, community, clarity, conviction, and power.

We **re-learn** what it is to be held and that we do not have to hold all things together.

As you journey towards Easter, the following guide will walk you through Scriptures and reflection questions that lead you in recalling, receiving, and re-learning.


My hope and prayer for you is that through these Scriptures and reflections, you will know and sense being held together within yourself, with others, and in our world. Even as you seek to hold things together, may you know Jesus' secure hold on you and our world.

With you,

Laura Murray

How to Use This Guide

- This guide is available in print or digital format. If using the digital version, save this guide to your desktop, phone, or reader, and use a personal journal for note-taking.
- Decide whether you will go through the guide alone, with your family, a spouse, a group, or a combination of each.
- Place the guide in a consistent and visible place in your home or workplace as a visual reminder to complete the daily devotions.
- Use this guide as a part of your daily routine. Choose a specific time and place if that helps you stay consistent.
- Set aside at least 15 minutes a day for this practice. Meditate on the week's Scripture, sit with the questions, and talk with God.
- If you are reading with another person(s) or in a group, share your reflections from your days. Set up a doable way to share—via text, phone call, audio message, etc. Try to connect in person or via video chat once a week.
- Enjoy the gifts of God for you in this season—his presence, community, care, and so much more.



AND HE IS
BEFORE ALL
THINGS, AND
IN HIM ALL
THINGS *HOLD*
TOGETHER.

1

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the

beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

COLOSSIANS 1:15–20

HELD TOGETHER

Dust scatters. On Ash Wednesday we remember that we come from dust, and to dust we return. Dust scatters. And this dust reminds us of what a scattered world we live in. Scattered between one another and scattered within. We are scattered people. And in our scattering, we desperately try to hold all things together.

Yet, we are unable to. We need someone to hold us and our world together.

We have a God who holds all things together. Specifically, Jesus holds all things together. Jesus can because he is before all things, and through him all things are made and held together. He holds us together through his love and reconciliation that he accomplished in his work on the cross. Yes, we are scattered. Yes, there is sin that keeps us apart. Yes, our world is deeply torn. And yes, there is Jesus, who holds all things together and is holding us together even now.

In your places of scattering, where is God asking you to trust him? Where have you tried to hold everything together, relying on yourself? Spend some time confessing to God how you have relied on yourself and forgotten that he is there for you.



STRETCHED TO SPEAK

Our cries come when we are stretched. In circumstances and situations where everything is falling apart, we speak. In these times, it is hard to imagine that things will come together, let alone that they can ever be held together. We encounter and hold onto these situations and settings as we are stretched to our limits. In this space of stretching, God invites us to speak.

Whether it is too much, hard to imagine, or the discouragement is too heavy, what seems impossible for God to hold together? Talk to God about your discouragement and your doubts. God is listening.



OURS TO DO

Situations and circumstances are not the only spaces where we are stretched. Far closer are the relationships that are tangled, strained, and even broken. We rely on ourselves and others to fix things. We have responsibility, but we do not have all the power. Sometimes it is hard to know when to take responsibility and when to let go.

In your relationships, where is there responsibility to be picked up? Where is there surrender to what is not yours to do?



LONGINGS

We do not have to strain to see the ways the world seems to be falling apart. As wars continue, injustice remains, and pain persists, it is hard to imagine that Jesus still holds all things together. In the struggle to imagine, God invites us to talk to him, expressing our thoughts, feelings, and broken hearts.

Spend some time sitting with those things in the world that you long for Jesus to hold together. As these rise, talk to God about your longings for peace, justice, and healing. Express with candor any emotion, passion, or desire that arises.



2

²⁹ And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" ³¹ The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on

us, Son of David!" ³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³³ They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." ³⁴ And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

MATTHEW 20:29-34

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

The compassion of Jesus meets us as we name what we want. One of the hard things is knowing what we actually want! In order to hear, we need quiet. In order to notice Jesus, we need to pause long enough to see.

Our deepest desires are rooted in our deepest pains. We long for wholeness and healing in the places we hurt. Yet we fear the quiet and resist the pauses because they come with facing these places of pain.

Yet the only way to receive wholeness and healing is to go to the places of pain and allow Jesus to meet us there. A Jesus who is compassionate, who sees, who cares, and who carries us.

Spend some time in quiet solitude today. Imagine the compassion of Jesus from this story meeting you. As you sit, resist the urge to cut the time short or respond to a distraction. Allow the places where you feel weary, discouraged, or stuck to rise to the surface. As you become aware of these places, talk to God about them.



ATTUNED TO SUFFERING

Those suffering are often more attuned to their longings and desires. This attunement allows someone to know what they want. As the blind men heard Jesus passing them, they cried out to him. Their need was quite clear to them, even to the point that they could hear Jesus on a noisy roadside.

Our noisy world can crowd out the ability to know our sufferings and to notice Jesus' presence. Identifying our sufferings and the noises other than the voice of Jesus helps us make way for his voice.

How are you attuned to your pain and suffering? What are the noises your world is filled with? Talk to God about them, helping to make space for hearing Jesus.



THE NEARNESS OF JESUS

As already mentioned, the two men on the roadside heard Jesus going by. We don't know how they could hear and know it was him, but they could tell. Though Jesus is always near to us, we don't always sense or notice it. Yet there have been times in our lives when we have sensed Jesus is very near, and it is good to recall these times as we attune ourselves to his presence.

Describe times in your life when you heard or sensed Jesus passing by. As you reflect on these times, what do they have in common? How does this help you hear or sense God now?



PUSHING THE PACE

We have a culture of pushing the pace. As we do so, we miss seeing and hearing others and noticing their presence. We are so busy moving to get things done or get through something that we do not notice God in our daily movement.

One of the causes of our tendency to pick up our pace is our desire for comfort. We want to get through the hard thing, move past the difficult conversation, or knock things off the to-do list so that we can get to what promises comfort.

The two blind men were unable to provide comfort for themselves. They could do nothing to push the pace towards healing and were completely dependent on others for their provision.

As you consider the pace of your life, where are you pushing through for a sense of comfort or calm in something you cannot control? How might you slow down and sit still long enough to notice Jesus passing by and meeting your needs?



WELCOMING PAUSES

To welcome a pause means we welcome another's agenda, idea, or pace. To welcome a pause, we must slow down. It also requires us to slow down long enough to receive the gift God has for us.

Jesus, the God of the universe, pauses for us. He pauses to listen, to notice, and to be with us.

What is it like to imagine Jesus pausing for you? How might you welcome his pause for you?



JESUS ASKS

When we welcome Jesus' pauses, things come up. Maybe our weariness rises, or our emotions around a relationship or situation change. Sometimes our fears rise up, and we are tempted to run right back and push towards comfort. Rather than push past pause and towards comfort, Jesus asks us what we are longing for in that moment.

How would you respond if Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"



PASSED BY

We have experienced the brushing off of our pains and heartaches. Friends respond by passing us by rather than pausing to listen. Leaders are in too much of a hurry to listen, so offer us a lecture. Jesus pressed against the crowd, showing his priority for compassion and care. He stopped and listened.

Jesus stops when you cry out to him. In fact, he never moves past you. He is with you, hears you, and is ready, with compassion, to listen to your longings.

How does Jesus' attentiveness and willingness to stop speak of his compassion towards you? How can you receive this compassion with the fullness and joy with which he gives it?

Jesus' compassion might not show up exactly as you desire. Keep in communication with him. Keep noticing him nearby. He sees you and always has time to listen. Jesus isn't in a hurry to move on.



3

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called

your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

LUKE 15:11–32

THE CARE OF THE FATHER

Consistency contributes to trust. Trust grows when we can depend on something or someone. When so much of our lives is unpredictable, consistency is a great gift. Our consistency can provide stability to someone who is walking towards an unknown future. The consistency of community can hold us steady when we are riding the waves of uncertainty. Even greater than what we can provide or what others can provide is the consistency of God the Father. The story for this week is filled with a father's consistency that reflects the care of our Father in heaven. The father's demeanor towards his sons, his availability to them both, and his ready generosity reflect God's posture of care towards us.

Where do you need consistency? How has God provided consistency for you?



A WAITING FATHER

To give and receive requires waiting and freedom. The giver waits and the one who receives has the freedom to accept the gift. The father in the story was ready for the return of his son and waited for his return. He also gave the son the freedom to return when he chose to. It is a paradox between God's waiting and the freedom he gives us as he waits. God holds all the power in the world and never wields it against our freedom. He gives us the freedom to respond and choose to return.

What is it like to imagine God holding a gift for you? What holds you back from receiving it? How can the reminder of God's consistent waiting draw you to receive what he has to offer?



OUR WORTH

Our worth and performance are often bound together in the knot of identity. God is in the work of loosening this knotted-up center through his care, goodness, and grace. Yet we find ourselves behaving according to the belief that because “I have sinned against heaven and against you,” we are no longer worthy to be the sons and daughters of God.

In the story, the son’s worth never came from his performance or perfection. It was rooted in and came from his father’s love and relationship with him. It was never something he gained or lost. It was always his.

What are areas of your life you can’t get over? Maybe it is a way you performed or a mistake you made that you cannot forgive yourself for. How might this story of the father’s unconditional love warm you towards turning towards God rather than in on yourself?



PRESENCE OVER PERFORMANCE

We long to be accepted, approved of, and belong, and we often do so through performance. Both sons in the story connected their performance with their father's approval. Whether one son had done everything right or another son had done everything wrong, they expected their performance to shape what their father did for them. The father in the story was less interested in what he offered his sons and more interested in being with them. In the same way, God values presence over performance.

What is it like to hear that God is more interested in your presence than your performance? How might God want you to know his presence today, without performance?



GOD WITH US

God is with us and promises to never leave us, though it doesn't always feel this way. Sometimes God seems so far away. We feel this distance when we don't sense or experience his security or care in the ways we long for.

In the story, the image of the father waiting and being alert is a picture of God for us. Even if we cannot feel God's presence, we can imagine his character and who he is. He is steady, loving, looking, and waiting.

In what ways do you sense God being with you? In what ways does he feel far away? How can this image of a father who is steady, loving, and looking meet you today?



GREAT LOVE

As so much in our lives is limited, sometimes it is hard to imagine the infinite love of God. Yet this limitless and abundant love is with us and for us. It multiplies, reproduces, and ripples throughout each person, community, and even creation. God is always inviting us into greater and deeper love. As we know it more and more, we can extend it, knowing that it will never run dry.

Have there been times in life when love has suddenly multiplied and expanded? What was that like? How does this lead you to be generous with love towards others?



GOD'S GAZE

God's gaze is always toward us. God faces us and welcomes us to look at him looking at us. Catching God's gaze can be overwhelming. Some of us are still learning that his gaze is one of delight. We are used to a gaze that judges and is disappointed in us. Some of us are learning that delight is more often the look on God's face when we catch a glimpse of it. This is wonderfully overwhelming.

To gaze at God is to allow ourselves to be deeply loved. This is both vulnerable and beautiful, frightening and freeing, and it is always towards our good.

How can you allow God's gaze of love and delight to meet you today? Spend some time today facing God and allowing his gaze to wash over you in love.



4

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with

you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

JOHN 14:25-27

THE PROMISE TO COME

Have you ever had a conversation with someone and said to him or her, “That is not how I remember it!” Oh, how I wish our memory didn’t fail us, but it does so regularly. We all need reminders, especially when we are so scattered.

Jesus promises us reminders through the Holy Spirit, who teaches and reminds us of what Jesus has said. And these truths ring true because of the peace they bring. Peace to our heart, mind, body, and soul.

As you prepare for this week, make time for solitude and silence. Ask the Spirit to remind you of what he wants you to remember. Things that are good and true.



THE FORGOTTEN GOD

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are the Triune God that we believe in and trust. Each person of the Trinity has ways of operating, and we learn about each person. Of the three, the Holy Spirit is often the forgotten person. Ironically, the one that is forgotten is the one who reminds us of who God is.

How much interaction have you had with God the Holy Spirit? What role does the Holy Spirit currently have in your life?



THE COUNSELOR

When we think about counsel, we think of wisdom that comes through information, facts, dates, statistics, and discussion. All of these are good things, yet sometimes we rely too heavily on what we can understand and figure out ourselves. And when our intellect or access to experts cannot supply answers, we get discouraged. In these circumstances, we recall that Jesus has not left us alone. The Holy Spirit gives us counsel and teaches us. This counsel is correlated with peace. This counsel may not give us exact answers, but it does give us peace and presence.

How do you rely on the wisdom that comes from your own resources? Where can you turn to the Spirit and hear the Spirit's counsel?



GUIDED

Our lives are filled with decisions to make and directions to go, some significant and some simple. Some are clear and some are foggy. And then there is decision fatigue. We have made so many decisions that making another overwhelms us.

We were never created to make decisions alone. In the Holy Spirit, we have received a guide. A guide that would be with us and remind us of the words of Jesus, and these words would help us choose and decide the direction to go.

Where are you experiencing decision fatigue? Where do you need to remember that you are not alone?



CIRCUMSTANTIAL PEACE

Circumstances can give us peace. Health, enough money in our savings account, career climbing, wonderful family and friends, relationships, and more. In these times, we unknowingly begin to lean on our circumstances for peace.

One shift in circumstances, and our peace is shaken. In these times, we grasp for peace, and the Holy Spirit reminds us that we already have peace; we just may need to be reminded of it.

This peace that goes beyond circumstances is something we remember and receive. And this often happens as we express our desire and talk to God honestly about it.

What circumstances do you wish would change? What do you long to be steadied? Spend some time today expressing these desires to God. How is Jesus inviting you to see and know the Holy Spirit, the steady One, as your peace in the midst of your circumstances?



FACING HARD THINGS

Peace is not the absence of conflict. It often requires that conflict be faced and sacrifices be made. When we are in a place of conflict, the temptation is to skirt the hard things and avoid the sacrifices that must be made. Peace costs something.

Jesus knew this and faced conflict with sacrifice. He did this because of his love and so that we might have peace. It cost him to do so. We have a God who knows what it is to face hard things, and he promises to be with us. The gift of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are not alone.

What conflicts are you facing? How are you tempted to avoid the hard work? How does having a God who knows what it is to face hard things give you courage to work towards peace?



THE PROMISE TO COME

Opportunities for being troubled and afraid abound. We witness so much brokenness and encounter so many unknowns. Our hearts are burdened. We need peace.

Peace that is rich and true, that lives within our circumstances and without fear. Peace for ourselves and peace to take into the world.

How is your heart burdened by the brokenness in your community? As you recognize this burden, how can the Holy Spirit meet you and minister to you? Continue to bring your burdens to God and be on the lookout for the peace the Holy Spirit brings.



5

²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

JOHN 19:25-27

THE PROVISION OF PEOPLE

One of the great gifts of God is one another. Family and friendships that reach far and wide. From fits of laughter to walking through dark valleys, people are a gift. The presence of community is greatly felt in times of hardship. As we remain close to our own suffering, others join us and carry our burdens with us.

Even as Jesus was dying, he was providing community for others. As he suffered, he saw the need for his family. What power and strength Jesus had to think of others while he suffered! While being torn apart, he was putting others together.

Who has Jesus provided for you in the past year, month, week, and day? Where are your places of community and belonging? Take some time to express gratitude to God for these gifts.



BEING SEEN

Jesus saw his mother's need before she could express it. To be seen and provided for before we know what we need shows that someone is paying attention to us. Yet sometimes we feel very alone, and we long for support, someone to talk to, and advocates for our situation. We long for someone to see us and support us. If only people could see our needs like Jesus did and step in to provide.

As you reflect on Jesus and his provision of community amidst pain and suffering, where do you find yourself longing for allies, advocates, companions, and/or friends? Express these desires to God.



RECEIVING CARE

Receiving care can be more vulnerable than offering it. When we receive care, we admit that we need something or someone. Yet we often refuse another's care, and our suffering is made harder by loneliness. In fear, we keep our hardships private, minimize our pain, and diminish our needs. The gift of community is the gift of people with you and for you. Receive this gift.

*Are there ways you have been deflecting the care of others? If so, how come?
Who might God have for you to receive from today?*



ANTICIPATORY CARE

Many of us regularly provide for others. We give, serve, love, sacrifice, and care. This anticipatory care expresses that someone is looking for us and looking to care for us before we ever knew we needed it. It reflects the heart of God and what Jesus did at the cross. We can also be people who anticipate the needs of others by slowing down, looking, and becoming more aware of those around us.

When has Jesus anticipated and provided for a need of yours before you knew you needed it?



SLOWING DOWN TO SEE

To notice, see, and provide takes time, space, and margin. We cannot see others when we are rushing past them. We must slow down to see. We must pause to be present. And we must stop to listen. Slowing down, pausing, and stopping are not natural for most of us. We need the love of Jesus and the discernment of the Holy Spirit to join our discipline of slowing down, pausing, and stopping in order to be present to one another.

As you reflect on the pause of Jesus amidst his pain, how might you choose to slow down, pause, and stop in order to see and provide for another? Write down ways you can slow down, the times in the day you can pause, and the stops you need to implement.



WHEREVER WE GO

You never know who God will bring across your path to stop and see. This can happen in both familiar and foreign places. We can stop and see wherever we go. When we stop and see, we have the opportunity to love and serve. In doing so, we provide a glimpse of the love of the community of God.

Take some time to look through your calendar, noticing the regular places and people you encounter. Also notice the places that aren't on your calendar that you still stop by. This could be a coffee shop or school pick-up. Who might God have you notice, see, and serve?



WHEN WE CANNOT HELP

There are times when we cannot provide for others. We see their pain, their suffering, and injustices against them, and we cannot provide anything. The disciples and Jesus' mother were very close to the pain and suffering of Jesus. They chose to remain near even when there was nothing they could do. When we cannot provide or help alleviate the pain, we feel incredibly powerless, and heartbreak goes deeper. We often want to run. In these times, we can name what we are seeing and how we feel. And we can hold on to one another during these times.

Spend some time today reflecting on your nearness to suffering and the inability to relieve the suffering. As you sit in this space, share with Jesus whatever comes to mind for you. Consider sharing it with a friend as well.



6

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising

the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

HEBREWS 12:1-3

THE CLARITY OF THE CALL

Hard things are easier when we know what we will achieve. Many of us can persevere through anything when we know our goal is good. It is harder to persevere when we do not know what we are persevering for. Some of us persevere without a purpose.

With Jesus, we persevere not only with purpose but with people. We persevere with clarity of call, which is simply the good things God has given us to do in this world, along with the people God invites and transforms us to be. And we do this while fixing our eyes on Jesus. He knew what it was to live with purpose in perseverance for a people. For us.

Looking to Jesus, sit in solitude and silence today, reflecting on:

- the people around you
- one of your purposes in life
- the reality of perseverance



DAILY MOVEMENT

Turning our eyes upon Jesus is a daily movement. Distractions and demands draw our gaze to hopes other than Jesus. We can turn our eyes towards Jesus in a variety of ways throughout our day. For some, being with others who love Jesus helps them turn their eyes towards Jesus. For others, solitude and silence help them. Words, stories, songs, and creation help others. Jesus can be seen all around us.

Reflect on the ways your eyes easily fix on Jesus. In whatever ways your eyes turn towards Jesus, try more of these ways in the coming days and soak in Jesus' gaze.



PRESENCE OVER PURPOSE

Perseverance is a long road. It dips and winds. It has plateaus, valleys, and uphill climbs. The longevity of this road is wearing. For some, this journey is just beginning, and for others, this road has been a lifetime journey. Knowing why we are on the journey helps us persevere. Believing there is a purpose, even if it is unknown, helps us carry on. Yet purpose is empty without presence—the presence of Jesus.

What are you persevering in today? What part of the long road are you on? Wherever you are, turn to Jesus and talk to him about it.



CHEERED ON

We all long to be supported and cheered on. While we are persevering and doing the work God has called us to, we have followers of Jesus from the past and present cheering us on! And they are not only cheering us on when we're doing great, but they are cheering us on while we are stumbling and encouraging us to get rid of the things tangling us up so we can be free to run. What a grace to have people who are for us in the past, the present, and the future to come.

Spend some time thinking about those God has given for encouragement, strengthening, and cheering on. Write their names down. Imagine them surrounding you with their strengthening words and presence. How does this give you what you need to throw off any sin that is entangling you?



CHEERING OTHERS ON

We also get to cheer others on! We get to come alongside, celebrate, encourage, and strengthen others. We get to help them notice what is tangling them up and help them become free. We get to offer grace and love when they stumble and hope when they don't think they can keep on going. We cannot run their race for them, but we can give them what they need to keep going.

Who has God given you to cheer on?



LOSING HEART

Opposition will come our way. Opposition came Jesus' way and he endured as he focused on the joy set before him. The joy that was before him was us. And we are worth it.

Sometimes we lose heart as we live out our lives and faith. We can't always see what we are striving for, or we are discontent as we compare our work to another's. Other times we know what we ought to do but don't want to do it. For some of these reasons and more, we lose heart.

Opposition, whether external or internal, can lead to rejecting what we are called to do in this world. In these times, we need the cheers of community, reminders of God's love, and to know there is joy to come.

What opposition do you face as you consider the good works God has called you to in the world? What do you need more of?:

- the encouragement of community
- reminders of God's love
- confidence in the joy to come

Express these needs to God and talk to a friend who can listen.

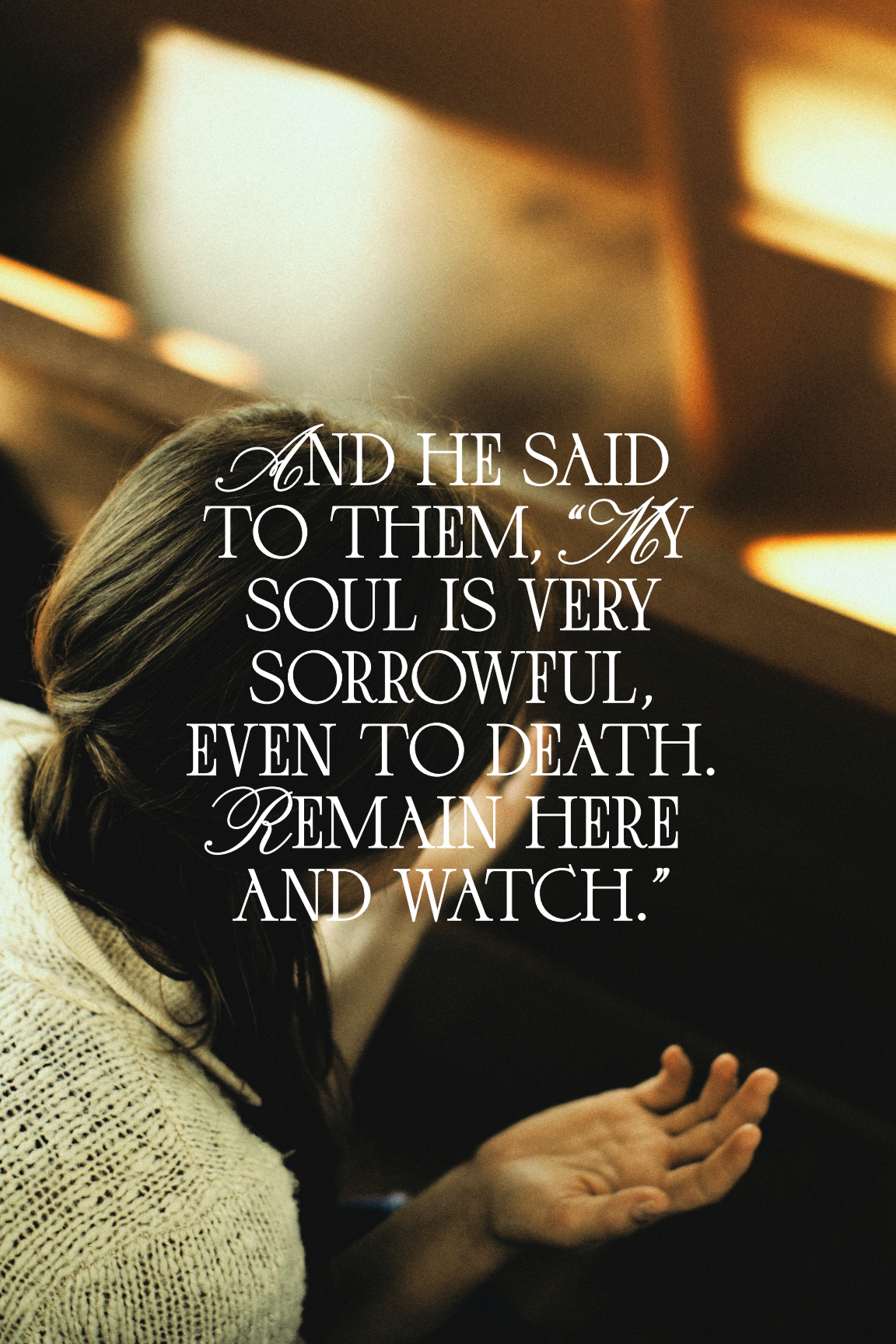


JESUS' JOY

Jesus' joy was you and me. It was the joy of a reconciled relationship with him. It was the joy of being family and having freedom. We are Jesus' joy. We are why Jesus persevered. It is Jesus' joy and love that hold us together and hold all things together. His joy and delight are big.

Spend some time reflecting on Jesus' joy and love for you. How can this give you the courage to live out the good works God has called you to?





AND HE SAID
TO THEM, "MY
SOUL IS VERY
SORROWFUL,
EVEN TO DEATH.
REMAIN HERE
AND WATCH."

PRAYER VIGIL

Since Jesus called his disciples to “watch and pray” (Mark 14:34) with him in his final hours, this Holy Week we are seeking to have a continuous presence of daily prayer in our building. Sign up by yourself or with your kids, family, friends, or community group. Space is available Monday–Wednesday from 7 am–9 pm, and 24 hours a day from 7 am on Thursday through sunrise on Sunday. Sign up for a one-hour slot at hppres.org/lent so we can keep watch as a church.

Watch

Observe

Ground yourself by taking a moment to observe your surroundings. Engaging all your senses, what do you notice?

Examine

Take inventory of your inner self. What thoughts or feelings might distract you from engaging in prayer?

Guard

Ask for protection over your time of prayer from distractions, discouragement, and spiritual darkness.

Wait

Don't feel rushed into praying. Listen for the Lord to give you direction for your prayer time.

Pray

For you:

What burdens are you carrying that you need to invite Jesus into?

For our church:

How do we need to grow in holding one another?

For our world:

Who do you know that is not experiencing the peace and comfort of being held by Jesus?

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²¹ And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. ²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

MARK 15:21-26

THE CROSSES WE CARRY

Jesus was required to carry what would be used to kill him. The weight of the cross would be nothing compared to the weight of our sin. It was this weight that would kill him.

Our crosses can be incredibly heavy. As we carry them, we feel as if we will be crushed under their weight. And like Jesus, we need someone to help us carry them.

What is a cross you must carry? Who has God given you to help you carry this cross?



HELP ALONG THE WAY

Our crosses vary in size, shape, time, and place. We all have crosses to carry. Even though they are ours, we carry them too long on our own. We hesitate to ask for others to help carry the load. Jesus, the God of the universe, had someone help him carry his cross. If he needed help, so do we.

How does the fact that Simon carried Jesus' cross for a bit reframe the idea that you must carry your cross alone? Who can you ask to help you carry it? How can you ask that person to help you?



SENSING SUFFERINGS

We can't always see the crosses people carry. We are at the mercy of their trust and their willingness to share their crosses with us. While we cannot always see, we can sometimes sense their need. The Holy Spirit at work in us prompts us to notice and nudges us to ask. We can respond to these nudges with care and curiosity, allowing the person to share whatever they'd like. As we are let in to their sufferings, we hold them with great tenderness, love, and care.

How can you be attentive to the senses from the Spirit even without seeing?



CARRYING CROSSES FOR OTHERS

Jesus was a threat to those in authority and suffered great injustice. Because of this, they executed him. It is hard for us to imagine this amount of suffering and pain. Most of us will never face it. Yet many in our world have faced persecution and still do. We can carry their crosses as we think of them, pray for them, and offer aid to them through trusted ministries and organizations.

Take some time today to think about those who have faced injustice, been imprisoned, and suffered as they did good work in the world. As you think about these people, pray for them. Also, consider how you can carry their crosses for them and make a plan to do so.



PREPARATION AND PROVISION

Knowing what was coming, Jesus prepared and provided what his disciples and we would need for the long haul. Jesus did so by sharing a meal with his disciples and instructing us to remember his provision for us. In his preparation and provision of this meal, Jesus reminds us that he continues to hold all things together. The past, present, and future are all held by Jesus. We need this reminder every day.

How does knowing Jesus' preparation and provision give you strength and confidence in the days to come?



WHEN ALL FALLS APART

Good Friday was the day that hope, expectation, and dreams died. It was a day when every expectation fell apart. A day when doubt and confusion replaced hope. How was Jesus going to hold all things together if he was dead?

Some of us are too familiar with death today. We have lost a loved one too soon, we are facing a financial crisis, or our family has been ripped apart. There is so much to grieve as hope, dreams, and expectations have died.

In these times, Jesus invites us to look at him and talk to him. Even when we know the story does not end today, the pain and grief are stronger than our hope.

As you sit with your pain and grief, what do you want to say to Jesus?



REST

Today is the day of waiting. Holy Saturday is the day of waiting. It is the in-between day. We know Easter Sunday and resurrection are coming, but we are not there yet. And this in-between day lasts more than a day. How we wish all of our waiting for new life and resurrection would only last a day, but our Holy Saturdays linger. In that lingering, Jesus invites us to rest.

Rest from trying to understand or make sense of our sufferings. Rest from trying to explain. Rest from holding everything together. Even though Jesus is silent, he is doing the work of holding all things together.

Take some extended time to be quiet today. Rest in being held.



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When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe,

and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

MARK 16:1–8

WE ARE HELD

We are held. Amen and amen!

Death has been put to death, and we are held together by the One who came first, who holds us, who died for us, and who lives for those he loves!

May you know Jesus' love that holds you together, that holds us together, and that will one day make all things new.

He is risen! Happy Easter!



About the Author

Laura Murray serves as the Director of Spiritual Engagement and Innovation at Fuller Seminary's Center for Spiritual Formation, a Spiritual Director, retreat leader, writer, and ECO pastor. Laura has spent over 20 years in ministry in the areas of spiritual formation, pastoring,

writing, and developing leaders. During the pandemic, she creatively began the ministry of Digital Silent Retreats and has hosted these spaces monthly ever since.

During her pastoral call at Highland Park Presbyterian Church, she ministered through writing, teaching, prayer, spiritual formation, and worship leadership. She holds a Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Seminary alongside a Masters Degree in Theology. She is married to Craig, has two incredible children, and two dogs. They live in the Dallas area, and she believes dessert is only dessert if it involves chocolate.

For additional resources, visit laurabmurray.com.

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