

**DAY 1 • DEVOTION****READ MARK 1:9-15 (NIV)**

*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

When I was in high school, my parents read a book entitled *The Blessing*. It was about the fundamental power of words of blessing when spoken over a child's life. The blessing is especially potent when coming from the child's father. The authors told stories of people who had never received this sense of approval, love, and delight. When it was denied from parents, they spent the rest of their lives searching for it in one way or another—usually with sad, even tragic results. In this opening scene of Mark's gospel, Jesus receives his Father's blessing: "You are my dear son. I'm delighted in you."

The story begins with the voice of John the Baptist, calling people to repentance and foretelling the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "One more powerful than I am is coming after me; I am not worthy to bend down and untie the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8). Then suddenly, there he is! Jesus arrives at the edge of the river, wanting to be baptized. Mark narrates the event from Jesus' perspective. I have tried to imagine what it was like to see the heavens "torn asunder," revealing the spiritual realm, usually invisible to the human eye. The Holy Spirit descended "like a dove," say all four gospel writers, and then ... there was the voice. The divine Father speaks directly to his son, proclaiming his identity and declaring his own pleasure in him. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

I am struck by the rare presence of all three members of the Trinity in this scene. The Father's voice booms over the gathering, the Spirit's visible presence is somehow dove-like, and God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, splashes into the Jordan

River rising from the water with his eyes wide open. If I could choose one moment in Jesus' life to witness personally, I think this might be it.

Suddenly, the story takes a dark turn. The Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness where he will live without food for the next forty days. At the end of this time, Jesus will be tempted by Satan. The experience will leave him physically depleted, but spiritually triumphant and strengthened for the purpose for which he came in the first place: to manifest the Kingdom of God on planet earth.

The fasting season of Lent is observed in imitation of this wilderness experience of Jesus. Christians have set aside the 40 days leading up to Easter as a spiritual pilgrimage of sorts. As ancient Israel emerged from the Red Sea to wander in the wilderness for forty years, so Jesus rises from the waters of the Jordan to walk alone into the wilderness for forty days.

Now it's our turn. We have experienced God's love and delight. We have been plunged beneath the waters of baptism, and now we are invited to take the journey. We do not have to go, but if we choose to, we may arrive at Resurrection Day with more spiritual energy than we have ever known. There are many wonderful ways to engage the Lenten season. Fasting is only one of them. We do not recommend going without food entirely, but maybe you could choose one day per week, say Fridays, to fast ... or skip breakfast, or choose an element of your diet like chocolate or coffee to do without. Remember that Sundays are feast days, so you can enjoy the item you're fasting from on Sundays. The point is not to become a martyr for the faith, but to lean into the discomfort as a way to identify with Jesus. Whenever you begin to crave the thing you set aside, take the opportunity to thank Jesus for the discomfort he endured on our behalf. Ask him to reveal himself to you, to move in and occupy the emptiness left by whatever you have abandoned for the season.

# DAY 2 • BIBLE STUDY

## **GENESIS 9:8-17**

Genesis chapters 1-11 is a series of very old oral traditions about origins. In Genesis, Moses begins his narration of Israel's relationship with God using these stories to reveal how unique Israel's God is compared to other gods at the time. Scripture doesn't shy away from dark and difficult times, whether it is judgment on a wicked generation, temptation in the desert, or even death by crucifixion, there is always hope. We can enter these moments in the fullness of that hope.

### **PREPARATION**

Be seated in your comfortable place. Grab your colored pencils or pens to mark your observations. Set your timer if necessary. Take a breath and let yourself be reminded that Jesus is with you as you study the Scriptures. Ask him for his insights.

### **OBSERVATION**

Read Genesis 9:8-17 closely. As you read, mark repeated words or phrases. Think of this as a treasure hunt. Read again to catch what you might have missed the first time.

### **INTERPRETATION**

Read the passage again reflecting on all the things you've noticed. Let yourself be curious. Is there a word you'd like to know the biblical definition of? ([blueletterbible.com](http://blueletterbible.com) or [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com) are accessible resources for this.)

Ask questions: "What actions are taking place?" or "Who is doing the acting?" In this passage, judgment on early humanity has taken place. How does Israel's God act to alleviate the lingering fear of his people going forward? The idea of covenant permeates this passage. What is a covenant? ([biblestudytools.com/dictionary/covenant](http://biblestudytools.com/dictionary/covenant)) Once you have done your work, you might wish to access a commentary.

### **APPLICATION**

Respond. Take your observations and interpretations and make for yourself an application for the day or for the week. Noah and his family came through the flood to new life. This idea echoes through the Scriptures even into the New Testament as Baptism. Have you been baptized? Take a moment to relive that moment. Perhaps you are impressed that God loved his creation so much that he covenanted to never again destroy it by flood. What is one thing you can do to respect God's creation? End your time of study with a prayer of thanksgiving for the renewing of your mind!

# **DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER**

---

## **MARK 1:9-11**

Always keep in mind that when we use our imagination in reading the Scriptures, we stay within the boundaries of what is written. We use our imagination by accessing our own experiences to fill in details of the passage to bring the Scriptures to life.

### **PREPARE**

Be seated in your comfortable place. Take a couple of deep breaths, breathing in the peace of Christ and breathing out any stress. If it helps, set a timer so you aren't worried about the time.

### **READ MARK 1:9-11**

Read the passage slowly, once or twice, and consider these things: the distance from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan river near Jerusalem is about sixty miles, a journey of several days. Jesus has left home and probably won't return. He's left his mother in the care of his younger siblings, and he's on his way to begin his ministry.

Close your eyes and imagine what this might have been like. Walk with him. What does he share with you, excitement, trepidation, or something else? Do you offer him encouragement? Do you feel the crunch of rock and dirt under your feet? Do you camp overnight? When you finally catch sight of the Jordan, is the water inviting after the long journey? Do your feet ache? What do you experience when Jesus wades into the water to meet a man there? Can you hear what they are saying? As you watch, what happens? What do you see and hear? Are you able to speak with Jesus as he wades out of the water? Stay with any part of the story as long as you wish.

### **PRAY**

Finish your time with a prayer of gratitude for your time spent with Jesus. Take a moment to record your impressions and your experience.

# **DAY 4 • LECTIO DIVINA**

## **1 PETER 3:18-22**

### **PREPARE**

Have a seat in your comfortable place. Catch your breath. Breathe in “Be still and know...”; breathe out “that I am God...” a few times. Ask the Lord to guide your thoughts.

### **READ (LECTIO)**

Read through 1 Peter 3:18-22 silently or aloud. Take your time savoring the words. Look or “listen” for the word or phrase that catches your attention.

### **REFLECT (MEDITATIO)**

Read through the passage again listening for that word or phrase. What is it that attracts you? Does it seem to address a situation in your life? Does it answer a question for you or describe a deep longing? Is there an invitation to an action?

### **RESPOND (ORATIO)**

Read the passage again and be transparent with Jesus about your thoughts in a quiet conversation.

### **REST (CONTEMPATIO)**

Read through the passage one last time. Linger with Jesus. Listen for his response or just enjoy sitting in his presence.

### **RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)**

Is there some action you would like to take in response to your reading today? Is there a burden lifted, an insight to savor, or good news you might share with a friend? Finish your time with a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus.

## **DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA**



**“THEOPHANY: JESUS BAPTIZES THE WATERS” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY**

### **TURN ASIDE**

In Genesis 1, the Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos, separating light from dark, wet from dry ... Now as Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit again hovers over the waters, over the One who will reconcile all things. Take a moment. Relax. Let your eyes turn to the image.

### **THIS BREATH PRAYER IS A GOOD WAY TO BEGIN:**

*[On the inhale] Immanuel*  
*[On the exhale] God with me*  
*[On the inhale] Open my heart*  
*[On the exhale] That I may truly see.*

### **SURRENDER**

Tim Keller said, “If a work of art gets its meaning across in a way that it is too apparent, it is really preaching instead of art.” When there is more than meets the eye, it will likely take some time or effort on the observer’s part—an effort that, hopefully, will be rewarded.

**READ**

Take a moment to read the associated Scriptures. With the image in your mind let the words of Scripture begin to highlight aspects of the image or initial thoughts you had about it.

*"And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" (Mark 1:10,11)*

**ENGAGE**

Let the image spark your imagination. Ask the Lord what he might want to say to you through this image. What jumps out to you? Jesus had not yet begun his ministry when he was baptized. In what way was God pleased? If we are in Christ, does God's pleasure extend to us as well? The title of the image is "Jesus Baptizes the Waters." What might that mean?

**REMEMBER**

Ask the Lord to bring the image to mind at other times. Continue to ponder the art and the questions it raises throughout the week., Can you receive, as a means of grace, to hear the voice of God that says, "In you I am well pleased."

