



**grow. pray. study.**

**SUNDAY November 15, 2020**

**Five Practices from the Cross**

The Final Words of Jesus **from scripture:**

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.”

“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”

“Behold your son...Behold your mother.”

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

“Today you will be with me in paradise.”

“I thirst.”

“It is finished.”

**MONDAY 11.16.20**

**Words of worship on the cross**

**Luke 23:44-46**

Even on the cross, Jesus modeled the five practices that we have studied this Lenten season. There's evidence that Jewish parents in Jesus' day taught their children Psalm 31:5 as a bedtime prayer. It seems likely that Mary would have taught it to Jesus when he was a boy. According to Luke, he quoted these worshipful words of trust and gratitude—"Into your hands I entrust my life"—as a way to express his unbreakable bond with his heavenly father.

- Crucifixion put ultimately fatal pressure on a crucified person's diaphragm. It was not possible to make long statements from a cross. On the cross Jesus quoted a single verse from two psalms— but in both cases he likely had the whole psalm in mind. In Psalm 31:14-15, after describing enemies seeking his life, the psalmist wrote, “I trust you, Lord! I affirm, ‘You are my God. My future is in your hands....’” Imagine the inner power of that worship statement for Jesus on the cross. How can you, like Jesus, root your inner life in Scripture, so that you worship in good times and bad with deep inner trust in God?

- If you do not already have a chosen evening prayer, you might consider adopting the one Jesus prayed: “Father, into your hands I entrust my life.” What would it mean—how might it change things—to put your life fully in God's hands, not only at scattered moments of difficulty, but every night? How would it deepen your gratitude to know your life is held safely in God's eternally loving hands?

**Respond: Forgiven.** We are often our own worst critics, but God reminds us that we are forgiven. Remember a time when someone has offered grace and mercy to you, forgiveness in a beautiful way. How did their grace change you and fill you with gratitude? Write them a letter of appreciation

**Prayer:** O God, like Jesus I pray, “Into your hands I entrust my life,” because I realize you can care for me better than I can care for myself. Thank you for the promise that you will never let me go. Amen.

## **TUESDAY 11.17.20**

### **Words modeling growth on the cross**

#### **Luke 23:33-34, 47**

Luke recorded Jesus' amazing prayer, asking God to forgive the soldiers who were nailing him to the cross. As far as we can tell, the soldiers, more used to curses and screams of pain, just went about their grim business. Still, Jesus' prayer (exemplifying his conduct during his hours on the cross) registered. The centurion in charge of the crucifixion, who had likely seen many other convicts die, clearly saw Jesus' inner purity.

- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “More than any other world religion, Christianity teaches, preaches, veritably shouts forgiveness. Yes, some of our preachers dwell too long on guilt....a Christianity obsessed with guilt is no Christianity. Christianity is a faith whose central focus is not guilt, but grace, redemption, healing, forgiveness, and mercy.” \* How did Jesus' nurture his ability to forgive? In what ways have you grown in making forgiveness a transforming, freeing practice?
- Jesus had taught the kind of behavior he showed (Luke 6:27-28). But we all know what a gap can sometimes exist between words and actions. In later reflection, the letter to the Hebrews suggested that even Jesus had to learn and grow (Hebrews 5:7-8). If Jesus in his humanity needed to grow, clearly all of us do, too. What steps toward growth has this Lenten season inspired you to take?

\* Hamilton, Adam. *Forgiveness* (p. 17). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

### **Respond: Transform**

Each day you have committed to reading Scripture and reflecting on its impact in your life. How has that practice shaped you? Write here a passage that has been transformative for you.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, you gave your all to forgive, accept and love me as your child. Help me grow my capacity to give my all every day as I gratefully live out what you've done for me. Amen.

## **WEDNESDAY 11.18.20**

### **Words, action of service on the cross**

#### **John 19:25-27**

Even Jesus did not always have what we'd call a perfect family life (Mark 3:21, 31-35). John 7:5 said that his brothers didn't believe in him. But even on the cross, Jesus used some of his fading strength to serve his mother's needs. In Jesus' day a widow with no son or other male relative to protect her had few legal rights and little status. In the midst of his suffering, he provided for his mother by asking one of his most faithful followers to care for her.

- We often tell one another that we'll “be there” for each other. What price did Mary have to pay in order to “be there” as her son was crucified? How was Jesus “there” for Mary, despite the suffering he was going through? How confident are you that Jesus will be there for you when you face difficult times?

- Jesus did not “disown” his mother in Mark 3:33-35, as his loving act of service toward her from the cross showed. But he was serious when he spoke about his bond with those who do God’s will. When have shared faith and experience with God created ties for you as close as (or closer than) those you share with family members? When have spiritual “family members” served you? When have you been able to serve them?

### **Respond: Care**

Offering care and compassion to those who are lonely and in grief can be a powerful experience of connection.

Visit a care home – among the residents there may be those who are lonely and in need of connection. They may have lost loved ones (a spouse, a child, a dear friend). They may have stories to share about their life, spend time listening to their memories.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you lived out the beauty of caring, serving and loving. Make me into a person who can serve caringly in all the relationships I’m a part of. Amen.

## **THURSDAY 11.19.20**

### **Words of self-giving on the cross**

#### **Matthew 27:45-46, Galatians 1:3-4**

Jesus didn’t ad lib these desolate words on the cross. They were the familiar first words of Psalm 22, a longer psalm about suffering and trust. They fit what Jesus went through as he gave himself for us. Scholar John Goldingay wrote, “The psalm isn’t a prophecy in the sense of a passage that says, ‘One day there will be a messiah to whom this happens.’ It’s a prayer for Israelites to pray when they need to, so it is hugely encouraging because it gives them permission to acknowledge their sense of abandonment and their fears without shame.” \*

- Isaiah 59:2 described our human reality: “Your misdeeds have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you.” But 2 Corinthians 5:21 said that on the cross “God caused the one who didn’t know sin to be sin for our sake.” How would bearing our sins, not his own, make Jesus feel Godforsaken? How can you live out your gratitude to Jesus for giving himself to reconnect you with God?

- Jesus asked, as we do, “Why?” Scholar William Barclay said, “We see Jesus plumbing the uttermost depths of the human situation, so that there might be no place we might go where he has not been before.” \*\* When have you felt pain so intense that you cried out to God, “Why?” How can it give you strength at times like that to know Jesus deliberately gave himself up to that experience before you, and for you?

\* John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 1: Psalms 1–72*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, p. 71. \*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2, Chapters 11–28 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 369.

## **Respond: Pray**

When someone is in the midst of a really challenging time, we might not know what we should do to help, but what we can always do is to pray. Giving our time to lift them in prayer is a reminder of the power of community.

5 people today that I am praying for:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, sometimes I suffer and feel forsaken. It means the world to me that you, God, didn't stand aloof, but gave yourself in suffering for me. I offer you my heart, my love, myself. Amen.

## **FRIDAY 11.20.20**

### **Words sharing the good news on the cross**

#### **Luke 23:39-43**

Again, a cross was no place for a long sermon about grace. But even there Jesus was willing and able to share the good news of love and grace. Two men were crucified with Jesus. Luke called them "criminals." Matthew 27 used a word that could mean "rebels." Some think they were part of Barabbas' gang, since it seems he was originally to have been crucified instead of Jesus (Mark 15:7). What we know is that when one man reached out to Jesus in faith, Jesus promised him eternal life.

- Luke didn't say if the two criminals had known of Jesus, or how they decided how to act toward him. But one asked, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (which trusted that Jesus would come into his kingdom). What is the process by which you have moved (or are moving) to trust Jesus as king of the universe and of your life?
- "Good Friday," we call this day—not because the human race crucifying Jesus was in any way "good," but because God's transforming love brought eternal good out of that awful act. We often use the term "deathbed conversion" to describe an insincere effort to avoid eternal judgment, but God's grace was still there on that awful Good Friday. What does Jesus' response to the thief dying on the cross tell you about God's heart toward anyone who turns homeward, at any time?

## **Respond: Stop**

In Mark 15:34, we hear that at 3 o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, three verses later we read "then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last." Set your alarm to stop today, to breathe in and out, and give thanks.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you welcomed the thief, who freely said, "We are rightly condemned." And before your holiness, I am rightly condemned-but you welcome me, too. Thank you, my Savior and Lord. Amen.

**SATURDAY 11.21.20**

**Words of victory: "It is completed"**

**John 19:28-30, Mark 15:39**

Pastor Hamilton wrote, "In John, the final words of Jesus were 'It is finished' (John 19:30 NRSV). I had often interpreted those words to mean that Christ was exhausted and defeated. But then I learned that in Greek the phrase is expressed in just one word: *tetelestai*. That word is a shout of victory announcing that a battle has been won, a mission accomplished." \* Jesus' purpose in coming to earth had been accomplished. "It," all of it, was indeed "finished" or completed. At infinite cost, God's great saving work for humanity, for all of us, was finished.

• Jesus' great ordeal was over. He gave his all, physically, emotionally and spiritually. He died in peace, even triumph, knowing he had finished God's eternal plan to redeem the world. In what ways was Jesus' experience on the cross a victory? Has that victory changed your life for the better? Part of Jesus' saving work was that he faced the very worst evil and death can do and defeated them. Hebrews 2:14-15 said Jesus "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death." In what ways does fear of death affect your life choices? How can Jesus' death and resurrection free you from that fear?

\* Adam Hamilton, *John: The Gospel of Light and Life*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015, p. 136.)

**Respond: Surrender**

What is something you need to surrender to God, something you can no longer carry on your own? How might this act of surrender give you a sense of relief in knowing that God who can make all things new can bring about something new in you?

What I surrender to God:

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**Family Activity:** Many people were cruel to Jesus during the last week of his life on earth. He consistently responded with love and forgiveness towards the people who were hurting him. As a family, share some of your favorite stories about Jesus. What words would you use to describe Jesus in those stories? Review the events of the Final Week together and explore Jesus' responses in them. How would you describe Jesus in those times? What qualities did Jesus faithfully display throughout his life? Choose one or two characteristics of Jesus your family can develop. What steps will your family take to grow more Christ-like? Pray and ask God to help you become more like Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, on that Saturday, you rested in the tomb. But, as a great preacher once said, "Sunday's a'comin'." Bring my heart alive as I rejoice in the light of your affirmation of new life. Amen.