

DAY 1 • DEVOTION

READ MARK 8:31-38 (NIV)

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

There was a point in Jesus' ministry where he started speaking plainly about how his time on earth would end: with rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection. Mark's gospel records three of these cryptic predictions, and this is the first of them. To Jesus' distressing words, Peter reacted—as usual—with his heart a stride or two in front of his head. Was he struggling with Jesus' plan? His timing? All we know is that Peter's rebuke was met with arguably the harshest words Jesus spoke to anyone, ever; "Get behind me, Satan." Ouch. He continued, "You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's." Try to imagine overhearing this awkward conversation. Don't you feel sorry for Peter? Poor guy—he "misread the room." All the more baffling when you notice that the previous conversation, recorded in Mark 8:27-30, documents the peak of Peter's understanding. Jesus asked his disciples, point blank, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter replied with his astonishing confession: "You are the Christ." Peter went from the pinnacle of clarity to the abyss of Jesus' rebuke in just a few lines!

I wonder if Peter had been getting used to the idea of Jesus being the Messiah when Jesus interrupted his dreams with all this talk of suffering. After all, if Jesus, his own Rabbi, was the Christ, then he was the fulfillment of everything his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had taught him to expect. A formidable national leader, the one

who would finally conquer and summarily dismiss the great Roman Empire from their land and sit on David's throne. And since Peter was clearly his right hand man, then ... wait—what is this about being betrayed, handed over, tortured, and killed? That is not how the story goes!

Have you ever been here with God? Maybe you had arrived at a new level of intimacy with God, and the next day, something happened that was not part of the plan. The bottom dropped out of your life, and you were left feeling irritated with the God who, just yesterday, seemed so present and gracious.

Spend a little time with Jesus' next words to Peter. Read this line a few times, and ask yourself if there has ever been a moment when he could have said this to you: "You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but on man's." In that moment, were you struggling with Jesus' plan or his timing?

Later, the Apostle Paul writes a similar line to the believers in Colossae: "*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*" (Colossians 3:2). Maybe this tendency to get our plans confused with God's plan is an ongoing problem. If it happened to Peter soon after his confession, and it happened to Christians in the early church, it's likely we too will need a reminder to keep our focus on the right things.

DAY 2 • BIBLE STUDY

EXODUS 20:1-17

Gather your tools for Bible study and settle into your quiet place. Before you begin, consider these ideas: In the Ancient Near East, covenants were made between two parties, and they contained stipulations that one or both of the parties were bound to keep to maintain the covenant. The covenant defined the relationship. If you kept the covenant, the language was that you “love” your “brother” (the socially equal partner-brothers) or your “father” (the party greater than you, i.e. a king or conqueror, and you would be the son). If you did not keep the covenant or didn’t have a covenant, the language was that you “hate” your “brother” or “father.” Also keep in mind that theologians categorize Old Testament law as ceremonial, civil, or moral law. The Ten Commandments were the stipulations for God’s covenant with the nation of Israel and are categorized as moral law.

PREPARATION

Take a couple of breaths to settle yourself. Ask the Lord for insights and understanding as you read his Word.

OBSERVATION

Read through Exodus 20:1-17. Mark repeated words or phrases. Note words you might like to know the biblical definitions for. One of the skills of studying Scripture is learning to ask good questions. You might ask, “What might be God’s purposes for these stipulations? What is the focus of the first four commandments versus the last six? What effect would these have on a newly formed nation?”

INTERPRETATION

Reflect on your observations, thinking about what you have discovered. What impact would they have on Israel’s relationship with God and their neighbors? Have a rich dialogue with God about these things.

APPLICATION

Respond. What application can you make for today or for the week? Keep it simple, and make it measurable. What if you arrange your work, chores, and responsibilities to be complete in six days so you (and your family?) might have a sabbath? (Remember summer days and school breaks = rest, relaxation, and play.) Perhaps rewrite one or all of the commandments to make them personal? (i.e. I shall not murder my co-worker’s reputation by complaining to others this week. Or, rather than coveting _____ this week, I will list five things each day that I am thankful for.)

Finish your time with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s good wisdom and your good mind to understand these things!

DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

JOHN 2:13-22

In today's reading, we experience an unusual side of Jesus' character. He is angry. Very angry. A little context may be helpful. God's desire for Israel was to be a light to other nations, the Gentiles, to draw them to him. The temple court Jesus cleared was a place for "God fearers" (Gentile converts to Judaism) to come and worship the God of Israel. The religious leaders had allowed it to be turned into a market, and not necessarily a good one. Money changers had an opportunity to gouge pilgrims who came to give financial offerings. Or animal sellers made a profit selling "perfect" animals for sacrifice when their animal didn't meet the standards for sacrifice. They had turned this sacred space into a place noisy with commerce.

PREPARE

Settle into your comfortable place. Rest in your chair, relax your shoulders, your arms, legs and even feet. Take a few measured breaths. Ask the Lord to guide your thoughts and imagination.

READ JOHN 2:13-22

Read the passage slowly, keeping in mind the setting. What do you hear? The bleating sheep, squawking birds, and haggling? Locate yourself in this scene? Are you a pilgrim desiring to meet the God of Israel? A seller in the market? A disciple? Watch Jesus. What feelings come up as he drives out the noise? Watch the authorities come in. What do you think about his words to them? Stay with any part of this story as long as you like.

PRAY

Finish your time with a prayer of thanksgiving for the opportunity to witness this part of Jesus' ministry. Thank him for the example of his passion (zeal) for God's house.

DAY 4 • LECTIO DIVINA

1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25

PREPARE

Go to your place that is becoming the space where you meet with the Lord. Take some deep breaths, perhaps tying them to a favorite Scripture. Greet the Lord and ask for his guidance as you read.

READ (LECTIO)

Read through 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. Read slowly, carefully taking in each word. Listen and look for that word, phrase, or thought that tugs on you or catches your eye.

REFLECT (MEDITATIO)

Read the passage again slowly. Perhaps this time aloud, noticing the rhythm of your reading. Look for the word or phrase that is for you today. What is it about this word that resonates?

RESPOND (ORATIO)

Read the passage again, settling into the flow of it. Tell the Lord what is going on in your mind and heart, your desire in response to his Word. Have a conversation with the Lord about it and then listen.

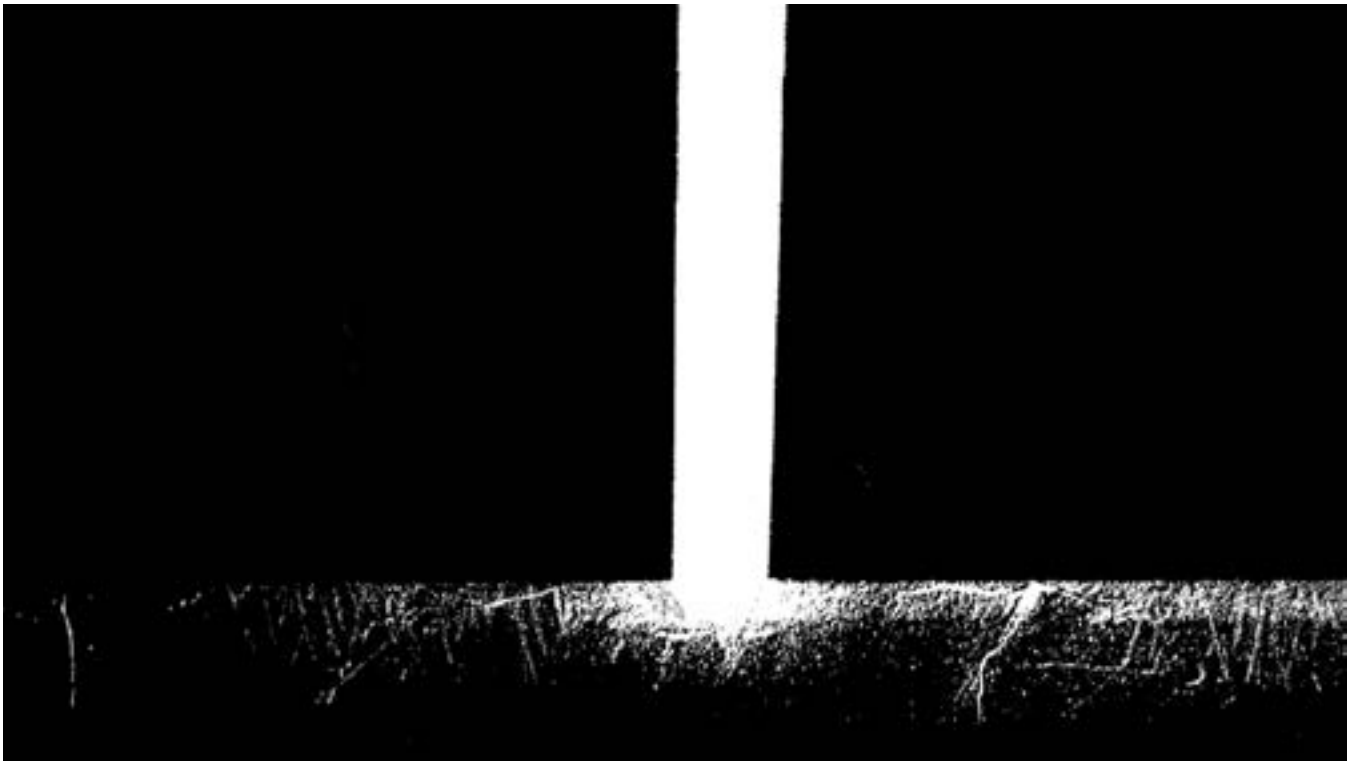
REST (CONTEMPATIO)

Read the passage a final time. Relax in the company of Jesus. Allow the time to be full.

RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)

Decide to in some way take what you've experienced with you into the rest of your day or week. Look for evidence of God's "foolish" wisdom in situations at work or with family. Ask for God's wisdom in a decision. Be aware of the power of God available to you to help you live well in God's kingdom. Be blessed and become a blessing!

DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA



“DECALOGUE: GATEWAY TO THE MANGER” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY

TURN ASIDE

Imagine you're a shepherd keeping an eye on your flock on a Judean hillside the night Jesus was born. Your entire culture considers you to be unclean. Under the Law, you're unqualified to enter the Temple. You'll never be invited to a Pharisee's house for the post-prayers party at Purim. Yet, a terrifying and particularly shiny angel of the Lord has appeared—along with the “God of the Angel Armies Choir”—to announce to you and your ragamuffin pals that the Savior has been born and is currently lying in a manger in Bethlehem. In the darkness, you run to find this baby Messiah. As you approach the stable, you realize the light coming from inside is brighter than any candle or torch could be. Do you—an unclean shepherd—dare to come closer? The light still beckons.

Take a moment. Relax. Let your eyes turn to the image.

SURRENDER

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.*

READ

With the image in your mind, think of the doors to the stable and their shape, like the shape of the stone tablets on which the hand of God had carved the Ten Commandments (The Decalogue), read Exodus 20:1-17.

Do you see the commandments and the whole of the Law as a locked door that separates you from God, declaring you to be as unclean as those shepherds? Or can you see all those “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” as promises that describe the kind of person you will become as you draw close to the child in the manger and he draws close to you.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God ... For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” (Corinthians 1:18 and 1:25)

How preposterous is it to believe that the infinite creator of the universe could somehow be contained in the smallest and weakest of human beings—a helpless baby? Consider how foolish it is to believe that the greatest strength ever seen has been shown in Jesus. Dying. On a cross.

ENGAGE

Ask the Lord what he might want to say to you through this image. What jumps out to you? Can you imagine the helpless baby in the stable, crying for his mother, as God? The title of the image is, “Decalogue: Gateway to the Manger.” Do you feel you must uphold the commandments perfectly to enter into fellowship with God? Or can you imagine a movement the other direction, as the Christ-child comes out of Mary’s womb, fully divine and fully human; out of the stable, opening the “doors” from the inside and fulfilling the law in himself; coming out of the grave having conquered death, once and for all; and finally coming to dwell permanently in your heart?

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, reflecting on what it cost God to bring about your salvation, and what it costs you to follow him. Thank him for that unimaginable grace.

