

## **DAY 1 • DEVOTION**

### **READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25 – “CRUCIBLE OF WISDOM” (NIV)**

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;*

*the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

*Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

It is said that the single most replicated piece of art in the world is the crucifix: Jesus Christ, God incarnate, nailed to the cross, with blood flowing from his wounds. This demands an explanation. How could such a horrific image become the object of so much adoration? Paul tells us the crucified Christ is the “power of God and the wisdom of God.” Because I was not exposed to the crucifix in churches as a child, when I was finally confronted with the image, I was deeply disturbed by the pitiful vision of my dear Jesus hanging on a cross. Apparently, my Protestant forebears had rebuffed the crucifix for the image of an empty cross because it placed an emphasis on Jesus’ death rather than his resurrection. A nice, clean cross is a constant reminder that Jesus is alive, and a much more pleasant focus for our attention. While I was in seminary, I fell deeply in love with Scripture and church history. I began to inquire more deeply into the story of my own faith, retracing my heritage backward, through the reformation to claim the pre-reformation catholic (meaning universal) church as my own heritage. I stayed the course through church fathers and mothers, all the way to the early church we learn about in Paul’s letters and Acts, and finally to Jesus himself, an itinerant preacher who died on this cross to create a portal through which humankind is permitted admittance into God’s eternal kingdom. In his excellent book, *The Wood Between the Worlds*, Brian Zahnd explores ideas about God that he learned from looking closely and prayerfully at hundreds of crucifixes along the Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage across northern

Spain. He writes, "The cross is the axis upon which the biblical story turns ... On Good Friday the true nature of God is on full display in Jesus of Nazareth crucified." He goes on to say that the central task of the theologian is to interpret the "meaning of God as revealed in the crucified Christ."

As I write these words, I can see five different crucifixes. My aversion to them is cured. I want to know this aspect of my faith; I want to explore the wisdom of God and the power of God. Paul reminds us that the very thought of worshiping a crucified Christ is going to seem foolish to the world around us, but if we are to ever know Jesus, his broken body and spilled blood cannot be ignored.

# **DAY 2 • BIBLE STUDY**

## **NUMBERS 21:4-9**

### **PREPARATION**

Gather your supplies for Bible study and settle yourself with a few deep breaths. Let the distractions fall away.

The Book of Numbers details a forty-year period of Israel wandering in the desert as judgment for their lack of faith in God's ability to bring them into the Promised Land. Twelve spies were sent into the Promised Land, ten gave a poor report that caused the people to fear and rebel. God's pronouncement: that the generation would not enter the Promised Land. So, for forty years they wandered, complaining frequently against God and his chosen leader, Moses. A question to consider as you read today, "How do you get the attention of an angry mob?"

### **OBSERVATION**

Read Numbers 21:4-9 a couple of times. Note the details given. Look for repeated words or phrases. Ask questions. Did they really have no food or water? How does God answer Moses' prayer? Why was the snake bronze? How does the healing take place? What biblical truth does this illustrate?

### **INTERPRETATION**

Read the passage again. Look up anything you are curious about. [Blueletterbible.org](https://www.blueletterbible.org) has a study guide ([Study Guide for Numbers 21 by David Guzik](#)) for this passage that might answer your questions, or give you new ones! Does 2 Corinthians 5:21 shed any insight? After you have done your work, you might also desire to access a commentary, get a different perspective or additional information.

### **APPLICATION**

Consider your observations and your interpretations, and ask God where this might be applicable to your life. It is good to acknowledge possible darkness in our lives during this season. You might ask, am I unreasonable when I don't get my way? How do I respond to discipline? Do I grumble against or support those who are in leadership over me? Who or what is the object of my faith? Have a heart-to-heart with the Lord over these things and receive his words for you. If he desires an action, be determined to do so. End your time of study with a prayer of thanksgiving for the renewal of your mind and reason!

## **DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER**

### **JOHN 3:14-21**

The Gospel of John gives us insight into several impactful conversations Jesus has with individuals. We get to “see” Jesus engaging each one in a very relational and intimate way. We first see Nicodemus as he comes to meet with Jesus, in the dark. Nicodemus is not only a Pharisee, a learned man, but a leader in the Sanhedrin (think Hebrew “supreme court”).

#### **PREPARE**

Be seated in your comfortable, holy place. Take a few deep breaths to shake off distractions or stress. Come into the Lord’s presence. Perhaps he is seated near you. Ask him to guide your thoughts and speak to you in this passage.

#### **READ JOHN 3:14-21**

Read through carefully once. As you prepare to read a second time, use your imagination to set the scene. What do you hear? Hushed silence? Crickets? Is there candlelight? You’ve caught part of a conversation. Are you a disciple nearby? Perhaps you identify with Nicodemus. How does Jesus sound as he speaks? Does Jesus invite you to join them? What part of this conversation would you ask Jesus about later if you had the chance? Stay with any part of this conversation as long as you desire.

#### **PRAY**

Finish your time with a prayer of gratitude for getting to sit in on this very important conversation. If you would like, read John 19:38-42 to witness Nicodemus’ other encounter with Jesus.

# **DAY 4 • LECTIO DIVINA**

## **EPHESIANS 2:1-10**

### **PREPARE**

Come to your favorite place. Join the Lord there and greet him with a brief prayer. Relax in his presence.

### **READ (LECTIO)**

Read through Ephesians 2:1-10 slowly and carefully. Look for that treasure, that word or phrase that stands out for you.

### **REFLECT (MEDITATIO)**

Read the passage again to settle on that word, or perhaps find another. What speaks to you through this particular word or phrase? What response does it raise up in you? Hope? Gratitude?

### **RESPOND (ORATIO)**

Read through the passage again perhaps aloud this time and emphasizing certain words, your word or phrase in particular. Have a prayerful conversation with Jesus about what this means to you. Take your time.

### **REST (CONTEMPLATIO)**

Read the passage again and relax, listening for Jesus' response, or perhaps sit with him for a while in companionable silence.

### **RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)**

Take this experience with you into your day, pondering the truths in this passage. Let it inform your relationships at work or at home. Dallas Willard once said, "The true saint burns grace like a 747 burns fuel on takeoff."

## **DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA**



**“NEVER ENOUGH? ON THE SERPENT’S VOCATION” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY**

### **TURN TOWARD**

Art is supposed to be pretty, right? Hopeful. Comforting. Happy endings, rainbows, and hot chocolate—at least according to the Official Hallmark Guide to Holiday Movies. But art can also make us sad and uncomfortable. It can frighten us, even fill us with terror—challenging our expectations of hope, comfort, and happy endings. So many stories in Scripture do just that, and we may be tempted to turn the page. Instead of averting our eyes and skipping uncomfortable passages, often the Lord wants us to face those things we fear so we might discover a deeper truth. Take a moment. Relax. Let your eyes turn toward the image. It’s okay. You are safe.

### **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

Like many of us, your breathing is now a little shallow and your heart is beating a little faster. With the image in mind, read the following from Numbers 21:4-9.

*From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."*

## ENGAGE

Ask the Lord what he might want to say to you through this image. These questions may assist you. Why do human beings have such an innate fear of snakes? Is it fair to assume the people were attacked by snakes simply because they didn't like the food God miraculously provided to sustain them through their desert wanderings? Where else do we see a direct relationship between snakes and the things people say? (Hint: Read James 3.) What did that most famous serpent—the crafty one from Genesis 3—try to point out to Adam and Eve? When we grumble like the Israelites about our perceived lack, whose voice do we echo—the serpent, or the one who generously gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13)?

Ask the Holy Spirit to show us those places in our lives where—instead of gratitude—we choose to be dissatisfied with what God has provided, biting ourselves and those around us with that deadly poison. In a way, we can view Lent as an opportunity to celebrate the limitations, letting it turn us once again to the God who provides.

## REMEMBER

Continue to ponder the art and the questions it raises throughout the week, remembering that Jesus is the one who was lifted up, as Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:13)—on the cross, he became our sin, our healing, and our salvation.

