



A Lenten Devotional Guide

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

A Lenten Devotional Guide

We are glad you've joined us for this journey through Lent! Historically, Lent has been a time to reflect on Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. It has also been a time of self-examination and reflection on how we can follow Christ sacrificially in our own lives.

As Christians we know that Christ's life didn't end with His crucifixion. Instead, His sacrifice led to resurrection and new life, which brings hope to us all. Similarly, many scripture passages tell us that it is only by dying to ourselves that we, too, find true life. The bible repeatedly teaches that when we surrender ourselves to Christ we will find new life in Him.

Our 2015 Lenten journey will focus on **6 key scripture passages** that describe this process of dying to self and finding new life in Christ. Each week we will focus on one of these passages and ask how it can help us better follow Christ. This booklet directs you to the scripture passage selected for each week and includes a brief devotional reading. It also contains note pages for you to use as you reflect on the scripture for yourself throughout the week.

In addition, **two reflection questions and an action question** will be made available weekly to help guide you in applying these passages to your life. Each Sunday morning these reflections questions, printed on convenient bookmarks, will be found hanging on the cross in our church Welcome Center. You are invited to literally "journey to the cross" to receive your reflections for the week. If you are unable to make it to church the questions will also be available on the church website.

Finally, at the end of Lent, on Easter Sunday, you will be provided with a paper flower in your bulletin. We invite you to write on it what you have learned, as well as listing any commitment(s) you have made as a result of this journey. After the service, we encourage you to hang your flower on the cross, allowing the cross to "bloom."

Let us embark upon this journey through death to new life in Christ!

A Special Thanks

TO THE CHRISTIAN FORMATION MINISTRY TEAM
who prayerfully created this devotional guide.

Mary Beth Asbury

Jeff Fryer

Judy Fryer

Jonathan Jordan

Phil Potratz

Dayna Schoonmaker

Jim Whitaker

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 1 - Feb. 22-28

Take a moment to read and reflect on Romans 6:3-14.

There are two fundamental ways to live our lives. One is to live selfishly – to pursue selfish ambition and aim to gratify our earthly desires. This path inevitably leads to fearful protection of our life and belongings, alienation from God and others, loneliness, and ultimately death. The other approach to life is to live selflessly – offering ourselves to God and seeking to honor Him in all we do. This selfless path gives new meaning and purpose to life, freedom from fear, a generous spirit, fellowship with God and others, and ultimately life. The reality, according to Romans, is that we all live somewhere between these two basic approaches to life. This week's scripture passage implores us to die to our old self, the selfish way of life, and come alive to our new way of life in Christ. This is precisely our goal during this journey of Lent.

Verses 3-4 refer to our time of baptism as a crucifixion of our life of selfishness so that, as Christ died and was raised to new life, we also might die to our old self and come alive to the new life God has for us. Verses 5-7 repeat the idea of dying to our old self so that we might no longer be slaves but be set free. Verse 8 pronounces our great hope – that dying to our self actually means we will live a new life with Christ! The joy of the Christian journey is that we do not walk it alone. Christ lives in us and will be our guide and companion along the way. Verses 9-14 affirm that, because Christ's spirit lives in us, sin is not our master. Instead, we are alive to God and live by grace.

Seen in the context of eternity, the great challenge and opportunity of this life is that we have been given free will to choose. We can use our free will to seek personal gain, or to offer our life to God and others. The great paradox is that if we seek to save our own life, we will lose it. If we offer it freely to God, we not only glorify our creator, but we also gain a life of freedom and fruitfulness.

Let us, then "die with Christ, so that we might also live with Him."
Romans 6:8

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 2 - March 1-7

Take a moment to read and reflect on Romans 12:1-2.

The word sacrifice can be a scary word. We tend to associate it with having to do something extra or having to lose something in our lives. Too often, we view sacrifice in legalistic terms, thinking that *if* I do not do _____ (insert your sin/ addiction/struggle), *then* God will reward me.

However, if we look closely at this passage, we see that Paul's message is far from encouraging legalism. The key to understanding Paul's message is an often-overlooked word—*therefore*. With this one word, Paul demonstrates that sacrifice is not something that we have to do, but something that we should want to do. Paul reminds us that God has given us many blessings and mercies, and because of this, we should want to worship Him with our entire being—our mind, our body, and our soul.

Because we live in a sinful world things will try to get in the way of our worship. We often find ourselves talking to everyone else about our problems instead of talking to God about them; we turn to things for comfort instead of turning to God; and we prioritize work, family, and even church over God.

Yet, in this passage, Paul tells us that God wants us—just as we are—to come to Him and be fully His. It is only through Him that we can be transformed. He wants our weaknesses so that He can turn them into strengths; He wants our struggles so that He can turn them into victories; He wants our messes so that He can turn them into messages. He wants it all.

When we sacrifice, or give ourselves fully to God, we not only become new beings, but we also show Him that we trust Him, which is the ultimate form of worship. While the word *sacrifice* can be intimidating, it is ultimately one of the best things we can do for ourselves. Let this Lenten season not only be a time of giving yourself to God but also allow Him to transform you. God wants to transform us, but we must first be willing to give ourselves fully to Him.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 3 - March 8-14

Take a moment to read and reflect on Philippians 3:7-14.

Have you ever been singing a song in church and realized that you might not be living the life your words proclaim? If you have, you know the feeling of a quick gut check. If you haven't, read through a few of the verses we sing. For instance, we sing, "When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of Glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride." Do we really count our gains as loss? Do we pour contempt on our pride? It is easy to fall into a pattern of thought that says, "Sure, that sounds good. If I say that's me, or act like that's my story, maybe somehow it will become true." It is even easier to just sing words without ever really taking them in.

Like those songs, Phil 3:7-14 provides an opportunity for a real gut check. It reminds us that the Christian calling is to more than just glancing over words on an ancient page. Take time to read yourself into this story, speak the words on the page aloud, "Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." In reading the scriptures this way we find ourselves invited to seriously consider whether we actually mean what we are saying.

Lent is the perfect time for checking our words against our actions. It is a time for considering who we are and who we'd like to become in Christ. There is a time for just saying words and hoping they will somehow become true, but there also comes a time when we must start actively trying to become the person we were made to be. It's a process of dying so that we might truly live.

This life anew in Christ is a never-ending, life-demanding endeavor. As verse 12 reminds us, it is not that we will obtain the perfect reality of life in Christ in this life, but nevertheless we press on toward the goal. May this Lenten season provide a fresh opportunity to fix our eyes on the goal remembering the prize that draws us heavenward.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 4 - March 15-21

Take a moment to read and reflect on Matthew 6:25-33.

As we began our Lenten journey the grey skies of winter were pressing in at the windows. Winter can be a dark time. We experience less sunshine, more sickness, and barren landscapes. Problems seem to surround us on every side and anxiety is often our default response. The world and its demands can be so persistent that we react by worrying. We worry about our health, our family, our finances; and the list goes on. Our lives seem to be lived in that dark and confusing Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We know the promise of the cross, but we've yet to realize the fulfillment of life anew in the Kingdom of Heaven. We have a 'Holy Saturday' yearning for spring and new life.

Jesus understands our longings. However, He encourages us to put our priorities in order. During his ministry, Jesus used many metaphors to describe His kingdom. In one parable, He described the kingdom as a treasure hidden in a field that is so valuable it is worth selling everything we own in order to obtain it. He wants us to see that seeking the world first will leave us empty handed, but seeking the kingdom brings us closer to God. When we reset our perspective, "all the these other things will be added unto us." Jesus does not diminish the goodness of food and clothing. He enjoyed these things Himself. But He cautions that worrying about such things is not appropriate for citizens of God's kingdom. Jesus wants us to place our hope not in things seen, but in things unseen; to hope in the promised security of what's to come, rather than seeking security in the fleeting things of this world.

As we approach the cross during Lent, we often approach with a yoke of anxiety. Let us lay our worries down. Let us confess our weakness and deep need for Jesus. Let us live each day thankful for our daily bread trusting that God holds us in the very palm of His hand. As we move from winter into spring, may we lean into the Easter side of life seeking His kingdom and eagerly awaiting all things new!

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 5 - March 22-28

Take a moment to read and reflect on Galatians 5:16-25.

Galatians asks us to live by the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, almost like a shield protecting us. This scripture also reminds us that we are not called to cower behind the Spirit, but we are to plant the Spirit in our lives. When we do, the result will be Spirit produced fruit. The Spirit not only protects us, but works through us if we humble ourselves and obey.

We live in a hostile world where life demands a courageous struggle from day to day. In an increasingly difficult time it is easy to see our moral fiber eroding before our eyes. Yet Jesus calls us to bear fruit and be righteous. The Advocate that God sent to us on Jesus' behalf is here to help us walk in righteousness and, as Paul puts it, "not gratify the desires of the flesh." We are called to be set apart.

This passage reminds us that the Spirit is there to help, to stand by, and to provide us with the gifts needed to share the word of God with those around us, whether that be in the workplace, at home, in our community or with our own family.

Faith is often best shared through what we do rather than by what we say. When your life shows those around you that you are not consumed by gratifying desires of the flesh, it speaks volumes more than handing out a tract or criticizing others' bad behavior.

Paul admonishes us that when we plant the Spirit in our hearts it will produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We have the choice to live our lives consumed by our own pursuit of pleasure or to be guided by the Spirit in what we do in a way that will produce the life that Jesus wants us to live. This Lenten season may we deliberately pursue the fruit of the Spirit rather than the false pleasures of this world.

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST / *Alive in His Love*

Week 6 - March 29- April 4

Take a moment to read and reflect on John 15:1-12.

Fruit trees...hydrangea bushes...roses. What do all these have in common? In order to produce bountiful and beautiful flowers and fruit, these species must be pruned. Pruning is the key.

Chapter 15 presents one of the many "I am" statements found in John's gospel. It presents God as the One that plants and grows the vine. It introduces Jesus as the True Vine. We, who claim to be the people of God, are the branches. So how does "pruning" apply to us? If we allow Jesus to be a part of *all* of our life, we allow ourselves to be guided by His teachings. Even more than being taught, we allow ourselves to live by His teachings. To truly do this we must allow our lives to be trimmed and pruned of anything that does not glorify God.

Notice how the word *abide* is repeated many times in these verses. It means to stay, to dwell, or to sojourn. In these verses, Jesus asks us to abide in Him and to let Him abide in us. This indwelling, this co-existence, enables us to abide in the love of Jesus, just as Jesus abides in the love of God. We are not sent out as Christians to go alone without help or companionship. We go even as we continue to abide in love.

And so Jesus invites us to follow Him, to abide in Him, to allow our lives to be totally immersed in His teachings and discipleship. What will our lives look like if we let Jesus abide in us and us in Him? The joy of Christ will be in us and our joy will be complete.

Amen.

Alive in His Love

Moving forward we encourage you to continue reflecting on the sacrifices you've made and the transformation that God is working within you. But most of all it is our prayer that you will not forget that you were created to really *live* this life. You can experience life abundant here and now because of the grace, love, and presence of God the Father, Jesus the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

And now...

May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
May the Lord lift His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26



First Baptist Church
of MURFREESBORO