



THROUGH PETER'S EYES

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

CONTRIBUTORS

*Harold Faw
Linda Koop
Mike Evanson*

*Doyle Klaassen
Maaïke VanderMeer*

*Dave McCarthy
Bev Gordon*

DEAR CHURCH FAMILY,

The season of Lent is a 40-day observance that leads Christians towards and into the Easter weekend. The 40 days commemorate the days spent by Jesus in the wilderness, and they serve to spiritually prepare believers for Easter; helping to meaningfully engage with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. There are different ways to observe Lent. Many choose to sacrifice something in their daily lives in order to serve as a daily reminder of Jesus' sacrifice – chocolate or media are popular choices. Additionally, many believers choose to take up a spiritual activity to aid their reflection and to deepen their walk.

This year we are encouraging you, our Sevenoaks church family, to engage with us in spiritually preparing for Easter. Maybe observing the season of Lent is new to you, so we have developed this devotional to use as a guide. It is centred on the relationship between Jesus and Peter leading up to and directly following the passion narrative. It invites you into the story and to imagine yourself in Peter's place. There are 7 weekly devotionals that members of our church family contributed which will help you to dig deeper into the story and to prepare your heart.

Each week we suggest that you spend time reading the primary Scriptural reference, reading the included reflection, pondering the questions, and praying the prayer. We also encourage you to read the "Further Reading" Scripture passages and to try out the weekly "Practise".

Our prayer is that this devotional booklet will aid you in your reflection and preparation for Easter.

Pastor Jamie



Matthew 16:13-20

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Harold Faw

This exchange takes place in Caesarea Philippi, a region within sight of Mount Hermon's lofty slopes. Places can be significant. For Peter, this place represented a high point in his faith journey, matching the nearby mountain peaks. Future visits would certainly trigger memories of Jesus' probing question and Peter's ringing declaration: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" While we might credit Peter for his probing insight, Jesus made it clear that his awareness reflected God's gracious gift instead.

Peter's experience with God, like ours, included both highs and lows. He boldly affirmed Jesus' identity; he later denied even knowing Jesus, revealing the inconsistency of his faith. Are you and I any different from Peter? More important, the truth that Jesus declared in response to Peter's affirmation rises far above fluctuating human faith: "*I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH.*" Amazingly, he used Peter in the process, both to establish and lead the church as seen in the book of Acts, and to craft letters to fellow believers. And he uses us.

What a reassuring declaration Jesus offers us! Even though our faith falters, he is steadily building his church, and nothing can interfere with his purposes. Praise God for his faithfulness! If you can affirm from your heart that Jesus is the Christ, be reminded that you, like Peter, are a recipient of God's gracious gift. He is building his church, and he intends to use each of us.

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. In your spiritual journey, is there a special place where you encountered the living God and your faith was deepened?
2. Do you find delight in knowing that Jesus is building his church, even as your faith in him fluctuates?

PRAY

"Lord Jesus, thank you that in your generous grace, you have enabled me to recognize that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, my Saviour. Thank you that you use me, even though my faith is sometimes weak, to build your church for your glory. Amen."



FURTHER READING

Psalm 2
Isaiah 9:6-7
Psalm 89
John 1:35-42
John 4:25



PRACTISE

All of this week's "Further Reading" passages focus on Jesus' identity as the Messiah.

We encourage you to get a notebook, or even just sheets of paper and a pen, open to one of the suggested passages each day, read it, and write down something about Jesus' identity that stands out to you. Write out what you sense God saying to you through the text, and finish by writing a prayer.

Journalling is a great way to identify how God is speaking to you.

Matthew 16:21-28

GET BEHIND ME SATAN!

Linda Koop

When Jesus predicted his suffering and death in Matthew 16, it was "too much" for the disciples. I find myself agreeing with Peter, that Jesus should not have to die. He was the Son of God performing miracles that brought people out of their pain and misery. Why should he ever accept suffering for himself? Yet today we are so grateful that he was obedient to the will of God, for through his brokenness we are made whole - something Peter didn't understand.

Peter's response was from a human perspective. Are God's ways "too much" for us today? I submit that we often do the same thing as Peter by reflecting the world's culture, which is in direct conflict with our Lord's teachings:

The World

avoid pain when possible
pursue pleasure in life
demand my rights

The Word

deny yourself
take up your cross and follow me
lose your life for His sake

When we think like the world, we speak and act like the world. This is the "Get behind me, Satan" part. Peter could not imagine that Jesus, whom he knew to be God's Son, would actually die. But God's ways are not our ways. Only when we spend time with the Father and his Son in the Word, can we change our thinking through the renewal of our minds, so we can understand what it means to deny ourselves and follow him.

Proverbs 9:6 challenges us "*Leave your simple ways and live. Walk in the way of understanding.*"

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. How does Christ's example of suffering and crucifixion influence your choices between the world's self-centred outlook and Jesus' instruction to deny ourselves?
2. What are some of the choices you can make to deny yourself and follow Him?

PRAY

"O Father, our great God and compassionate, loving Creator. Thank you for making a way for us to be a part of your family through the death of your Son. Teach us to understand the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, so that we can follow his example and experience freedom through obedience to your Word. Amen."

FURTHER READING

Isaiah 53
Psalm 16
Genesis 22:1-18
Colossians 3:2
Philippians 3:17-4:1

PRACTISE

In this week's primary text, Jesus rebuked Peter for having his mind on earthly things, and not on the things of God. I wonder if he would say the same to us? Since our default position is the same as Peter's, we encourage you this week to free your mind from clutter and earthly things by replacing whatever time you would normally spend on social media, watching tv, or worrying, with spending time in the Word and prayer.

The more your mind is focussed on the things of God, the more you will see the happenings of the world and your life from his perspective.



John 13:1-11

LET ME MAKE YOU CLEAN

Mike Evanson

Peter just doesn't get the whole foot washing thing. I think I get Peter though. Foot washing isn't just weird or embarrassing, it also seems like a waste of time. Peter wants Jesus to do what the Messiah is supposed to do — get things done! Defeat God's enemies, build the Kingdom. Can't Jesus just get on with it? I feel the same way: Can't you speed things up a bit, Jesus?

We are told that the time had come for Jesus to return to the Father, a journey which will require Jesus' suffering and death (13:1-3). Jesus is leaving a mission for his disciples, to continue his work (Jn 14:12; 15:16, 26-27; 17:18). But this mission can't happen if it is to be done on Peter's terms, according to his plan. No, it must be done through sacrificial love.

The challenge for the believer is that although Jesus' suffering is done, it remains a testament to his path. Such a path remains before us, and beckons us to adopt the posture of our Master, that of a servant. To do so requires giving up our desire to do things our way, to bring God's kingdom in the way we see fit. You see to wash feet isn't just to do something, it is also to give up other things. It isn't just to serve, but it is also to give up our own way of getting things done.

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. As we approach Easter, and are in a season of Lent (a time for giving things up), which of our plans and ways of doing things do we have to give up?
2. What does Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension reveal about how God chooses to accomplish his purposes?

PRAY

"Lord Jesus, thank you doings things differently, for choosing the path of a servant, the path of sacrificial love. Please be patient with me when I try to accomplish your purposes on my own terms. Lead me as I try to imitate your example. Amen."

FURTHER READING

Exodus 12:21-28
Psalm 51
John 1:29-34
John 3:16-18
Philippians 2:1-11

PRACTISE

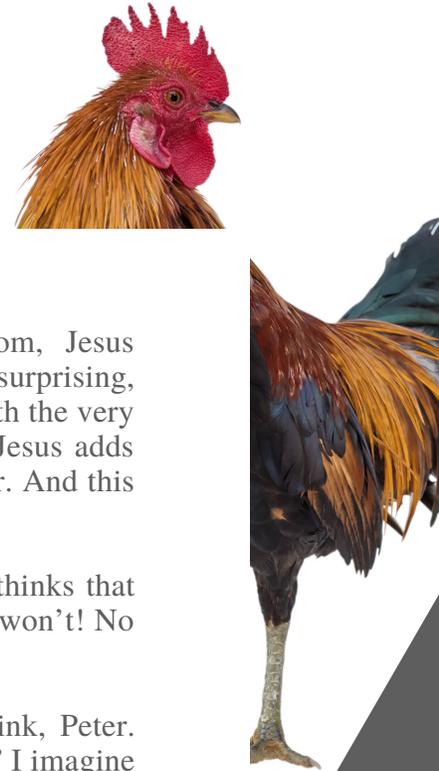
This week, you're encouraged to use hand washing as a reminder to pray. Every time you stop to wash your hands, spend a few moments or minutes expressing gratitude to God for his plan to make you clean in Christ. The more you express gratitude, the more joyful you will become.



John 13:31-38

YOU WILL DENY ME

Doyle Klaassen



On the night of the last Supper, after Judas leaves the room, Jesus immediately enlightens his disciples. What he tells them is intense, surprising, and even shocking. He, the Son of Man, will be glorified ... and with the very glory of God Himself. Without explaining how this will happen, Jesus adds that the disciples and he are about to be separated from one another. And this separation will involve the disciples abandoning him.

Peter gets "hung up" on this revelation about separation. If Jesus thinks that the rest are all going to abandon him under pressure, well ... Peter won't! No sir! Peter is prepared to take a bullet for Jesus.

But Jesus' reply is "You don't know yourself as well as you think, Peter. Before we see the light of day again, you'll disown me three times." I imagine a tender-eyed Jesus speaking these words ever so softly, with a sad but loving look on his face.

For love is the point of the whole story. Starting immediately, a new obligation will come into effect for Jesus' followers – that they are to love one another. And they are to love one another as he loves them. Given that Jesus knows that they are all about to forsake him, even as he prepares to give his own life to save theirs, it's not surprising that the Apostle John has a vivid recollection of what Jesus said that night.

What love!

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. How will Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial have been a help to the disciple after the fact?
2. What might "denying knowing Jesus" look like in my life?

PRAY

"Dear Lord, thank you that you love me just as you did the disciples, to the very end. I am amazed that your love for me won't stop, even if I, like Peter, denied you! I realize that I, too, stand in danger of following in his footsteps. Please help me, Jesus, to stay close to you today. Amen."

FURTHER READING

Psalm 118
1 John 4:7-11
1 John 4:13-21
Luke 22:31-34
Romans 12:9-21



PRACTISE

Scripture makes clear that one of the defining characteristics of Jesus' love is that he gives it freely to people who do not deserve it. We are to practise that kind of love. This week, as you pray, make a particular point to pray for the people in your life, past and present, who you may feel little love for because they have disappointed or hurt or denied or abandoned you. Ask the Spirit to give you Christ's love toward each of these.

Mark 14:32-42

COULD YOU NOT KEEP WATCH?

Maaïke VanderMeer

His voice is dry like earth without water, cracked like the feet of a shepherd. He asks us to keep watch, but there is no danger. Only our breathing, the cicadas, the rustle of thick leaves. He walks forward and falls to the ground, silent.

Something in his face reminds me of the first Passover, families praying for the dark angel of death to pass by, children with wide eyes. No one knew what morning would bring.

It bursts from him, "Father!" He begs for the coming hour to pass him by.

There is no answer.

My eyelids gather darkness, my head tips forward. I dream of the thickness of the coming hour gathering over Egypt, Pharaoh raising a hand to his son's stilled face --

I wake, sweating, and he is there. Quiet. "Simon, are you asleep?"

I have no answer. Three times he woke me. I had no answer.

Reader, I know now that death is worse than dying. But on that night I was young, foggy headed, and waiting for the kingdom. So I was silent when he said, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death.*" I did not know how to guard his sorrow. I couldn't say why there was blood on his forehead. I could have sworn no one had come close to harm him; it was only us four, in a garden, with the cicadas --

"It is enough," he says, rousing the others, "the hour has come."

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. What does Christ's experience of grief tell you about him?
2. Are you standing as a witness for someone in their grief right now? Do you need to pray for the stamina to "stay awake" with them? Has the challenge of that ministry drawn you closer to this moment in Christ's life?

PRAY

"Father, I am in awe of Jesus' love that we see in the garden. He endured such grief and anguish as he bore our sin, and committed himself to going to the cross that we might go free. Amen."



FURTHER READING

Psalm 13
James 1:12
Hebrews 5:7-10
Psalm 69
Ephesians 6:10-20



PRACTISE

Many people don't give much thought to their pre-sleep routine. This week, we encourage you to use the time before you fall asleep to engage in an ancient five-fold prayer exercise. It will help you to see how God was present throughout your day.

One way to remember it is as the 5 R's:

- Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts you have today
- Request that the Spirit lead you through your review of the day
- Review the day
- Repent of any mistakes or failures
- Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well

Matthew 26:47-56

PUT YOUR SWORD AWAY

Dave McCarthy

In these verses we have the amazing and unmistakable love of Jesus for three people or groups of people. First, there is his love for Judas, even though he knew Judas was going to betray him. When it does happen, he calls him his friend: *“friend do what you came to do”* (v. 50). Second, notice his love for Peter. In verse 52 he tells him to *“put your sword back into its place,”* thus potentially saving his life (he had plans for him). Third, Jesus loves the mob (around six hundred armed men). He protects them from any further bloodshed and even heals Malchus’ ear.

I want to focus on Peter and how the love of Jesus for him shows how it’s another step in his life from brokenness to wholeness. Peter using his sword shows how little he understands even what he says to Jesus earlier, *“you are the Christ, the son of the Living God”* (Matt 16:16). In his Jewish culture for Peter this meant that Jesus was a king anointed by God and empowered to rescue God’s people and set up his righteous Kingdom. He was expecting an earthly King who would free them from the tyranny of the Romans. By drawing his sword Peter was taking things into his own hands, trying to help and save Jesus from his capture and death. Jesus had already battled through this with his Father and submitted *“Father if it should be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt 26:39). Even though Jesus had explained many times the reason he came to earth, Peter (and all the disciples) just did not get it. This is also so true in our lives. When we confront a problem, we often resort to handling it with our own power (Peter’s sword) instead letting God work out his purposes in our lives.

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. When adversity strikes, how do you respond? With fear and panic, or with confident hope and trust in God? Explain.
2. Peter, Judas and those in the mob all acted against God’s will and yet Jesus still loved them unconditionally. Can you accept his abundant, undeserved love when you “blow it”? Why or why not?

PRAY

“Thank you, Father, for the love of Jesus that is the same for us today as it is in these verses. And thank you for the example of Peter who is so real and transparent in his faith journey. Live in us today that we might show the love of Jesus to others around us. Amen.”

FURTHER READING

Matthew 26:57-27:66

For the Apostle Peter, the time that passed between the night of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and the morning that the risen Jesus joined his disciples on the shores of the Sea of Galilee must have represented hours of the deepest darkness he had ever experienced. Terror, helplessness, confusion, shame, anguish, shock, grief, alienation, loneliness, despair – all of these emotions were likely to have been “in the mix” for Peter.

Your Scripture reading assignment for this week – and your recommended spiritual practice exercise for this week as well - involves reading the same single long Scripture passage every day.

PRACTISE

Take up the story in Matthew's Gospel immediately after Jesus' arrest in the Garden. Read from Matthew 26:57 all the way through to Matthew 27:66. As you read, let yourself “enter” the story. Open yourself up to imagining what it must have been like for those who were present for the events that are described. Imagine what it must have been like for Peter.

Repeat the exercise every day. And each time you read this passage, open yourself up to whatever new insights the Spirit wants to bring to you. Perhaps you'll notice a particular word that you didn't notice before. Perhaps you'll think of some detail in a scene that you had overlooked before. Perhaps a new question will arise in your head. Perhaps you'll find yourself connecting to some current of emotion in the story. Perhaps you'll find yourself standing in the crowd.

If there are particular insights that come to you, consider writing them down. As you read, as you meditate, as you write, ask God to deepen your understanding of the meaning – for you and for all of us - of his death on the cross.



John 21:1-17

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Bev Gordon

Peter, in his failed discipleship speaks volumes to us when we feel like spiritual failures. The man who had lived in the immediate presence of Jesus for three years had publicly lied, cursed, and betrayed him three times. Yet Jesus, knowing every awful thing about Peter, willingly went to the cross.

Peter's sin had been public so his restoration needed to be also. That morning on the shore, Jesus brought Peter face to face with his disordered love. There he gave him the opportunity to publicly make confession three times, each time reminding him he was called.

Twice, Jesus asks: "*Simon, do you truly love me more than these?*" In Jesus' profoundly personal question he used the word *agape*, love so deep that it dies to self and lays down its life for others. Peter had pridefully boasted that his love was superior to all other loves. In the painful aftermath of the cross, he would no longer claim that his love was *agape* love. Humbled, he could only speak of his love as *phileo*: "I'm fond of you, Lord."

The third time Jesus does not ask Peter if his love is truly *agape*. In beautiful condescension he asks: "*Simon, do you love (phileo) me?*" Peter, deeply grieved, appeals to his trust that Jesus knows all things. Jesus meets him at the level of friendship love knowing that one day Peter's love would rise to the sacrificial *agape* love of his Saviour. But only when he knows that he is weak will he be strong.

TAKE TIME TO CONSIDER

1. How do Jesus' words of restoration to Peter encourage you when you feel like a spiritual failure?
2. Meditate on the gentle welcome of Christ: "*Do you truly love me?*" What comes to your mind about your own discipleship?

PRAY

"Loving God, Thank you that you know all things. You know that I love you and I long to love you more. I offer the crumbs of my poor love to you, trusting you to multiply it for your glory. Amen."

FURTHER READING

Psalm 23
Matthew 4:18-22
Luke 9:10-17
John 14:12-17
Matthew 25:31-40

PRACTISE

For our final practise exercise of Lent, we want to introduce you to the art of contemplation. Spending time pondering, considering, imagining; unlocking a part of your mind and heart that you may not often access. On the next page, we've chosen an image of Jesus' face that we would like you to spend time with in contemplation. Stare at it. Notice the nuances. Look at his eyes. Imagine how Jesus must have felt. Allow your emotions to respond to the story of Jesus' passion and Peter's reinstatement.

You may want to sit with the image and pray. You may want to have a notebook and pen handy and write out a prayer. The poets among you may even want to write a poem or a song. Be creative, and be moved by Jesus.



THANKS FOR JOURNEYING WITH US.

We trust that this devotional helped you to engage meaningfully with the Easter story this year. Our prayer is that some of the suggested practises would become regular disciplines in your life, helping you to hear from God and to live in awareness of his presence every day.

We would like to thank the church family members who contributed writings to this project. You were a joy to work with, and we are grateful to benefit from the unique insights you presented, the reflection questions you wrote, and your prayers. We are a body with many parts.

We will have a Good Friday Service on April 15, and we would love for you to join us.

We will also have Easter Services on April 17. Come and celebrate Christ's resurrection with us.

