

*This devotional/prayer challenge has been written to help and guide you through your devotional time over the next few weeks. Our hope and prayer is that by reading and remembering the story of Jesus that you will be led to live your life for Him more and more each and every day. As you will see, each day there is a devotional written from ideas presented in the story of Jesus. Below them are passages of Scripture we would love for you to search through after each devotional. Spending the time in the Word of God is critical! All of the devotionals are written from the Bible story so it will be important to read those throughout each devotional. Then, at the bottom is a prayer challenge for you to pray through. Hopefully these prayer challenges will help get the prayer conversation started between you and God. We also want to invite you to specifically pray for Easter at the Ridge each day that you go through the devotional. We ask you to pray for staff, team leads, our church body, the visitors who will be attending, logistics, for people to know Jesus, the worship team/pastor specifically, and anything else that comes to your mind. Maybe you want to take time to pray for one of these a day. Maybe you want to lift them all up frequently. We simply just ask that you pray. Ask God to tell you in what ways He would like you to serve, pray, and invest in this community wide event. This devotional time should help motivate us to service, so make sure to get involved through prayer and action.*

*We really believe this is leading to a special Easter gathering. Our hope and prayer that as we walk through the story of Jesus as a community that it will lead us to experience Jesus in a special way on Easter. We are believing for God to teach our community special things throughout these days. We can't wait to see what God will do in our lives during these days.*

*Easter at the Ridge*

*Easter Morning @ 10:30a*

*Ridgeferry Park*

*Rome, Georgia*

**Introduction**  
**From Lamb to Life**

*In our day to day lives, we let so many disruptions dim our vision of the Almighty God whom we fell so deeply in love with at the point of our salvation. As you take this journey of Christ from the Lamb to Life, allow your spirit to receive a fresh look at the Savior. This devotional will take you from the last days of Christ, through His death, and into His glorious resurrection. As you walk along this path with Christ, be prepared to fall deeper in love with Him everyday. This devotional causes you to catch a clear vision of God's plan, and it changes everything!*

*Imagine, the God of the Universe wants to sit with you. He wants to talk with you and prepare your heart for the day ahead. After all, He is the only one who truly knows what your day holds. During your devotional and prayer time, let me encourage you to do something. Take the time to just "be still" before God. It is sometimes in those moments of quietness that God speaks so clearly.*

*So, be ready to have an encounter with the living God who takes away the sins of the world. Be prepared to be humbled, uplifted and encouraged all at the same time. Be intentional about your time with God over the next 21 days. Don't miss a moment of what God wants to show you right now. He is preparing you for this season in your life. As you take time to listen to God and "be still" before Him, search out how He is asking you to respond to each day's devotion, scripture reading, prayer and word challenge. Then, live like you were always meant to live!*

Day 1:

// Lamb //

It is known that throughout history lambs have been used as the labeled sacrifice for the sins of the people of God. Israelites would sacrifice a lambs with the belief that this lamb would be presented to God as a pleasing sacrifice that would allow their sins to be forgiven, but a lamb had to be given over and over again. Then Jesus enters the story. The first time we see Jesus in the gospel of John He is referred to as “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” In humility God has given Himself, through His son Jesus, to be the all sufficient sacrifice. The lion has become a lamb. The shepherd has become a sheep. His purpose was rooted in service, His passion in humility. Obedience was what He pursued. He never once stepped outside the boundaries of what His Shepherd had asked Him to do. He knew His goal and selflessly gave up His life. There is something interesting about the scene just before Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Just before they get into the garden, Jesus and his disciples cross over the Brook of Kidron. This is significant because this brook was actually connected to a drainage system from the temple. There is a great chance that at the time Jesus was crossing over it that the brook would have been filled with the blood of thousands of Passover lambs. This would have been another reminder of what awaited King Jesus. The suffering that awaited this innocent man had to fill His mind. This is just another reminder for us that all of history was leading up to this critical point. Heaven was awaiting the moment where its king would give up His throne to be subject to the wrath of His Father. Our great King has always planned to be our suffering servant. Who has a story like this? That the God of the universe became the only thing that would allow us to be saved! The One who is holding all of history became a sacrificed lamb so that you could experience the beauty of freedom and the glories of heaven. The God-man born to die. The Lion became a Lamb.

John 1:29 // Philippians 2:5-11

*Dear God,*

*I am overwhelmed by Your sacrifice for me! Thank you just doesn't seem big enough to express how I feel. Yet, all I am required to do is accept this beautiful gift of grace. You have set before us the most perfect example of sacrificial service and humility. I want to honor You with my life. Thank you for the invitation to join You in your work on this earth. Lord, as I prepare my heart for today, show me where I can make a difference in my service to You.*

*~ In Jesus Name, Amen ~*

*Challenge 1: Service*

Day 2:

// Pass the Cup //

One of the incredible scenes of the Gospels is found when Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. In this scene, we see a heightened tension in the life of Jesus between the God in Him and the human in Him. Matthew records Jesus making a statement that is full of faith. Jesus says, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” From the beginning of time, Jesus knew his role in history. He knew from eternity past that this moment was in store for Him, and He knows in eternity future the implications that would result from this moment. Yet, even in His ability to completely know His Father’s plans He has the faith to ask His Father this question. This isn’t a weakness of Jesus, but a strength. It’s a strength because it proves just how faithful Jesus believed His father was. While Jesus knew what was awaiting Him, He also knew the love that His Father had already lavished on Him. He knew that if there was any other way for God’s redemption plan to happen that God would allow it to happen. However, Jesus also remembered how much God loved His people. This was the moment that heaven had been looking at since the beginning of time. The redemption of humanity hinged on Jesus. And Jesus wasn’t looking back, He was looking up. He knew the joy that was set before him.

Why aren’t we more like that? Do we believe that God loves us enough that He allows us to ask questions? Know that right now in this moment that God’s love for you is stronger than anything you’ve ever experienced. He is a heavenly Father who allows you to ask questions. Even when you’re hurt, and even when you know the process, just ask. Sometimes it is so soothing just to ask God in faith for the things you don’t understand. He is a good, good Father. Faithfully pray to Him today that He will provide a way first and foremost for His glory, and then also for your good.

// Matthew 26:36-46 //

*Holy Father,*

*Your love for me is beyond what my mind can conceive! It was my sin that caused this cup not to pass from our Savior. Thank you for Your faithfulness to mankind. Lord, in my times of trouble I pray that You will give me the faith to cry out to You and the strength to release my will to You.*

*Let my faith rest in the assurance that You are with me through all things and that You have a plan far greater than I can see. My joy is in You. As I prepare my heart to worship You as never before, may I be reminded of Your faithfulness and respond in a way that pleases You.*

*~ In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge2: Faith*

Day 3:

// Don't Stop //

While Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He continually asked His disciples to stay up and pray with Him. But what did they do? They kept falling asleep. We read this and I believe all of us think, "Well if Jesus asked me to pray, there is no way I would fall asleep." Let's be real though. How many of us have fallen asleep praying right before we go to bed at night? Probably all of us! And just like the disciples, we miss out when we don't spend time in prayer. In this instance the disciples fell asleep. Then, all of a sudden, an angel came from heaven to comfort Jesus. However, the disciples didn't get to experience this because they were all asleep. Doesn't the same type of thing happen to us? Our prayer life is a direct connection between us and heaven. When we disconnect ourselves in prayer we also disconnect ourselves from the very power and glory of heaven. Jesus wasn't the one who missed out when the disciples decided to sleep instead of pray. The disciples were the ones who missed out! When we don't pray for people in our lives or events in our lives, we usually are the ones who miss out. We don't get to experience the blessing or be filled with the faith of believing that God will come through.

Scripture tells us to pray without ceasing. This doesn't mean that we literally only pray for the rest of our lives. However, this does mean that we should stay in a prayerful mindset all the time.

We shouldn't only be aware of the physical things around us, but we should be aware of the spiritual things too. What is God speaking into your life right now? Who is He calling you to talk to? Who has He laid on your heart for you to pray for? It is a special thing when someone is willing to go to heaven on your behalf. Heaven is on our side and maybe this is a moment for us to connect with God. Power and promise can come as soon as we are willing to live a prayerful life. There is a line in a popular worship song that says, "I touch the sky when my knees hit the ground." So pray now. Pray long. Pray often. Pray with faith. Believe that the God of heaven turns His ear towards His people, and don't stop praying.

Matthew 26:36-46 // 1 Peter 4:12-13 // Romans 12:12

*Dear Lord,*

*I can almost hear you say, "I've been waiting for you." Thank you for calling me into Your presence each day that I live. Forgive me for the times that I have failed to connect with You through prayer. Help me to capture a glimpse of all that You have waiting for me in these intimate moments with You. Lord, I don't want to miss the incredible blessings and power that come through these special times. What a humbling fact it is to know that the Creator of the Universe wants to meet with me each day! Impress upon my heart, the things that You would have me pray about. May I be prepared for all that You have awaiting me today.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge3: Prayer*

Day 4:

// Arrested //

How could it be possible that Jesus would allow Himself to be arrested? Imagine what the disciples must have thought. To see the one they had been following be taken by the religious leaders. I think this part of Scripture is so Jesus. What I mean by that is that what happens here is a typical Jesus move. First of all, the guards approach Jesus with a cohort of soldiers. This means they possibly could have come with 600 soldiers prepared to arrest Jesus. This in itself shows that they didn't know anything about Jesus for two reasons: 1) If they truly knew how powerful He was, then they would have known that there was no way only 600 people were stopping Him!

I mean, have they seen what He is capable of? Have they heard what He has done? 2) If they truly knew Jesus, then they should have known they didn't need that many people because He would voluntarily give Himself up to be arrested and later crucified. He had been telling people all along that this would happen!

And then what happens next is so incredible. They approach Him and say that they are there for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus responds with one of the most profound statements He makes during his whole ministry. Jesus says, "I Am He." What Jesus is implying is that He is the "I am." The "Great I Am" of the Old Testament. The "Great I Am" being the God that they knew so much about. Jesus once again identifies Himself with His Father, and as soon as He makes this statement the guards fall to the ground. Jesus' power and glory is demonstrated in this one simple, yet profound statement. What we see in this scene is that Jesus holds all power and authority in this moment. The only way that He was arrested is by Him voluntarily giving Himself up. This was His choice. This was His decision. He knew what being arrested meant for Him. He knew that this meant that just a few days later death would be arrested. Death would be locked up. Death would have its power taken away. How beautiful is our Savior who freely gave Himself up, knowing that in His arrest would lead to the arrest of death and darkness. Yes they are still active, but they don't have power anymore. The power belonged to Jesus the entire time.

Our King chose to surrender knowing that soon enough death would surrender to Him! Be encouraged to surrender to Him, trusting that He is in control of every situation.

Matthew 26: 47-56 // John 8:48-59

*Dear Father,*

*I praise You because You are the Great I Am! You hold the power of death and hell. Lord, I pray that You help me to live knowing that the same power lives in me. It is through Your blood that I can fight against the enemy when he attacks me from every angle. Your word says that "no weapon formed against me shall prosper." I claim that verse for my life, my family and my church. May You keep the enemy far from us as we proclaim Your name and worship You, The Great I Am!*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge4: Battle*

Day 5:

// Are You His Follower //

When you think of the life of Peter, one thing that always stands out from his life happens on the night Jesus was arrested. Early in the evening Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will reject Him. Of course Peter never believes he would ever do this. After all, as Jesus is arrested Peter attempts to save the situation by cutting off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. Then comes the moment where Peter is accused of being one of the followers of Jesus. Sure enough Peter denies this accusation three times, probably because of fear. I love characters like Peter because there is so much we can learn from them. The same question that surrounded Peter on this night is the same question surrounding us today. "Are we a follower of Jesus?"

It's easy to answer that in your head, but not as easy to answer that with your life. Does your heart say you are a follower of Jesus? Does your life say you are a follower of Jesus? That can be a tough reality for us to deal with. It's not easy to admit that we are a follower of Jesus when it could cost us our job or a friendship. It especially isn't easy if it could cost us our life. But usually we don't like to think about that. So many times for us being a follower of Jesus is about whether or not it is convenient for us. Does it help us in certain situations? Does it make us look better? Instead maybe we should start asking the question, "Am I a follower of Jesus because He is the way, the truth, and the life?" Jesus moved forward with His plan whether Peter supported Him or not. That is the thing about walking with Jesus, He doesn't need our help. Yet He still invites us to join Him in what He is doing all around the world. So are you a true follower of Jesus? Do you walk in the ways He walks and are you moving in the ways He moves? Do you follow His steps? Do you let Him lead you? It's an important question for us to answer... "Are you one of those followers of Jesus?"

Matthew 26: 31-35 // Matthew 26:69-75

*Dear Lord,*

*Lead me today so that I might walk in Your perfect light. Help me to follow You in humble obedience. Let my heart always be pure before You, and forgive me for the times when it was not. Help me to hear from You everyday and give me the wisdom to know where You want to use me for Your glory. God, I pray that you give me the courage to follow You into the city streets and shout Your name from the highest places.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge5: Courage*

Day 6:

// Jesus Chooses Barabbas //

Matthew 27 has an interesting scene in the middle of it. Jesus has been delivered to Pilate and it is a Passover custom that a prisoner be released. Pilate gave the crowd two options for the prisoner that he could release. One was Jesus, the other was Barabbas. Barabbas is described in the Bible as a “notorious sinner.” Now I don’t think you get called a “notorious prisoner” for something that isn’t extreme. Barabbas would be considered a thug. The Bible says that Barabbas had been thrown into prison for causing a violent uprising against the government and for murder. What has Jesus done except help heal the sick and raise the dead? Are these two even comparable? Should the crowd even have to consider this? But what do we see happen? The chief priests convince the crowd to ask for Barabbas. The whole crowd chants, “Give us Barabbas, give us Barabbas!” I think we immediately put ourselves into the story and believe that there is no way we would have ever chosen Barabbas. But who do you think Jesus was choosing. Picture this! Pilate says you can have the son of God or a murderer, the crowd is shouting “Give us Barabbas,” but what does Jesus do? He just stands there silently because He knew the plan of God. As the crowd is yelling for Barabbas I just imagine Jesus thinking, “Please choose Barabbas, please choose Barabbas!” Jesus knew the will of God. One pastor puts it this way, “Jesus knew that God would have to treat him like Barabbas so He could treat Barabbas like Jesus.” Wow! However, we never see Barabbas thank anyone. He doesn’t understand what has just happened. He doesn’t look at Jesus and thank Him for what Jesus is about to do. Barabbas walks off the stage believing that it was the crowd who set him free. Oh no, it was the love of Jesus that set him free. Jesus’ obedience to His Father’s plan kept Him silent, but His love for Barabbas, for you, and for me was being shouted with the cries of the crowd. It doesn’t take us long to understand who we are in the story. We are Barabbas. How many times do we stand on that stage and just as we are about to be set free, Jesus steps in our place? The reality is that we are just like Barabbas in that our actions don’t set us free. No amount of work, devotion, or discipline that we possess is strong enough to set us free. There is only one who can. Jesus. The one who stood silently on that platform and took our place so that one day, God could love us the way He loves Jesus.

Matthew 27:11-26

*My Redeemer,*

*I can't say that I comprehend Your love and forgiveness. I do not deserve such grace. Yet, You quietly stepped forward and took my place on the cross so that I might live in freedom. Lord, I want to honor You with my life. Help me never take for granted the great sacrifice You made for me. Instead, let me live everyday in gratitude through love and service to You. May I extend forgiveness to others just as You have to me.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge6: Forgiveness*



Day 7:

// Nail the Nails //

It is easy for us to see on this side of the cross that the crucifixion was cruel. I think many of us want to immediately jump on idea that there is no way that we would have wanted Christ to be crucified. We all want to say that we would have been in the camp that was completely against crucifying Jesus. But when you think about it, have we ever needed anything more? Was it unfair? Yes. Was it cruel? Yes. Should it have been us? Yes. Was there another way? No.

This is what we have to come around to believing and knowing. When Christ died for us it was the only way for God's plan of salvation to come to fruition. Yet, why do we try to take the nails out of the cross of Christ. The way we live sometimes in our mind is our attempt to undo the work of Christ on the cross. How do we do that? By seeing our salvation is something we can earn on our own. This mentality isn't far from any of us. As a matter of fact that is probably something that you are thinking about doing right now in order to boost your standing with God. We all have the mentality, "well maybe if I pray more, then God will show me favor," or, "maybe if I read a couple extra chapters of the Bible, then I will be more blessed." We have all been at the point where we say, "Well if I just find the will-power to stop sinning, then I will reap the blessings of God." STOP!!! We don't find the answer within ourselves. The only way for us to ever enjoy the grace of God is for us to, in our hearts and minds, help nail in the nails that hung Jesus to the cross. This doesn't allow us to keep on sinning. Rather, this requires us to stop.

Nailing in the nails for us today means understanding that because of Christ we have to stop sinning. Because sin doesn't compare, or even come close to measuring up to the beauty of grace Christ has displayed on the cross. So stop attempting to undo what Christ has done for you by trying to find grace and favor on your own. If we are honest, you don't have the power to save your children. You don't have the power to restore that relationship. You don't have the power to heal your friend or family member. That grace is only available through the power that comes from Jesus. He is the only way to God. His cross is the greatest combination of destruction and beauty. The place where death meets life. So nail the nails. Believing in your heart and mind that this is the only way for you to experience the grace of God doesn't offend Jesus. As a matter of fact, He wants you to quit working for something you can't obtain on your own. Your work and devotion won't change the world. Rest in His work. It's the only thing strong enough to carry us through.

// Matthew 27: 32-55 //

*Gracious God,*

*Thank you for reminding me that grace is never earned. I am who I am only because You are my Creator and Lord. Keep my heart pure before You, and let my service be an outpouring of my complete awestruck love for You. May I never get over Your gracious and unconditional love for me.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge7: Grace*

Day 8:

// Tetelestai //

John 19:30 "...he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

Think of some of the most important phrases/speeches ever spoken by leaders throughout history. The words "I Have a Dream" are all a powerful collection of words that have shaken history. But has there ever been three words that have shaped history the way that these have? Have three simple words ever changed as many futures as these? Three words that have bridged the gap from history all the way to eternity. Connecting eternity past to eternity future, God to his creation. "It is finished." What is it that has been finished though when Jesus said these words? The plan. All of history had been about God reestablishing relationships with his people. All of history had been a back and forth chase between God and humanity. So when Jesus utters these words it has to put into perspective for us that this is what everything from history to eternity has been all about? Three words...filling the gap from history to eternity. These three words declared God getting his prized possession back. How incredible is it to know that God's greatest plan has been about restoring a relationship with you? All of history was waiting for this. All of eternity is celebrating this. The only way for God's plan to be achieved was through the life and death of the Lamb. And now it is possible. God and His people. Forever in relationship. Rest in these three words and know that there is nothing today that can keep you from a relationship with God, and there is nothing that can keep your friends from a relationship with God. Sin is finished. Religion is finished. Legalism is finished. Death is finished. Shame is finished. Guilt is finished. They all died on the cross with Jesus and there is nothing that we can do to restart what Jesus has declared completed. Jesus' plan was finally complete. Everything in history was leading up to this and everything in eternity will be because of this. What I love about these words is they mean there is nothing left separating us from God. If the plan has been completed, then that means Jesus doesn't have to think of a new plan. They aren't trying to rally the angels of heaven together to get a new plan going. God's plan has been completed. So stop waiting for God to intervene in another supernatural way before you completely give Him all of your life. He has already completed His plan through Jesus. "It is finished." Believe it.

// John 19:17-36 //

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for orchestrating the greatest plan ever conceived on my behalf. Your finished work on the cross was all for me. Yet, I still fail you every day. Lord, forgive me for the times when my response to you is weak. My relationship with you is above any experience I can ever have. Give me the strength to boldly profess my faith to others and lead them to the cross. ~In Jesus*

*Name, Amen~*

*Challenge8: Gratitude*

Day 9:

// Top to Bottom //

Up until the moment of Jesus' death, only the high priest was allowed to go behind the curtain of the temple and into the holy of holies. The high priest would go into the holy of holies to offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people. However, no one else was allowed to go back there into the presence of God. But then what happened? At the moment of Jesus' death it says that the veil was torn from "the top to the bottom." What does this signify? First and foremost it shows that Jesus' death was indeed a sacrifice for all sins. However, it also signifies that now it was finally possible for any person to enter into the presence of God on their own. Then there is the detail in this scene that says the veil was torn from the top to the bottom. Historians say it is possible that this curtain could have been up to 60 feet tall. Why is that detail important? Because it shows that the only person who could have made that happen was God. Therefore, it is God who is now inviting us into His presence! This is only possible because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. What a pleasure it is to know that as you are reading this that God is inviting you into an intimate relationship with Him. You don't need a pastor or some kind of church leader to pray on your behalf. You have access to the very presence of God right now! How can this truth be a game-changer in your life? How should that change your life to know that God, in all his power, is inviting you into the holiness of His presence? How do you feel God's presence coming over you now?

Matthew 27:50-55 // Micah 4:1-2 // James 4:8

*Holy God,*

*As I picture myself standing in Your presence I realize just how undone and unclean I am before You. Yet, You have personally invited me to come to You. Take my hand, Lord, and lead me into Your presence right now. Cleanse me of my unrighteousness through the blood of Your precious Son, Jesus. Thank You for my salvation that will keep me until the day You return. Thank You that the veil is no longer standing between us!*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge9: Encounter*

Day 10:

// Waiting //

We have all played the waiting game before. We have all waited on some kind of breakthrough. Maybe you are waiting right now. You could be waiting on a job, a check, some sort of healing, a relationship to be restored, a relationship to begin, or maybe you've even found yourself in the place where you are just waiting on a new day and the potential that it brings to possibly bring a new type of joy. And for some of you it has been years of waiting, believing, praying, doubting, hoping, crying, and waiting again. The disciples had a similar circumstance. However, while the followers of Jesus were only waiting for three days, they were waiting in a period of darkness. They had been following Jesus for three years. Three years of believing and trusting in what He said and did. Then all of a sudden, He is dead. The disciples are left in darkness and despair, wondering if all they had seen and done in the last three years of their lives was just a waste of time. We go through periods of waiting. We go through seasons of doubt. But the story of the Gospel shows that our story never ends there. The morning is coming soon, and this doesn't mean that one day all of our worries will be cast away. However, it does mean that the Gospel gives us great hope that our season of waiting is producing endurance. It is in the dark days of waiting that we have to set our minds on Jesus and continually remind ourselves of who He is and what He has already accomplished. When it appears that the enemy is winning in your waiting, just remember that by the power of Jesus, He is actually helping you produce patience, endurance, and character. Keep Waiting!

Psalm 27:14 // Psalm 37:9

*Dear Lord,*

*Waiting is so hard. Help me learn to rest in You while I wait. There is so much peace when I truly rest in You. Keep my mind stayed on You and Your beauty so that the world crashing in on me fades away into dimness. Nothing in this world compares to Your light and love. Fix my mind on these things so that I am reminded that You are walking me through my darkest hour. Lord, this is so hard to do at times. Give me the courage I need to face every day with Your strength and not my own.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge10: Trust*

Day 11:

// Light of Morning //

The story of the Gospel never ends at the cross. If there is one thing we know from reading the story of Jesus, it is that Jesus can flip the script in a moment. How about when Peter is walking on water, loses faith, begins to drown, and in a moment Jesus picks him up and saves him? How about when Lazarus actually dies, and then Jesus goes to his house and in a moment raises him from the dead? Then, Jesus especially displays this in His own death and resurrection. We never see Jesus completely scared about the situations that surround Him. We do see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane pray about the suffering He will endure, but we don't see Him back down. In fact, Jesus typically allows bad situations to come before us before He intervenes in power and grace. What about the two scenes mentioned previously? He allows Peter to begin drowning before He saves him, and He allows Lazarus to die before He raises him from the dead. Why? Because Jesus knows His power. He knows that He is the best thing in all of time, history, and eternity. It is in total darkness that you see how bright the light is. We tend to think that Jesus doesn't want us to walk through a valley, but maybe Jesus is willing to do whatever it takes to show us His matchless beauty. That is the story of the Gospel, and especially the story of the resurrection. Jesus showing us that no matter what the circumstances appear to be, His light always drives out the darkness. Just like in the resurrection story, morning is coming for us. It may not come in the way we want it. In fact, it may not even come while we are on earth. But morning is coming. It's the story of Jesus to bring us a new morning. Your valley is purposeful, and in fact, it may even be where Jesus wants you to be. Our shepherd isn't just leading us in the valley, but leading us through the valley. All so that we can eventually get our eyes on his matchless beauty and power. Morning is coming and it is brighter than ever.

Luke 24:1-12

*Dear God,*

*Thank you that in our darkest days, Your light shines the brightest. When we need You the most, You are always there for us. God, I am so thankful that You live within me and that I can count on You when times get hard. Some days are really hard. But, I know that I have a hope within me that will carry me through these valleys. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in me! Yes, Lord, I have hope that morning will come!*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge11: Hope*

Day 12:

// Resurrection Power //

The light of resurrection morning comes with the glory of resurrection power. In Matthew 28 when Mary and Mary walk up to the tomb, what they see is quite astounding. I think we honestly miss it in our traditional and ordinary reading of Scripture. Pay attention to some of these details.

A violent earthquake took place. Then it says they saw an angel who descended from heaven.

The angel rolled back the stone, and didn't appear to need any help. The Bible says "His appearance was like lightning and His robe was as white as snow." Just imagine snow and lightning put together...that's blinding. Then it says, "The guards were so shaken from fear that they became like dead men." Then the first thing that the angel says to them is, "Do not be afraid." Yeah good one!

Of course they would have been afraid. This wasn't an ordinary day. Take into consideration that we haven't even made it to the part where Jesus isn't dead anymore. These details say a lot about King Jesus. He didn't just crawl out of the grave being barely alive. He came out full of power! The Jesus we worship isn't a Jesus in a coma. He isn't just barely alive and just holding on. It's not like He is barely breaking through. No, Jesus is fully alive, full of power, and nothing will ever reverse that. Yet, we live like Jesus is an underdog. We live and pray in a way that sounds like, "Come on Jesus if you could just pull through for me here than that would just be epic." I feel like the Jesus we see in the Bible would say, "Don't you see that everything about Me is epic?" No one has ever demonstrated power like we see from God, especially in the resurrection story of Jesus. Jesus didn't limp out of the grave. He blew up the whole scene. He made a grand exit from the grave because He wanted to show the world once again what He is capable of.

There is so much we can find joy in by having such a powerful God!

Jesus shows us who has control over death. The whole world is under His authority. Everything is in the palm of His hands. So just live like it. Don't live like we have a God who isn't capable of the most impossible things our minds could dream of. If the resurrection shows us anything, it is how powerful God is. So maybe we just need to start living like Jesus is all powerful. If He is in control of death, then He is definitely in control of our situations and circumstances. That same power, glory, and awe is available to us every day through a relationship with the living God.

// Matthew 28 //

*Almighty God,*

*You have shown me through Your resurrection power how to stand firm and expect the supernatural. You are able to do far more than my mind can imagine. There is nothing You cannot do. I place my trust in You. Help me not to limit Your power in my life. Let my faith grow stronger than ever before. Take my circumstances and show Yourself strong and mighty.*

*Challenge12: Strength*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Day 13:*

*// Empty //*

Empty...as in His body isn't there anymore. This is crazy! Imagine what this means for the different people involved. Think about the soldiers, the followers of Jesus, and the religious leaders. They all get a chance to look in the grave and see that His body isn't there anymore. This is what He said would happen, and it did! That is such soothing news. How exciting is it for those who are in Christ that we don't celebrate the burial place of our leader. I think of times when one of our family members die. We usually keep the tomb well kept. We put flowers out there and make it look memorable. We don't have to do any of this with Jesus. He isn't there anymore! There is so much to celebrate in an empty tomb! Our faith doesn't end at the cross because the story of Jesus never ends there. There is a cross standing in the middle of history, but it is accompanied with a grave that has been busted wide open and is now empty. So what does an empty grave mean? An empty grave means death has no power. This empty grave just goes to show that death was a part of His plan the entire time. One of my favorite songs is

"Resurrecting" by Elevation Worship. One line in the song says, "The tomb where soldiers watched in vain was borrowed for three days, His body there would not remain, Our God has robbed the grave." Those words are so powerful for us. To know that there is no sting of death that can stop our Jesus. If He has defeated death and the grave and holds the power of life, what are we to fear? That doesn't mean we go out and live recklessly. But, it does help us change our mindset and outlook. Seeing the empty grave moves us to a place of being fearless. The grave is empty and Jesus is alive!

*// John 20: 1-10 //*

*Living Rock of Ages,*

*Not only did you die for me, but you miraculously came out of the grave and gave witness to Your divine power. Your love for me is far beyond words. To think that you did this all for me is incomprehensible. Thank you for the privilege that I have to live victoriously every day without fear. Help me never to live in defeat because You have overcome the grave!*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge 13: Victory*

Day 14:

// Dead Now Alive //

Dead, now alive. That is the story of Jesus. The Romans were experts at killing. When they crucified Jesus, they certainly knew what they were doing. They knew when He was dead. Sure enough, Jesus, this mysterious man from Nazareth, was dead. The religious leaders thought their problem was taken care of. The Romans were glad that this was finally off of their hands. This man was now dead. Surely they could move on. Little did they know the world was about to flip upside down...

We all know that the story doesn't end there. It keeps on going because it is the repeated story of Jesus and the repeated story of us. Throughout the story of the Gospel, there is this repeated tendency of powerful comebacks, and what greater comeback than the resurrection story! It is greater than the Cubs and Cavs coming back to win championships while down 3-1 in the championship series. It is greater than the Patriot's Super Bowl comeback after they were down 25 points in the second half. Jesus was completely dead, then came back to life. Now, since that is the story of Jesus, it has become the story of us who are in Christ. Before Christ saves us we are completely dead. Not moving. No life within us. No chance. "But, God!" Those are some of the most powerful words written in Scripture. But God intervenes through Christ, and according to His mercy and grace, He makes us alive!

Picture this. The scene in Ezekiel 37 where Ezekiel is standing in the middle of this valley full of dry, dead bones. No life around them. But then God's spirit makes the bones come together, and then they all of sudden come alive! What represents us spiritually more than that? Apart from Christ each one of us is dead in our sin. What does this mean? It means that basically in our sin, we are not useful. Sure, physically we are very much engaged in the world. But spiritually we are completely dead. However, as we know, our story has never ended there. Because Jesus is alive, we get to experience life. We get to participate in the beauty and freedom of adventure because our sin is not holding us back anymore. Death is not in control anymore. Maybe we are limited physically, but certainly we are free spiritually. There isn't much more freedom than this. So stop living in that valley of dry bones. Because in Christ, God has taken you and put your bones back together. He has breathed His spirit in His people. He has given us life. There is no better place or time to celebrate this than in the midst of Easter Season. What is beautiful is that we weren't always alive. It is much more of a miracle to take something that was dead, and make it alive.

That's the story of Jesus. That's the story of us.

Mark 16 // Ephesians 2:1-10

*Merciful God,*

*Thank you for breathing eternal life into my soul. Lord, You have saved me from the death that I once lived. My life will never be the same. Let me live my life not in vain, but as a powerful witness of the mercy You have shown upon all mankind.*

*Challenge 14: Mercy*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*



Day 15:

// Liar, Lunatic, or Lord? //

C.S. Lewis said that Jesus can only be a “liar, lunatic, or Lord.” He explains that it is impossible for the Jesus we see in the Gospels to be anything, but one of those. He can’t be all of them. He can’t be two. He can only be one. So maybe He was lying about the things He claimed to be in the Gospels. Maybe He was just a lunatic and was actually crazy. Or consider the fact that Jesus truly is Lord of the universe. Nothing shows this more than the story of the resurrection. This Easter season, take into deep consideration that Jesus is in control of the universe. This may not be too hard to admit, but certainly hard to believe with all of your heart. It’s kind of like how it is easy to admit we are sinners, but much harder to stop sinning. What does it actually mean for our lives that Jesus is the one holding the world together? It means that He is what everything is all about. Which means He is about His glory. Which means we exist for His glory. There is freedom in that.

It is such a blessing to know that life isn’t about you and me. If we aren’t Lord of the universe, then the world isn’t worshipping us. It’s worshipping Jesus. And if the world is created to worship Jesus, then that means it doesn’t matter what people think about us. So maybe we need to turn our attention to Jesus. How do our jobs reflect Jesus? How do our relationships reflect Jesus? How do our hobbies reflect Jesus? After all, Scripture says that “every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.”

The resurrection emphasizes that Jesus is in control of everything, including life and death. He has the final say in everything that comes to pass. His power is unrivaled among anything we have ever seen. We can rest this Easter season knowing that He is Lord. Worthy of all of our worship, all of our praise, all of our lives. He is powerful enough to hold you today. He is strong enough to carry you. The weight of the world isn’t too much for Him. Give Him your life, you aren’t too much for Him. He is Lord. Life is under His grip, and still He is not letting go of you.

Colossians 1:15-23 // Matthew 16:13-19

*My Lord,*

*I love that I can rest in knowing that You hold all the answers to life’s questions. I take such comfort in the fact that all power is Yours. May I find peace in my daily walk and struggles because You hold me in the palm of Your hand. Thank You for being the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and yet You know me so intricately. You are my Lord and my God in whom I trust.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge15: Surrender*

Day 16:

// Not With Us, But Within Us //

After Jesus' resurrection, He comes back to reveal Himself to His followers. He comes back, builds their faith, encourages and challenges them, and then ascends back to heaven. But before His ascension He leaves them with some interesting information. In Acts 1, the disciples ask if this will finally be the time that He restores the kingdom to Israel. It makes sense right? They thought they killed Him, but they really didn't. Jesus should just make everything come full circle now right? But He doesn't. Jesus says, "It is not now for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." Jesus had to leave in order for His Holy Spirit to come. But the Holy Spirit isn't a secondary option. It's primary. The Holy Spirit is God's opportunity to get one step closer to humanity. God created humanity in the garden, but Adam and Eve separated themselves from God's presence through their sin, so God came closer. Jesus came and was literally "God living among humanity." God was actually walking around with His creation. Now, Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to live inside us. That is intimacy! God isn't with us, but within us. He is moving throughout us. Moving among us as freely as the wind blows. That is special! The Holy Spirit isn't an "it," but a Him. He is God. In the form of a spirit, and He is living and moving inside of His followers. He is placing the power of heaven inside these earthly temples. God is engaging His church with His sweet and soothing Spirit. We can rest in that. We can know that God loves us so intimately that He wants to live inside us. What might His spirit want to communicate to you today? How might He want to engage you in God's story for the world? His spirit is still on the move. Check inside yourself and see what freedom and power that the Holy Spirit of God is breathing in you today.

Acts 1:1-10 // Acts 2:1-5 // John 14:16-17

*Holy God,*

*Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit living within me today. Help me to realize that You are with me through all things. You equip me to live a Spirit-filled life. Let me be sensitive when You speak to me each day. Help me to listen to Your voice within me. Guide my actions in a way that pleases You. Let this temple honor You today and every day that You have appointed me to live on this Earth.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge16: Honor*

Day 17:

// Do You Love Him? //

I believe one of the most intimate scenes in all of the Gospels is a conversation between Jesus and Peter that takes place in John 21. Take into consideration the moment that still has to be lingering in the back of Peter's mind is the night Jesus was arrested and how he denied being a follower of Jesus 3 times. Jesus predicted this. Jesus said it would happen, and sure enough it did. Peter, terrified by the fact that Jesus has just been arrested, just can't come around to admitting that he was a follower of Jesus. Now pick back up in John 21. Jesus has been resurrected and has re-appeared before His disciples. And now Jesus comes to Peter and shares an intimate moment with him. Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" Peter responds, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus replies, "Feed my lambs." Then Jesus asks him this same question. Peter has the same response, and Jesus replies the same way. Then, it happens a third time. After the third time, Peter appears to get frustrated. Peter says, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep."

It appears that Jesus is being a little aggravating. However, Jesus is being so loving towards Peter. For every time Peter denied Jesus before, Jesus gives Peter the same amount of opportunities to express his love for Jesus. Peter was right. Jesus knew everything. He knew Peter's heart. He knew Peter truly loved Him. However, He gave him the opportunity to just tell Him face to face, life on life, in the form of an intimate relationship. That is the same question hanging in our lives each and every day. I can picture Jesus asking us every day that we wake up, "Do you love me?" And what is the best way for Peter, and also us, to express love towards Jesus? To take care of His people. What a challenge! The greatest way for us to show Jesus how much we love Him, cherish Him, and adore Him, is to help take care of His flock. This requires a lot from us. Because some of us say loudly that we truly love Jesus, but do we love His people? Do we take care of the people that aren't like us, the ones who we don't relate to, and the ones we even think we are more superior than? When Jesus uses the word sheep it carries the idea of Jesus' flock or the church? Some of us say we love Jesus, yet we don't even love the bride of Christ. Jesus is asking us today, "Do you love me?" Our response is critical. It requires more than words. It requires a life of action.

John 21:15-25 // Matthew 22:37

*Lord,*

*I love You. Move me into action that will reflect the truth of my words. Lord, thank You for the scripture and how it speaks to me so personally. I know that my love for You is greater than my feeble attempts to serve You. Today, I pray that You would uncover the blinders that I have upon my eyes so that I might see the needs of Your people and respond out of love for You.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge 17: Love*

Day 18:

// Scars of Truth //

“If I was anyone in the Gospel story I would probably just be Thomas.” How many times have you heard someone say this? How many times have you said this? That is because it is true. We have this huge tendency to doubt. We tend to doubt normal things, so of course we doubt supernatural things. Jesus rose from the dead? Impossible! Most of us would have been in the same camp as Thomas. But in John 20, we see something incredible take place. Thomas is doubting and he tells the disciples, “Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, I will never believe.”

So what does Jesus do? Well first of all, He walks through a wall! The Bible says that the disciples were gathered together and the door was locked, most likely because of fear. Then, He directly calls out to Thomas. He tells him to touch his scars. After Thomas does this, he says, “My Lord and my God.” For Thomas, it took physically touching His real scars for Him to believe that He had risen from the dead. So of course, if that is what it took, that is what Jesus was going to do.

I have always found it interesting that Jesus still had His scars after the resurrection. But His scars tell a story. His scars explained what happened. They show what He went through. So, since there are scars that means there is healing. Jesus isn't embarrassed by the scars that mark His body. He boldly embraces them. Because these scars are scars of truth. And so are ours. Just like Jesus has scars, we are filled with them. Our whole story is marked by wounds that have hopefully healed into scars that we will have forever. But they tell our story, and they show that we have been healed. They show that God, in his goodness, allows us to experience pain that leads to joy. They let us identify with the world. They show that it is okay to hurt.

Jesus' scars completely changed a man's life. And they change your life too, whether you believe it or not. They are proof that what Jesus has done for you is more powerful than anything that has happened to you. His scars run deeper than ours. That doesn't diminish our pain, but elevates our purpose. Our scars tell our story. His scars run through the story of everyone because his scars are for the world. For you and me. That guy at work who may never acknowledge the gift. The girl in class who gets on your nerves. His scars are for everyone. They are scars that tell the true story of the love Jesus has for the world.

John 20: 24-29 // Psalm 107:2 // 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

*God,*

*You are my healer when there is pain. Thank you for the reminder that Your scars are part of my story. Without You, I would never overcome the trials that I encounter in this life. I give You all the praise for the scars I own because I know that they are a witness to the healing You have given me. When others doubt, let me praise You through the story You have woven into my life.*

*When I doubt, Lord remind me of the scars in Your hands that tell Your love story for me.  
~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge 18: Believe*

*Day 19:*

*// Tell the Story //*

The resurrection of our King carries a lot of weight. This event flipped the world upside down. He has risen in power, just as He said He would. He has overcome death, He has defeated hell. He has shown His authority and power. He has demonstrated love, mercy, and grace. The Gospel story has shown us the true treasure that Jesus is. There is absolutely no one like Jesus. There is none who compares to Him. A song we sing at our church often says the words, “I’ve tasted and seen of the sweetest of loves...” Don’t we see that in the Gospel? Don’t we see that in the resurrection? Then share it. Everyone knows that one person who continually tells a story over and over again because it’s like the greatest thing to ever happen to them. We all tend to do that at some point. But do we do that with the story of Jesus? If the story of Jesus has truly changed our lives, then it should always be at the tip of our tongue. Just like we wait for the moment to tell a cool story of our own, we should be waiting for the right time to share this story that has changed the world.

After all, the resurrection is the message that changed the world. Jesus told his disciples in Luke 24 that this is what they should preach. He says in verse 46, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” The resurrection was what the early church was built on! Think about it. If someone had died and then all of a sudden come back to life in that time, it would be all over the news! Facebook articles would flood our feed. It would be trending all over Twitter. Because this is a story to tell. So are you telling the story of Jesus? Are you telling people about how He has conquered sin on the cross and death over the grave? Is that story worth telling to you? Jesus is asking all of His followers to share this good news. Sometimes we expect people to just watch us and understand why we are different. And yes, I believe if we have been changed by Jesus, then we will begin to look differently. However, Paul makes it clear that people won’t know unless we tell them. Devotional time isn’t solely about what happens in that particular window of time where we read the Bible and pray. Devotional is derived from the word “devotion.” Devotion isn’t just about being committed to

the preparation (quiet time), but also about being committed to the plan. Our time spent with God prepares us to boldly share this life changing news with everyone in our circle of life. Tell the story. This story changes everything.

// Luke 24:36-49 //

*Heavenly Father,*

*Thank you for my story - past, present and future. You have always been with me. You are with me now, and You will be with me forevermore. Give me a sense of urgency to tell my story to those who cross my path of life. Thank you for continuing to write my story every day that I am blessed to live.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge19: Proclaim*

Day 20:

// Hope of the World //

Jesus. The light in the darkness. The hope of the whole world. If Jesus has the power to rise out of the grave, then He certainly has the power to change the world. We get so fixated on how bad our world is. We get lost in thinking that our world is simply “going to hell in a handbasket.” But we have much to be hopeful for. We have hope in a Savior who is just as alive today as the day He ran out of the grave. A Savior who loves people just as much as He did when He lived among people. A Savior who holds the keys to death and has the power of life. A Savior who longs to bless His people with His power and grace. Jesus is still the hope of the world.

If Jesus is strong and mighty enough to bust out of the grave, He is certainly strong enough to change our situations and circumstances. The resurrection of Jesus certainly gives us hope. But not a far-off kind of hope. It’s more of a moment by moment hope that Jesus is up to something, and whatever He is up to is for our good and for His glory. So don’t spend too much time dwelling on whether or not our world is going to go any further downhill. It very well may, but that doesn’t mean we are. Our hope and trust isn’t in any type of politician or world leader. It’s not in any job or accolade. Our hope isn’t in a sports team, celebrity, or popularity status. Our

hope is in Jesus. So we continue to put our hope in Him, believing that day after day, we have the opportunity to show the world His matchless beauty and unrivaled power. The world needs to see that our hope isn't in any kind of man, but in Jesus. Jesus is still shining just as brightly as before. Nothing is dimming Him today. Nothing is robbing Him from power and glory.

So, who or what are you running towards? Because Jesus has risen, He is our hope in the present and future. He is what we put our trust in, believing that He still has the power to heal our loved ones, save our friends/family, and still has enough power to transform our life. Men aren't very trustworthy. Jesus...He is different. He is the treasure of the ages. He is the hope of the world. Is your hope in Him or something else? Rest in the fact that Jesus overcomes every obstacle.

Matthew 12:15-21 // Luke 2:25-39

*Faithful Father,*

*Thank you for the hope that I have in my heart. It is what carries me through when the world is dim and dark. I pray that You keep my hope and faith in You strong in these times so that I can be a witness to a lost and dying world. May they see that there can be peace in the storms of life when Christ is the anchor for their souls.*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge20: Confidence*

Day 21:

// Life //

The story of Jesus is unlike any other. From the beginning of His story His life was challenged. Worshipped as a child, rejected as a man. Believed to be either a liar or lord. Truest of all loves found in the form of humanity. Walking grace and mercy. Dwelling with the ones He loved most. The God-man born to die. Search throughout history and try to find a story that has turned the world upside-down as much as the story of Jesus. It isn't possible. When has a man ever died and come back to life? Let's finish where we started. Jesus is described in the Gospel of John as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." But this Lamb is different from every other lamb that has ever been slain. This Lamb came back to life! That is our story to the world. Jesus

is alive! This news is just as earth-shattering as it was 2,000 years ago. Because of Jesus we don't look at our lives through the lens of death, but the lens of life. The lens of forever. The lens of eternity. Because of the Gospel we know that death has no power. It doesn't have victory. If anything it is our entrance into life. So don't fear death! Our Lamb is ALIVE!

John 14:6-7 // John 5:39-40 // Romans 6:8-11 // Matthew 7:14

*Loving God,*

*I praise You today because You are beyond worthy of all that I have. You conquered death and hell to give me everlasting life. I was in Your plan long ago. I will forever sing Your praises. Your love for me is greater than the earth, sky or sea. Your love is measureless and will forevermore endure. Hallelujah! I live because You are alive!*

*~In Jesus Name, Amen~*

*Challenge21: Praise*