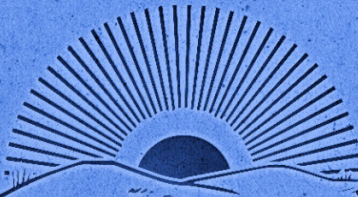




ROOTED ACT V

MESSIAH

Lent 2024



YOU'RE INVITED TO READ THE FIRST FOUR BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT — ALL FOUR GOSPELS!

Use this **daily reading plan** to encounter Jesus in the firsthand accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

This Lenten booklet, written by various Bethany staff, will guide you through **weekly spiritual disciplines** and ancient practices that have shaped the Church from the beginning.

You may miss a day or a week; just pick up where you left off or skip ahead. Keep going! The point isn't to accomplish a task; the point is to spend meaningful time with God in Scripture and in daily life.

The Bible is the living word of God meant to shape us as we read it. The redemptive arc of the Bible points to the core message: That a man, Jesus, who was fully God, came to live among us, die on our behalf, and rise in a cosmic act of love and redemption so that we can have a full relationship with God. Meet with and get to know this Messiah through Lent 2024 readings and practices!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How did you see the Messiah in this week's reading? Did the passage invite you to do or be anything?
2. How did you engage with the spiritual practice this week? What was that like?
3. With both the reading and practice in mind, what did you learn about yourself this week? How are you being invited to stretch, and how are you being invited to sit in the grace of Jesus?

DAILY READING GUIDE

FEBRUARY 18—APRIL 6

Week 1: Scripture Reading

- Feb 18 Sunday Worship
- Feb 19 Luke 1–3
- Feb 20 Luke 4–5
- Feb 21 Luke 6–7
- Feb 22 Mark 1–3
- Feb 23 Mark 4–7
- Feb 24 Matthew 1:1–4:17

Week 2: Solitude

- Feb 25 Sunday Worship
- Feb 26 John 1–3
- Feb 27 John 4–5
- Feb 28 John 6–7
- Feb 29 John 8–9
- March 1 John 10
- March 2 Matthew 4:18–25, 16

Week 3: Service

- March 3 Sunday Worship
- March 4 Luke 8–9
- March 5 Luke 10–11
- March 6 Luke 12–14
- March 7 Luke 15–17
- March 8 Luke 18–19
- March 9 Matthew 5–7

Week 4: Fasting

- March 10 Sunday Worship
- March 11 Mark 8–9
- March 12 Mark 10–11
- March 13 Mark 12–13
- March 14 Mathew 8–10
- March 15 Mathew 11–13
- March 16 John 11

Week 5: Generosity

- March 17 Sunday Worship
- March 18 John 12–13
- March 19 John 14–17
- March 20 Matthew 14–16
- March 21 Matthew 17–18
- March 22 Matthew 19–20
- March 23 Matthew 21

Week 6: Prayer

- March 24 Palm Sunday Worship
- March 25 John 17–18
- March 26 Luke 20–22
- March 27 Mark 14:1–15:32;
John 19:1–16
- March 28 Matthew 26–27:44
- March 29 Luke 23; Mark 15:33–47;
John 19:17–42;
Matthew 27:45–66
- March 30 Luke 24:1–13;
Mark 16:1–8; John 20:1–9;
Matthew 28:1–15

Week 7: Confession

- March 31 Easter Sunday Worship
- April 1 Matthew 22–23
- April 2 Matthew 24–25
- April 3 Luke 24:14–53
- April 4 Mark 16:9–20
- April 5 John 20:10–25
- April 6 Matthew 21



churchbcc.org/rooted

THE WILDERNESS OF LENT

Introduction to Lent & Overview of Reading Plan

Pastor Nathan Seppi

Pastor of Youth and Family, Bethany North

As we step into this next Act in our year-long journey through the Bible, we also find ourselves at the start of the liturgical season of Lent, the season of preparation for Easter.

The origins of Lent are rooted both in Scripture and the tradition of the early church. In Scripture, the 40-day season of Lent (46 days total, but Sundays are considered sabbath days) traces its origins to the 40 days that Christ spent being tempted in the wilderness in preparation for His ministry (see Mark 1:12-13, Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13). Traditionally, Lent has been a solemn season birthed from the early church that has encouraged a variety of spiritual practices meant to prepare the Christ-followers' heart, soul, body, and mind for the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Lent in this way, then, is a season of preparation by way of wilderness.

While the wilderness for many today has become a place of recreation and leisure, this was different in biblical times. For them, the wilderness was a place fraught with peril and the unknown. It was a place where you had little security and found yourself at the mercy of what you can't control. Indeed, we often see that the people of the Bible do not choose to go to the wilderness, but instead, are often led there by God. That is because, for God, the wilderness is a place of formation. If we allow it, then, Lent can be a wilderness for us.

As we enter this season, may we allow the Spirit to lead us into the formational wilderness of Lent and prepare ourselves for all that Easter holds. In this booklet, you will find practices offered to you inspired by *The Good of Giving Up* by Aaron Damiani with accompanied reflections offered by members in the Bethany community. These practices are not meant to be prescriptive or burdensome. They are an invitation to leave your regular rhythms behind and enter a wilderness, allowing God to form and speak to you in ways that you can't yet anticipate. In this way, we do not use these practices to "make God happen," or as a metric of our success as a Christian, but with them, we make space in our lives to encounter God anew. Thus, let us journey together in this season of Lent and find ourselves brought deeper into our relationship with Christ.

PREPARING YOURSELF TO DISCOVER THE FREEDOM OF LENT

1. 1. As you consider the journey of Lent, what is the Lord's invitation to you in this season? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a picture of freedom, grace, and/or change He wants for you.
2. Ask someone about their experience with Lent or another intentional season of spiritual growth.
3. With whom might you share your intention for Lent 2024?

WEEK 1 – SCRIPTURE READING

Pastor Nathan Seppi

Pastor of Youth and Family, Bethany North

As I move about in my life as a pastor, I encounter curiosity around the origin of the Gospels. Who wrote them? What are they? Why do we have four of them? Why do they differ slightly? Such curiosity is particularly justified because these four books are the core frame through which the Messiah is made known, God’s story revealed.

These questions were some of the same that the early church also wrestled with! In fact, there was a debate as to whether the early church should just smooth over some of these issues and consolidate the four Gospels into one cohesive book (see *The Diatessaron of Tatian*). The Church, however, decided to preserve these four biographies of Christ, and by doing so, they gave us an immense gift. In each of the Gospels, we encounter the same Jesus, but we encounter Him in a slightly different way.

In Matthew, we see Jesus through the lens of Jewish tradition by an author who held the name of God so reverently; he insisted on using the phrasing Kingdom of “Heaven” instead of writing the name “God.”

In Mark, we see Jesus as the disciples did; as we are rushed from story to story with words like “immediately” and “at once,” we are left to make sense of who this man is just as they did.

In Luke, we see Jesus through the eyes of a learned historian piecing together all he can know about Jesus with an emphasis on how Jesus interacted with the marginalized.

In John, we see Jesus from the perspective of the inner circle where Jesus explicitly talks about his identity as the Son of God.

With this in mind, the invitation is to journey through these influential and timeless texts above all as a means of encountering Christ. And **let us not just encounter Christ as a character in a story, but as God’s Messiah who, in His death and resurrection, continues to speak to us and call us to follow Him today.**

“The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for a theologian to swim in without ever touching the bottom”

- St. Jerome (born 342 AD, as Eusebius Hieronymus)

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SCRIPTURE READING:

1. Engage with the Scriptures in a different way than you usually do: read out loud, listen to an audio Bible, or try a different translation.
2. Pick out a single verse from the reading; write it out on a notecard or post-it.
3. Decide to read Scripture daily. Create a time and place where you’ll read Scripture during this season of Lent. Is this a midday, early morning, or evening? What would support building this habit? Headphones, blanket, comfy chair?

WEEK 2 – SOLITUDE

Pastor Richard Dahlstrom
BCC Teaching Pastor, Emeritus

One of the realities that we all face is aloneness. We're born alone, we'll die alone, and along the way, each of us walk a path that is ours alone. We deal with this reality by choosing either loneliness or solitude. Loneliness is a path to all kinds of difficulties, whereas solitude leads us to lean into our relationship with God as our ever-present companion.

Turning to God, who is invisible, usually requires an intentional removal of that which is visible because, given a choice, we'll choose the visible over the invisible almost every time. For this reason, God leads people away from the crowds, away from the noise and distraction of the material world, so that we might encounter the invisible, hidden realities.

Abraham was to become the father of a nation, but the beginning of his call was a call to "Go forth from your...relatives and from your father's house" (Genesis 12). God's intention had been that Abraham would be leaning into God alone as the source. For many, it's more tempting to look elsewhere.

Abraham's grandson, Jacob, is shaped through solitude as he faces God alone in the desert—twice. Later still, Jacob's son Joseph was shaped by solitude, again a solitude not of his own choosing. Hated by his brothers, he was sold into slavery and then later framed for sexual assault and put in prison, where he was forgotten for years.

Moses? Alone in the wilderness, partially because of some bad choices, but alone, nevertheless. Later, Moses was once again alone with God, this time on a mountaintop for 40 days to receive the revelation of God's heart, all that He desired for His people, Israel. Alone with God, his heart was shaped for all that followed. Solitude, ironically, leads to intimacy with God!

Jesus chose solitude for a variety of reasons—In preparation (Luke 4:1-2, 14-15); to recharge (Mark 6:30-32); to grieve (Matt 14: 1-13); to discern and decide (Luke 6:12-13); in times of distress (Luke 22:39-44); to focus on prayer (Luke 5:16). How could solitude lead you to deepen your intimacy with Jesus this Lent?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SOLITUDE:

1. Develop one single habit to learn solitude with God. It could be five minutes of meditation, a daily walk, jog, or journal time—anything that allows you to be alone with God.
2. Face your FOMO. We're often starved of solitude because we choose trivialities over the challenge and blessing of silence and solitude with God. Anything else seems better! By naming this and paying attention to how the thought of missing out is played out within our bodies, we bring it into the light and can overcome the constant motion driven by the Fear of Missing Out.
3. Make your solitude a time for just you and God, rather than you and God and a book, or music, or news, or social media. We have the privilege of learning and developing intimacy with our Creator.

WEEK 3 – SERVICE

Amy Wilkinson

Associate Director of Belong Ministry

The journey of Lent prepares our hearts to celebrate Christ’s salvation. The physical realities we invite into our lives during the season of Lent, such as fasting, generosity, and service, remind us of our true spiritual reality: our need for Christ.

And so, why is **service** a practice of Lent?

We serve during Lent because Christ served. The act of service to others—to the poor, to the sick, to women, to children, to the marginalized, to the outcasts, to even his own disciples—was a part of Christ’s daily life. It was not a calendar event nor an item on his to-do list. It was who He was. When Jesus served, He showed us that **the center of the act of service was actually an invitation into a relationship.**

The forgiveness of sins Christ offers again and again alongside His acts of healing and miraculous provision is the doorway to relationship with God. The loaves and fish were not about the meal; they were about Christ’s love.

We serve during Lent because the intentional act of service alongside other spiritual practices remind us of our equal need for God. How often do we disengage from suffering because we simply don’t know what to do with it? When we are unable to solve someone’s suffering, we respond to it by “fleeing from it, or finding a quick cure” (Henri Nouwen).

Through the practices of Lent, we can bring our lack of answers, our pain, and fears before God and **stand alongside those who are suffering in communion with them**, rather than avoiding or trying to solve their pain. When we believe the act of service is about solving a specific problem, we either realize we are unable to find the solution and disengage, or we burn out from trying to force a solution. If our presence cannot solve homelessness, do we avoid those who are experiencing it?

Christ invites us to carry these difficult questions into our acts of service, to stand in relationship with those we serve, to confess our confusion and judgments, to pray with those who are hurting and ask for God’s help, to generously give of our ourselves, and to walk alongside the other as we journey towards knowing Christ.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF SERVICE:

1. **Hold:** Is there an area of suffering or pain in the world or the lives of those around you that brings you discomfort – maybe because you don’t know how to serve or what the solution is? You’re invited to hold that topic, to bring it before God, express your discomfort and confusion, and ask God to be with you in your confusion. Ask God and yourself, what might service look like in this area?
2. **Listen:** Where are you serving now? In the places you are serving, is there time to sit and listen to their story and their experience? Lean into relationships where you already serve.
3. **Serve with your hands:** Prepare someone a meal, visit someone who could use a friend, or look on our website for ways to get involved, but find an opportunity to serve someone this Lenten season.

WEEK 4 – FASTING

PASTOR BRAD THAYER
LEAD PASTOR, BETHANY BALLARD

Fasting can be intimidating, especially to get started, but when we look at the purpose of why we fast, it's intended to be freeing. **Fasting invites us to remove distractions from our lives** to better focus on where God is leading, divert our energies toward a specific prayer need or a spiritual challenge, and/or discern what cravings have a hold on us. Fasting is about prioritizing our lives before God. This prioritization allows us to see, hear, and worship God more clearly.

To do this, we abstain from things for a set time and use that energy to seek God's direction and care. Most often, the things we're abstaining from are generally good: certain foods or drinks, media or entertainment, a particular activity, spending money in a particular way, or anything in our life that has become bigger or more important than we'd want it to be. By fasting, the hope is that the energy we usually give to those other things can be directed toward God and prayer.

We see fasting throughout Scripture: Nehemiah fasted and prayed, mourning over the state of the Jerusalem walls (Nehemiah 1). David fasted while interceding over his sick child (2 Samuel 12). Esther asked her people to fast as she met with the King (Esther 4:16).

Jesus, after He was baptized, went into the desert where He fasted for 40 days (Matthew 4:1-11). It's important to note that the fasting didn't bring more of God's approval; God had already said that he was "pleased" with who Jesus was. Instead, the fasting was a way to prepare Him for his ministry. Just like Jesus, our fasting doesn't earn us more favor with God—we already have that—but it does allow us to focus on what God is preparing us for in days to come.

Fasting is a great practice that can be used to focus our attention on what God is doing. However, our fasting is not what impresses God. Hebrews tells us that our confidence to approach God's throne is only found in Christ (Hebrews 10:19)

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF FASTING:

1. **Media Fast:** We are inundated with messaging 24/7 with social media feeds, news stories, constant scrolling, and bingeing tv series. Addiction to information has been linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and constant comparison. What would it look like for us to take a pause from media for a set amount of time? How might God fill that time?
2. **Word or Action Fast:** In the same way that we are inundated with information, there is often pressure to talk and contribute to the space around us. Whether it be at the proverbial water cooler, dinner table, or another space, what words or actions would you want to fast from this season? Talking about your co-workers, spending money on sundry items, interrupting a family member who's talking? As you do this, what does God reveal about your completeness in Him?
3. **Food Fast:** We all have our go-to comfort food. For most of us most of the time, food is an excellent and good choice as a source of comfort. What would it be like to take a break for a short time from getting comfort in this way in order to focus on God's presence in that moment? Fasting from food often brings up our histories with our bodies, so keep watch for those messages. Fasting from food all together should only be done when safe with your overall health needs.

Regardless of what you fast from, incorporating prayer or meditation on Scripture whenever you feel a craving will allow us to return our focus on how God is moving in that moment.

WEEK 5 – GENEROSITY

LYDIA CHOI

ASSOCIATE PASTOR OF BETHANY NORTH

As Jesus models throughout the Gospels, generosity is a posture to bless those around us with our time, attention, love, and resources.

This Lenten season, generosity might begin with your time: pausing to be present with your surroundings—neighborhood, work, school, family, roommates, or whatever your world looks like. Who are the people around you? What do you notice about them? Who needs your prayer, support, and/or encouragement? What are the ways you can serve the church in this season? How is the Holy Spirit tugging at your heart to be generous with your time? In Matthew 25:40, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Ten years ago, in March of 2014, our family of five was busy preparing and fundraising for a six-month mission training and outreach to Asia with a group of other families. We were still a few thousand dollars short of our fundraising goal when we learned there was another family that was in great need. As we were praying for the other family, God gave me a nudge to give a large sum of our personal savings to support this family. God led me to give not out of abundance, but out of obedience and generosity. Generosity is not a transaction between us and God, but a Spirit-led way to bless others without a guarantee of return on investment, whether that be financial, social, time, love, patience, or other resources.

HENRI NOUWEN WROTE:

Jesus is God-for-us, God-within-us, Jesus is God giving himself completely, pouring himself out for us without reserve. Jesus doesn't hold back or cling to his own possessions. He gives all there is to give. 'Eat, drink, this is my body, this is my blood... this is me for you!'

—*With Burning Hearts*

Let us be like Jesus in this Lenten season. Our sacrifices of time and resources are small in comparison to what God has given to us, and yet, God magnifies our gifts of time, talent, and treasure and uses them in mighty ways.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF GENEROSITY:

1. Post an envelope labeled “Generosity Fund” on your fridge. During Lent, as unexpected money comes your way or you feel called to fast from something that has a financial component: e.g. buying coffee, put that money in the envelope or Venmo account. As Lent comes to a close, pray for discernment on how to use the money—a particular person in your life? A cause that you feel drawn to? One of Bethany’s local mission partners? Pay attention to how it feels in your body to both put money in the envelope and give it away in Jesus’ name.
2. Take a walk around your neighborhood and simply ask God, “How can I be serving my neighborhood?”
3. Volunteer at one of Bethany’s Easter services to bless our community!

WEEK 6 – PRAYER

SCOTT SUND

SENIOR PASTOR, BETHANY COMMUNITY CHURCH

“Praying means above all listening to the voice of Jesus. Whatever we do in our lives, let us never fail to listen to the voice of the Lord in our hearts. Because in our restless, noisy world, the loving voice of God is easily drowned out.”

– Henri Nouwen (in *Show Me the Way: Daily Lenten Readings*)

Prayer is the gateway from the life we live to the deeper life of the Spirit Christ is inviting us into. When we pray, we are choosing to be with the Lord.

As we enter into Holy Week, the final week of Jesus’s earthly life, we see Jesus humbly riding on a donkey, praying the cup of suffering would be taken from Him, and then lovingly welcoming sacrifice at the last supper with His disciples.

The last week of Jesus’ life was spent speaking truth, serving others, and being in rest and in prayer. **In His last days, Jesus modeled that we’re called to intimacy in all times, especially (and most poignantly) when we’re in spaces of hurt, worry, and pain. Jesus prayed in the garden, prayed at the table, and prayed at the cross.**

In the same way, as those following Christ as disciples, we must be people of prayer. Paul said in Ephesians 6:18, “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

To pray is to put into practice the faith in our Heavenly Father, who sent His Son to walk this earth to model the way of love, and who, after the Resurrection, ascended into Heaven and left us His spirit. May you experience the Lord this week. How? Be a person of prayer each and every day as we head together towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF PRAYER:

1. Regularity: Set a consistent time this week to pray for a set time each day. You can set a timer so you won’t be distracted.
2. Intimately: Think of Jesus in the garden praying over and over for God to be with Him in his time of distress (Matthew 26:36-46). **Name your pain and ask God to meet you in that space. Be brave. Be honest. Be real.**
3. Intercessory: Make a list of 10 people who are in your life. Start with those closest to you: children, roommates, neighbors, coworkers. Pray for them every day this week. Ask them how you can pray, and let them know you are praying for them. Consider inviting them to Easter services at your Bethany location on Sunday.
4. Corporately: Go to churchbcc.org/247prayer, and sign up for a 1-hour slot as we once again pray 24/7 during Holy Week as an entire church. Pray for the church, the city, and your circle of relationships.

WEEK 7 – CONFESSION

PASTOR PHIL MAULDING
SENIOR ASSOCIATE PASTOR, BETHANY GREEN LAKE

Confession is the starting point of our faith. We enter into faith through our awareness and confession that we are not God, we need Him, and have fallen short. Through confession, we break through the delusion that we’ve got our “act together” and recognize that none of us are without sin. 1 John 1:8-10 tells us, if we are truthful, we know we fail to love perfectly. The wonderful part of our faith is the work of Jesus on the cross. He forgives us and removes our transgressions so that we are righteous through Jesus.

One of the biggest hurdles in confession is our pride and fear of failure. We don’t want to admit our sins to ourselves, let alone to God or one another. Pride and shame become barriers. We, like Adam and Eve, go and hide in shame, hoping God doesn’t see us. David in Psalm 32 (32:3,5,7) names that when we don’t confess our sins, it can even take a physical toll on our bodies. But when we do confess, there is a burden lifted. The apostle James says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed” (James 5:16a). The healing is physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational.

When it comes to confessing to God, we are not sharing new information with Him—He already knows everything; He’s not shocked or surprised by anything we have to say. Rather, confession invites us to receive the love Jesus is offering as we stand in truth before Him. Our honesty will set us free. On the cross Jesus said, “it is finished,” and so it is.

There is healing in the act of confession (James 5:16a)! We not only open ourselves to release shame and guilt, but we also open ourselves to receive forgiveness, mercy, and grace. It’s especially powerful when another believer can look us in the eye and say, “You are forgiven. You are loved.”

After confession comes repentance—changing our behavior and making it right—but confession is the start.

Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. —Jesus to his disciples

Matthew 5:23–24

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF CONFESSION:


1. Review your day: Where did you have gratitude and see God work? Where do you see places to grow, love, and reflect Christ? What do you need to confess—in thought, word, deed, in things done and left undone? Confess to yourself and in prayer to the Lord.
2. Tell another: Confessing to God and then another moves us toward healing. Share with a safe person (friend, spouse, pastor, therapist, etc.) the ways or a way you’d like to change.
3. Reflect on what you’d like to change and achievable steps you could make. Keep your amends list short. Go and make things right as soon as possible with those you have wronged (see Matthew 5:23-24 and Numbers 5:5-7).

“The season of Lent is a participation in God’s life, not an entrance fee to heaven. Our security comes from resting in God’s free gift.”

The Good of Giving Up: Discovering the Freedom of Lent, Aaron Damiani

“Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning.”

Dallas Willard


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