The earliest Christ-followers were known as “people of the way,” a reminder that their allegiance to Christ invited them to a journey. The destination of our journey this season is one that will end with eternal life, a risen Savior, death vanquished, and the glory of Easter. It will also bring us face to face with the reality of Christ’s journey, one that was not always pleasant. Yet as disciples of Christ, we remain committed to all of Christ’s call to follow, not just some of it.

Throughout these pages, you will read the words of Scripture, reflecting with others at Dawson on this sacred way. And you will pray for your Creator’s guidance as you go. Set aside some time each day. The when is not as important as the why. Find some time to be still, and dive in. Your desire to know God is all that is needed to take this journey.
MARY’S SONG

Luke 1:46–55; focused on 1:46–50

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”

Reflect

Today, we begin our Lenten devotional journey as a congregation. During each day of Lent, various Dawson members and staff will interact with a selected reading from the Gospel of Luke.

We begin our journey with Mary’s song of praise, known as The Magnificat, found in Luke 1:46–55. The word “magnificat” is derived from the Latin translation of the phrase “my soul magnifies”—the first phrase on the lips of Mary. In the words of N.T. Wright, this passage “is one of the most famous songs in Christianity. It’s been whispered in monasteries, chanted in cathedrals, recited in small remote churches by evening candlelight, and set to music with trumpets and kettledrums by Johann Sebastian Bach.”

Mary’s song is richly steeped in the phrases of her own Bible—the Old Testament. There are no fewer than seven allusions to the Psalms, coupled with scriptural echoes from Isaiah, Habakkuk, Genesis, and Hannah’s song found in 1 Samuel 2. Mary’s vocabulary is deeply saturated in Scripture and displays the posture of her heart as a faithful servant of the Lord.

Much of the song is a sharp critique of the powerful people of the day. It’s not a “hush little baby, don’t you cry” lullaby. No, Mary speaks prophetically to those who were preeminently concerned about making a name for themselves. Notice the repetition of common expectations being overturned—God has scattered the thoughts of the proud (v. 51); God has brought down the mighty from their thrones (v. 52); and God has sent the rich away empty (v. 53). Mary’s song warns those with ears to hear that her son Jesus comes not to comfort but to usher in a new kingdom value system.

Mary is predicting that Jesus is going to reverse the prevailing social norms of who is successful and valuable. It is a song that comforts because it is a reminder that God seeks the oppressed, the downtrodden, and overlooked. Mary’s song of praise is an invitation this Lenten season to join a God who is always present with the downtrodden and broken-hearted.

Pray

Lord, grant us the eyes to behold Your kingdom values. Grant us the courage and clarity to see those around us through Your kingdom lenses. May You give us a heart during this season of Lent for the hurting, broken-hearted, and overlooked.

Dr. David Eldridge

David is the Senior Pastor of the Dawson Family of Faith. He and his wife, Danielle, are the parents of Hayden, Luke, and Jonathan.
JOHN THE BAPTIST: THE PROPHECY OF ZECHARIAH

Luke 1:57–80; focused on 1:67–79

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.”

Luke 1:68-69

Reflect

As Luke continues to weave his narrative after Mary’s song, The Magnificat, he takes us back to his first story: the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist. Luke 1:5-25 gives the account of Zechariah and Elizabeth, an elderly, childless couple who are models of Jewish faithfulness. Zechariah, a Temple priest, is told by an angel that Elizabeth is to have a son, who is to be named John—one who will turn the people to the Lord and prepare the way for another.

Luke’s readers are immediately reminded of Abraham and Sarah—another childless couple well beyond childbearing years who at first cannot believe the good news of a baby on the way. Because Zechariah doubts that this is possible, he becomes mute until the child is born.

After Elizabeth delivers the baby boy, Zechariah is given back his voice and delivers a prophecy, beginning in Luke 1:67. Mary’s song looks ahead to the future. Zechariah’s is a song of praise by a father overcome with joy by the birth of a son. But, it is also a song of hope by one who has been in service to God for many years, experiencing the suffering of his people at the hand of wicked foreigners with hatred in their eyes and weapons in their hands.

N.T. Wright observes, “Zechariah comes across as someone who has pondered both the agony and the hope for many years, and who now finds the two bubbling out of him as he looks in awe and delight at his baby son. It’s a poem about God acting at last, finally doing what He had promised many centuries ago, and doing it at a time when his people had had their fill of hatred and oppression.”

Zechariah’s song reminds us once again that our God, in control of the vast expanse of history, connects with the hopes and fears of ordinary people. May we, in this season of Lent, give thanks to our powerful, loving God.

Pray

Lord, thank You for being the God who holds the sweep of history and the hurts and cares of Your children in Your hands. Most of all, thank You for the cross and the resurrection of our Savior and Lord. Give us the capacity to care for those we will never meet, just as for those closest to us.

Dr. Rogers Redding

Dr. Rogers Redding has been a member of Dawson since 2008. He teaches a Senior Adult Bible study class and has served as a Stephen Minister.
MARY’S TREASURE: OUR GREATEST GIFT

Luke 2:1–21; focused on 2:8-15

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:10–11

Reflect

When our sons were younger, we would read Luke 2 to them each night during Advent. Over time, they memorized the story from their children’s Bible and would recite it to us as we turned the pages. They knew the story by heart, and it was precious to us. However, a memorized story or something we know by heart can potentially lose some of its wonder.

In our passage today, we find the shepherds, Mary, and Joseph, as unlikely participants in the greatest event in world history. They were God’s chosen witnesses to a desperate world receiving its Savior. The shepherds went quickly to see what the angel of the Lord had told them and then departed telling others of the miracle of this birth. Mary faithfully endured shame and scorn while carrying the Christ child. Joseph trusted the angel’s message to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. All of them realized the magnitude of Jesus’ birth and the impact it would have for all humanity.

We are told that Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. Each of the people the Lord chose to witness the birth of Jesus, the Christ child, were filled with wonder and treasured what they had seen. The Word became flesh and God’s promises were fulfilled. Accepting God’s gift of Christ gives us life everlasting. As we celebrate the risen Savior, may we ponder and treasure all of God’s promises in our hearts.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that Christ is to be treasured in our hearts and His good works to be pondered. Remind us that You still use unlikely people to do Your will. Help us to never lose the wonder of Christ’s birth, and may we treasure that the gift of Christ is our salvation.

Christy Knight

The Knights have been members of Dawson for over 20 years. Christy has been actively involved in many of the ministries at Dawson, including Life Group and Bible Study Leader, Moms and More Coordinator, as well as a volunteer in many other areas.
SHOWDOWN IN THE WILDERNESS


And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

Reflect

This is the second of three temptations that the devil puts before Jesus, and it is especially significant in this Lenten season. The devil begins by taking Jesus up to a very high mountain and showing Him all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And then the devil says that all of it could belong to Jesus if He would bow and worship him.

Let’s pause for a moment: this is why Jesus came, right? He came for the kingdom. But the kingdom that the devil is offering here is a counterfeit. The devil is misunderstanding the kingdom—he thinks it is geographic. Jesus is inaugurating the kingdom of God—a kingdom that is not concerned with boundary lines, but that is made up of people. And He knows that if He wants a kingdom of people, there will be suffering involved to bring them back. There will be the messy and bloody work of redemption. There will be His death.

In this temptation, the devil is whispering a lie into Jesus’ ear, saying, “You don’t have to go that route. You don’t have to suffer. You don’t have to die. There is another way…”

But Jesus doesn’t flinch. Jesus says, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (a quote from Deuteronomy). We know from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament that the Messiah is the suffering servant. Jesus knows that there will be suffering in His serving. After all, He is the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.

And Jesus does suffer. He suffers here in the wilderness, and He suffered on the hill called Golgotha. It was there that they crucified my Lord. It was there that the full weight of the sins of humanity was laid upon Him. But He stands strong in the shadow of the cross, and He stands strong here in the wilderness against the devil—resolved to serve His Father and no one else.

Pray

Father, help us to stand strong against the schemes of the evil one. When we are assaulted with lies and are unsure of the truth, keep us bound to Your word and Your ways. Today, we look to Jesus—the Author and Finisher of our faith.
MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS

Psalm 91:1–2; 9–16

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

Psalm 91:15–16

Reflect

Today we continue our Lenten devotional journey by looking at selected verses in Psalm 91. In verses 1–4, the Psalmist provides two different metaphors for God’s protection. One is a fortress filled with shields and protected by tall and wide walls. The second is a mother bird gathering her baby birds underneath her wings. The walls of the fortress are strong and secure. Arrows and spears pose no threat to the walls. However, the mother bird shelters her young with wings that are fragile. The fortress gives us the picture of great strength and power. The mother bird gives us the picture of gentle, sacrificial love and care.

We read about the love of God in the Old Testament; His love that is strong and powerful like a fortress, but is gentle and caring like a mother bird. It is in the New Testament, in the cross of Jesus Christ, that God combines His righteous power and His tender love.

In verses 9–16, we read promises from God to those who say, “The Lord is my dwelling place,” and “who make the Most High your refuge.” He promises no harm will overtake you, and no disaster will come near your tent. This seems to promise that nothing bad will ever happen to believers. But the Psalmist closes with verses 15–16 and clarifies that God will save us in trouble, not from trouble. The only things those who find refuge in the Most High God can lose are things that are expendable. The approval and worth we work so hard to get from others God graciously bestows on us. He grants us His high regard, His “well done.” He gives us eternal life and salvation of body and soul that cannot be taken from us.

During this Lenten season, Psalm 91 is an invitation for us to praise God who is our refuge and our fortress. He is our help in times of trouble. He is our deliverer and our provider.

Pray

Father God, You love and protect us with the strength of a fortress and the loving care of a mother bird. You give us life and salvation. In the midst of trials, grief, and suffering, grant us eyes to see Your powerful, loving arms around us. Come near to us O God, our refuge and our fortress. Amen.

Brad Gowing

Brad is a graduate of Samford University and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Maile, have two daughters, Addison and Audrey. Brad has recently been called to be Dawson’s Executive Pastor.
SIMEON’S WAITING

Luke 2:22–52; focused on 2:22–32

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Reflect

Waiting is a daily part of life. We wait for our turn at stoplights, in check-out lines, to cross streets, to pick up children or adults, for class or meetings to begin or end, and the response to our text or email to come—daily we wait. On a larger scale, we wait for “BIG” things to possibly happen in our lives—life to begin with birth, education beginning and ending with graduation, marriage, anniversaries, and even death. Spiritually, we wait for God’s answers, our conversion to faith in Christ, His direction in our lives, and our daily walk with Him to see what He will do in His plan. We wait and wait and wait.

Simeon is not mentioned before this passage in Luke. We do not know historically any more about him. From this passage though, we know that he was “righteous and devout” in God’s eyes and that he was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Consolation is a Greek term meaning comfort. God had given Simeon the promise that he would see God’s comfort and rescue for His people. We do not know how long he had been waiting, but we do know that when the Holy Spirit led him to the temple to see Jesus being dedicated to the Lord, he knew “he could depart now in peace” (v. 29). What a promise fulfilled! God gave Simeon the gift of seeing His plan of salvation through Jesus through the Holy Spirit. His knowledge of Jesus’ life and death and resurrection—God’s plan to save His people—was clear.

As we wait—daily, weekly, yearly—for God’s answers in our life, we often grow impatient. We long for clear, immediate answers from God. We cling to our faith in Him and wait expectantly. During this Lenten season, let us wait—with patience and faith—to celebrate Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. God sent us His Son so that we could have a relationship with Him, spend eternity with Him, and spend our days serving Him.

Pray

Lord, thank You for loving us and daily walking with us as we wait for Your plans and promises to be fulfilled in our lives, and in our world. Please give us patience and a deeper faith to know that You alone are God, and through Your love for us You sent Your Son, Jesus, to fulfill Your promise.

Anita Crisler

Anita is married to Rob and has been a member of Dawson for 18 years. She serves on several church-wide committees and enjoys teaching Language Arts at Dawson’s Go Love Tell Ministry—The Learning Center.
PREPARING FOR THE KING

Luke 3; focused on 3:3–6;10–14

And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3

Reflect

When the word of God came to John the Baptist in the wilderness, it ended over 400 years of prophetic silence. The timing of John’s ministry was clearly stated by Luke. The gospel writer goes to great lengths to establish the context of John the Baptist’s ministry in Luke 3:1–2. The list of seven leaders, five Gentiles and two Jews, certainly gives us a precise chronological timeline; but it also describes the conditions of the time for God’s people. The nation of Israel was in the midst of a dark time. They were oppressed politically by the Roman government, they were bearing the weight of religious legalism, and they were bound by the power and penalty of their sin. They needed a King, a Savior.

In ancient times, when a king was coming to town, a messenger would go ahead of the king to herald his coming and to prepare the town for his entrance and the people for his arrival. Simply stated, this was John’s role. His ministry was to prepare the people for the coming of King Jesus, and he did so by “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (v. 3).

Why is this message so important, and why was it the prelude for the coming of Jesus? Repentance is sorrow for our sin and a sincere commitment to turn away from it. Jesus came to redeem us and to restore our relationship with God. We are saved by repenting and placing our faith in the One whose sacrifice atones for our sins, Jesus.

Repentance requires a change of mind and heart, but true repentance also leads to action. Repentance causes us to be sorry for our sins and leads us to the cross for forgiveness. There is more, says John in verses 11–14. The truly repentant produce fruit—generosity, honesty, and contentment are marks of our repentance.

The call from John is the same one that we should be shouting today: Repent and turn to Jesus for salvation.

Pray

Father, thank You for Your grace that leads us to repentance. Thank You for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. We pray that You will give us a humble, forgiving heart, and that it is reflected in the way that we live and serve others. Amen.

Jeff Glaze

Jeff and his wife, Laura, have been members of Dawson since 1996. They have three daughters. Jeff serves as a Deacon and teaches a High School Life Group. He and Laura really love hosting a Wednesday night high school fellowship group in their home.
WHEN THE TRUTH HURTS

**Luke 4; focused on 4:14–30**

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

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**Reflect**

Jesus was at the very beginning of His ministry when Luke provides us with a glimpse into how His message of salvation might be ultimately received. As Jesus stood up to recite the words of the prophet Isaiah, the crowd became fixated on Him. Something was different about the reader this particular Sabbath. The crowd began to speak highly of Him, and Scripture tells us they even marveled at His words.

And then, it happens.

Questions from their hearts and mouths begin to form: “Wait a minute, did He just say, ‘fulfillment of Scripture’? Don’t we know this man’s parents? Haven’t we watched Him walk through the marketplace with his mom and learn how to be a carpenter with his dad? Wasn’t it just a few years ago that we were watching Him attend the regular synagogue teachings like all the other young boys His age? How can this be?”

Jesus wasted no time getting to the heart of the issue; their hearts weren’t prepared for this new, radical message—especially from a man who grew up down the street! Jesus delivered one of His more famous statements in response to their sentiment: “Truly I say to you; no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”

He continued in His dialogue by giving two real—life examples, Elijah and Elisha—stories they would have known quite well from their years of Old Testament study. In times of intense disobedience by the Jewish people, Elijah and Elisha were each sent to aid Gentiles (as opposed to the Jews, God’s own chosen people). God’s mercy was certainly extended, even when people continually rejected Him.

We are specifically reminded during the Christmas season to “Let every heart, prepare Him room.” However, the exclusivity of the Gospel message requires that we continually work to prepare Him room at Christmastime, during this season of Lent, and in every season of life.

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**Pray**

Lord, allow us to read your Word with a heart that is prepared to hear Your perfect truth. Break down barriers of pride and expectation, and allow us to obey you in the specific ways You are calling us to do.

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**Allison Woodruff**

Allison has been a member of Dawson for more than 10 years. She plays an active role in a Young Adult Life Group, served on international mission projects, and volunteers at The Learning Center. She and her husband, Trey, have two sons, Colin and John.
MAN OF MIRACLES

**Luke 5; focused on 5:1–11**

And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

**Luke 5:10b–11**

**Reflect**

Imagine Simon Peter the fisherman cleaning his nets having finished his fishing for the night. He cleans his nets to keep them from rotting and breaking. The work has to be done quickly so the fellow fishermen, including John and James, worked together. People stood on the shore to hear Jesus teach the word of God from Peter’s boat as his platform.

Jesus spoke to crowds, but he was always concerned about individuals. Fishermen in Palestine fished during the night. So when Jesus had finished speaking, he noticed that, although Peter had fished all night, his nets were empty. Jesus called Peter to cast the nets on the other side of the boat, but he answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets” (v. 5).

Peter went from failure to success when he obeyed Jesus’ instructions. The nets were full to overflowing. He had to have his eyes seeing and his ears listening. If he had not responded to Jesus, he would not have witnessed the miracles Jesus performed. In subsequent verses in chapter 5, Luke tells us that Jesus also sees others who need a miracle: a man whose friends lowered him through a roof to Jesus for healing and a man covered with leprosy.

As Peter saw the two boats so filled with fish that they began to sink, he said, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Jesus saw depth in him and in the other fishermen. Jesus sees depth in us even when we do not see it ourselves. Peter heard Jesus say, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (v. 10).

Jesus gave Peter a platform like his own boat for speaking and for being a fisher of men. He followed Jesus as he preached at roadsides, boats, hillsides—anywhere there were people. The power of Christ continues to equip us, like Peter, as a channel of God’s blessing to others.

**Pray**

Our Father, we love You for who You are, who You always have been, and who You will always be. We confess with Simon Peter that we are sinners, saved by the sacrifice of Christ. We worship You with gratitude and joy.

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Don Lytle

Don is married to Carolyn and has served at Dawson as Deacon Secretary, Church Clerk, Life Group teacher, and Stephen Minister.
LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

Luke 6; focused on 6:20–28

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”


Reflect

Have you ever thought about the disciples following Jesus and what that meant for them? In chapter 6, verse 22, it says, “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the son of man!” As they were following Jesus, they realized how hard it was going to be, but they also realized how sweet the journey would be. The disciples were hated and were excluded because they chose to follow Jesus. As Christians, isn’t that our story as well?

The message Jesus is teaching the disciples doesn’t end at just loving and praying for those who have hurt you. We live in a day and age where there are many opinions. The tendency is to not have friendships with those who oppose us. These different opinions have led to many separations of friendships, families, and organizations. However, we are called to love not only our enemies, but also those who oppose our opinions. We must fight for unity, because of our unity in Christ, not only among those who have hurt us, but also among those who may hold differing opinions. We pray for them and love them because even our enemies are made in the image of God.

Isn’t it easy to love someone who loves us and agrees with us? The people that we would say are our “go-to” people. They are the ones who come over and have dinner with us or the ones that come to the hospital to see one of your family members or to check on you.

Then you have that person who wrongs you. The person who was rude to you or the person who frustrates you continually. We have all been hurt by someone before, and it’s hard.

In this passage, Luke is talking about a topic that is hard to hear. Jesus says we are to love our enemies. Often, our heart becomes hardened to those people, and it ends up affecting not only our relationship with them but also the way they see Jesus in us. We are to love our enemies, and to love them means to pray for them. Today, spend some time thinking about someone who has wronged you and pray that God would soften your heart towards that person.

Pray

Lord, soften our hearts toward others. Help us love as You love. Amen.

Abbie Johnson
Abbie, Dawson’s Associate Minister to Students, is passionate about discipleship, seeing students grow in their relationship with the Lord, and equipping parents. She will graduate with her Master’s Degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in May.
**JESUS LAMENTS OVER ISRAEL**


“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”  

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**Reflect**

As we resume our Lenten devotional journey today, we encounter an attempt on the part of the Pharisees to prevent Jesus from continuing to Jerusalem (v. 31). The Pharisees were one of the two major religious groups in Israel during Jesus’ ministry. As persistent antagonists to Jesus, this warning with an insecure motive is somewhat to be expected, but neither the Pharisees nor the tetrarch Herod would discourage or determine the outcome of Jesus’ mission.

Jesus responded with action; He continued to drive out demons and heal, He reached His goal, and He will “keep going today and tomorrow and the next day” (vv. 32–33). The journey to Jerusalem would go according to God’s plan and perfect timing. Jesus’ confidence in His Father would not be swayed.

So, why did Jesus have such a focus on Jerusalem in these verses? Jerusalem was the largest city in Israel and served as the nation’s political capital. Jerusalem was also representative of the city of God and was symbolic of the whole nation of Israel. Jerusalem also carried with it a history of rejecting God’s prophets when opportunities for repentance were offered (v. 34). We see this with Elijah in 1 Kings, Zechariah in 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah and Uriah in the book of Jeremiah.

Jesus laments for Jerusalem and provides powerful imagery of His longing to gather the children of Israel together, likening His feelings to that of a caring hen gathering her chicks under her wings (v. 34). Jesus grieves for Jerusalem, knowing it would discard the Savior and Messiah just as it had rejected earlier prophets. Jesus quotes Psalm 118:26 when imploring to Jerusalem that they would not see Him again until they say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (v. 35b). The overtones of His second coming add amazing hope to these verses.

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**Pray**

Lord, we praise You as the perfect and ultimate leader. Your concern for Your children and their salvation gives us hope in the face of our weakness. Grant us the confidence, consistency, and contentment only a relationship with You can provide. Thank You for making us complete. Amen.

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**Ryan Nast**

Ryan serves at Dawson on the Board of Deacons and as a Young Adult Life Group Teacher. He and his wife, Landon, have three children.
WAIT FOR THE LORD

Psalm 27

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Psalm 27:13–14

Reflect

Psalm 27 is ascribed to King David and describes his seeking the Lord while he was surrounded or besieged by his enemies. These enemies included both rival nations, such as the Philistines, and those from his own family, like Absalom.

While many of us can’t relate to being pursued and surrounded by armies trying to kill us, most of us have had times in our lives where we faced destruction in other forms. Whether financial hardship, a broken relationship, or a terminal diagnosis, we can relate on some level with David and the feeling of being surrounded.

For more than 10 years, I lived in a broken marriage ravaged by the festering wound of infidelity and subsequent addiction, and ultimately, my wife took her life. It wasn’t until later in that 10-year period that I truly started to seek the face of the Lord. And only then did I start to find the sense of security and assurance that He had offered to me all along. I had been impatient and not willing to wait or work for the healing we both needed. I had wanted it my way and on my timeline. As I earnestly sought the Lord in those latter years, I was able to forgive her and try to nurture our relationship again.

While the battle for our marriage raged on, I found a strange sense of assurance that the Lord was with me. His presence was never more palpable than the moment the doctor walked down the hall at UAB and told me the news that my wife had died. I know the Lord did not cause the trials that my wife and I faced. And I know that He didn’t cause her to take her life. But, I know that He was preparing me for the hardest things by giving me time to trust Him while I waited.

We may not get the outcomes we want or earnestly pray for in this life. We all want our “best life now,” but as Christians we have to remember that our best life is to come. As much as we want it now, we must wait. I think how we wait can define our faith in the One we are waiting for.

And while we wait for His will and purposes to be fulfilled, He is with us. So, wait for the Lord. Yes, wait for the Lord!

Pray

Lord, help us to seek Your face in all circumstances and to wait for Your will and purposes. Give us confidence in Your presence on the good and not so good days. Remind me always that You have faced and defeated the ultimate enemy on the cross.

Chip Treadwell

Chip and his wife, Leah, are members of the Bowdre/Martin Life Group and have two sons, Jackson and Fenton. Chip volunteers with Dawson’s Media Team as a camera operator.
DEATH IS CONQUERED

Luke 7:1–17; focused on 7:11–17

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

Luke 7:16

Reflect

In this passage, we see two times when Jesus raised someone from the dead. The Centurion’s servant and the widow’s son are both raised to life by Jesus. The first thing that we should sit with is the power that Jesus has. With the Centurion, Jesus did not even need to go to the house and see the servant. His word, from afar, was enough. With the widow’s son, it took just these two words: “Get up.”

Second, we see Jesus as the compassionate Savior in this passage. It’s too easy to imagine Jesus as a powerful, unapproachable being. Certainly, He is powerful. But He is not removed from the pains of our lives. He sees us in our need and in our sorrow and treats us with compassion. Jesus is powerful and He is near, approaching humans in their pain with the utmost love and care.

Third, this passage points to an enemy that had never been faced successfully: physical death. It’s interesting and important to notice that Jesus’ actions here are almost casual. He’s doing something that’s never been done, and it’s a little bit nonchalant. He is treating death as though it’s an annoyance. With just a phrase, He’s setting it aside. Jesus raised people from the dead in this passage, but He would defeat it fully and finally at Calvary. This is the precursor to the ultimate battle that was won on the cross. We look forward with hopeful expectation, knowing that Christ has defeated death on our behalf. He has done what He should never have had to do because He loves us.

Pray

Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son to do what we couldn’t. Thank You for rescuing us from death. Help us to live as people unafraid of death because we belong to You.
IS HE ENOUGH?

Luke 7:18–50; focused on 7:18–28

In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

Reflect

In this passage we find John imprisoned, having to hear about the teachings and miracles of Jesus from behind bars. As John’s entire life has been consumed by the proclamation of the coming Messiah who will free His people from bondage, he finds himself still in chains. In this very human look into John’s heart, we see him begin to question Jesus’ identity. “Is Jesus truly the Messiah? If so, then why am I still in chains?” He sends his disciples to go and ask Jesus a scandalous question, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Let’s remember the events of John’s life. John was miraculously born of an extremely elderly woman, heard the audible voice of God calling him, lived in the wilderness only by being sustained by God, proclaimed the coming Messiah, had a massively successful ministry that impacted thousands, baptized Jesus Himself where the heavens opened up and God the Father spoke, and later would be called the greatest man ever born of woman by Jesus Himself. And now John questions the identity of Jesus. When John’s messengers asked Jesus if He is the one who is to come (Luke 7:21), Jesus doesn’t erupt in anger or frustration, pointing out how clearly He has worked in John’s life. Instead, in the presence of John’s messengers, He said, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard.”

These miracles Jesus performed were direct fulfillments of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah throughout Isaiah. Jesus responded through action, proving His identity before their very eyes. But notice one prophecy Jesus didn’t tell John, where Scripture says the Messiah will free the prisoners from the dungeon (Isaiah 42:7). For John, there was no physical freedom from prison coming. John would stay in jail, and soon be beheaded for entertainment. Jesus never promised a comfortable life, He promised eternal life. Being good and faithful does not guarantee a life of prosperity. God is most glorified when life is at its worst and He is still enough. For John, Jesus was enough. In this difficult passage, Luke invites us to be reminded that Jesus is sufficient because of who He is, our perfect Messiah. In this season of Lent, dive deep into your soul and ask yourself, do you know who Jesus is, and is He enough for you?

Pray

King Jesus, hold us tight when we don’t understand the tragedy on this side of heaven. Grant us strength to endure and eyes to see You clearly. Help us rest assured in the truth that You are enough, in every season and circumstance.

Bryan Howard

Born as a missionary kid in Johannesburg, South Africa, Bryan grew up in Orlando, Florida, and came to Samford University where he received his Bachelor of Arts in Religion. Bryan served in Dawson’s Student Ministry before stepping into his role in the Recreation Ministry.
WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?

Luke 8:1–39; focused on 8:22–39

And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?”

Reflect

Other accounts of this storm (vv. 22–25) express Jesus’ words differently (“O ye of little faith” in Matthew and “How is it that ye have no faith?” in Mark), but Luke’s “Where is your faith?” conveys a different angle. Where was the disciples’ faith? Did their fear temporarily scare it away, or was it resting elsewhere? Were they depending on things they’d been depending upon before meeting Jesus—the ability to earn a living, the sturdiness of their boat, good friends to talk things over with? In those dire moments in the boat, it’s unlikely the disciples embarked on much self-examination.

Perhaps you grew up knowing this hymn: “Master, the tempest is raging...Carest Thou not that we perish? How canst Thou lie asleep...?” The refrain repeats, “Peace! Be still.” Musically climactic is the reminder, “No waters can swallow the ship where lies the Master of ocean and earth and skies!”

Storms we face today range from various crises to steady, daily dissatisfactions. Storms can come in the form of nagging purposelessness or unfulfilling work complete with irritating coworkers. Our storms may be health-related like cancer diagnoses, or even unnamed fears that arrive unpredictably. Other storms may be seemingly impenetrable layers of worldly affection encasing a heart that has neither time nor room for loving God or a mind occupied with everything except studying and dwelling on His precepts.

We frequently think of the storms that need calming as coming from the outside. But we should also examine our storms on the inside. Let’s include in our prayers a plea against internal storms: noise, resistance, aimlessness, and ungrowing faith.

Luke’s gospel gives many accounts proving the truth of Gabriel’s words to Mary, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Jesus embodies the “nothing is impossible” power of God. He is still “Master of ocean and earth and skies” and of every storm that may be testing or hindering your faith.

Pray

Lord Jesus, our muddled minds and hindered hearts need the steady rain of your Spirit breaking through years of built-up affections. During this season of serious observance, may we give You the attention we long to give You.

Betsy Lowery

Betsy and her husband, Jeff, have been Dawson members since 2012 and are members of the Arendall/McLemore/Martin Life Group. Betsy holds a Master of Arts Degree in Christian Education and is the author of three books.
CHRIST IN THE STORM ON THE LAKE OF GALILEE

Rembrandt
STEPPING FORWARD IN FAITH

Luke 8:40–56
And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

Reflect

Jairus was probably used to being in control and being able to solve problems. After all, he was the business administrator for the synagogue. Managing logistics and solving problems was part of his job description. However, in this passage, Jairus found himself facing a problem he could not solve on his own. He did not have the power or ability to save his dying daughter.

Facing the reality of his daughter’s illness, Jairus fell at Jesus’ feet, begging Jesus to come to his house and save his daughter. Jairus must have felt relief as they moved through the crowd, only to have that relief turned to frustration when their progress was halted because a woman touched the fringe of Jesus’ cloak. We do not know how long Jairus had to wait, but I imagine his feelings became those of failure and grief when someone from his house arrived saying, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.” Only to then feel a spark of hope when Jarius heard Jesus say, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” Talk about conflicting messages! Jairus was faced with a decision, should he listen to the logic of the world telling him he had failed and the situation was hopeless, or should he listen to Jesus and continue forward in faith?

Just a few minutes before, Jairus heard Jesus tell the woman that touched his cloak that she was healed because of her faith. Jairus personally witnessed healing that was beyond the power of the many doctors and healers the woman had previously consulted, a miracle that had only one explanation—faith in Jesus. Maybe that is what gave Jairus the confidence to press onward even though the world told him all hope was lost. Jairus stepped forward in faith. He took Jesus to his house anyway, and his daughter’s health was restored.

We often face the same decision today—do we listen to the world, or do we step forward in faith? We can learn from Jairus and remember what we have experienced and know to be true about God so that our faith is bolstered, and we can step forward in confidence.

Pray

Heavenly Father, how thankful we are that Your thoughts are not our thoughts and Your ways are not our ways. When we face times of uncertainty and desperation, help us tune out the messages of the world that threaten to overwhelm us and instead focus on You.

Anna Kittinger

Anna and her children, Jackson and Addie, are thankful to be a part of the Dawson Family of Faith. Anna has served on Dawson’s Finance Committee and leads adult Bible Studies on Wednesday nights.
TAKING UP YOUR CROSS


Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 9:23

Reflect

Perhaps it is fitting that the early parts of Luke 9 underscore our willing dependence on God’s faithful provision. Yet, hearing Jesus say He must face rejection, suffering, and death so soon after feeding the 5,000 must have startled this group of followers. The imagery and blunt language Jesus used to instruct His disciples most certainly captured their attention. Everyone who heard Jesus’ words understood the gravity of the cross. In the Roman world, a man sentenced to die on a cross was first forced to carry the cross to the location of His own execution. This fact was not lost on those who heard Jesus say these words.

In truth, a cross is heavy and awkward to carry. It is not subtle and is difficult to ignore. A cross is public and often attracts disdain and ridicule. It is serious and lethal and implies finality. And still, Jesus asks His followers (us) to voluntarily take up our cross daily.

Choosing to take up a cross and deny one’s own self-interests appears nonsensical. Self-preservation and promotion are the norm today. Denying oneself in our culture is radical and awkward. It will probably attract suspicion and ridicule. Choosing to crucify our selfish desire to accept earthly treasures in exchange for eternal joy is hard because Satan is relentless in offering distractions. Therefore, carrying the cross requires relentless daily focus. Crucifixion is serious and lethal. Fortunately, Jesus changed the narrative and showed us how the path to crucifixion can lead to life… a joyous, eternal life with Him.

Pray

Lord, we pray that we will not be enticed to invest our energy and efforts into short-term desires at the expense of following You. We pray for relentless desire to follow Your will. Help us be bold in telling others that an eternal life with Jesus Christ outweighs anything the world can offer.

Paul Hughes

Paul Hughes and his wife, Julie, have been members of Dawson for almost 19 years, along with their three children, Cameron, Carson, and Christopher. Paul currently serves as a Life Group leader for 11th graders as well as an Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 83.
THE URGENCY OF REPENTANCE

“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none.”


Reflect

This short parable about the fig tree that won’t produce fruit should lead us to careful self-examination. It is so much more comfortable for us when we assign points to sins. There is always someone worse than us, right? But God does not grade sins. All sin separates us from God.

The beginning of Luke 13 finds Jesus among a crowd of people who are reeling from recent events where people have died. They want answers. They want to know “Why?” Jesus, interesting enough, speaks to them in a parable, turning their attention away from the “why questions” and toward a more pressing issue—the urgency of repentance and the need to turn to God.

Jesus’ parable addresses the problem of unrepentance and having an unrepentant heart. In His example, the vinedresser did not cut down the tree when it failed to produce fruit. Instead, he gave the tree more time, hoping that it would “turn around” and become fruitful. To repent means to make a complete change (a 180 degree turn) toward God.

Scripture tells us that God is patient, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). God knows we have and will continue to sin. But He is patient with us and allows us to repent of our sins. He also gives us time to grow in our faith in order to produce fruit and spread His love.

But, time is running out. We must have a sense of urgency because no one has an unlimited amount of time. The tree in Luke 13:9 was given just one more year to produce fruit or it would be cut down. For those who still have not repented of their sins and turned toward the saving gift of God’s grace through His Son, Jesus, good fruit will never be found.

God desires us all to come to Him in repentance. As Christians, we do not know how much time we have on earth, so we must make it an urgent matter to grow in our faith, produce fruit, and take His love and His Word to the ends of the earth.

Pray

Heavenly Father, we know we are sinners. Help us to be convicted of our sin and repent so that we may produce fruit that will last and that will be visible in our lives so that others will be pointed to You. May You be honored and glorified in all that we do. Amen.

Beth Gladney
Beth has been a member of Dawson for over 36 years. She currently serves in the nursery, sings in the Sanctuary Choir, and serves on the Missions Team.
GOD’S STEADFAST LOVE

Psalm 63:1–8

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

Psalm 63:3

Reflect

Have you ever been in a place where you were unable to praise God? Have there been seasons of your life where God’s love and presence seemed distant and far away, like a fading memory? Perhaps even now you are in a place where you are deeply longing for God’s presence. In Scripture, the psalmist’s words capture this feeling so well: “My soul thirsts for you...as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

Yet, the psalmist acknowledges that it is in the struggle for understanding and the longing for solace that God is present. Just as God has been this psalmist’s “help” (v. 6), “wings” (v. 7) that protect, and the one to whom he “clings” (v. 8), so his help, love, and intimacy are ever present for us also.

Like a light in the distance, the psalmist begins to see hope. This hope draws him ever closer to God and eventually overwhelms him to the point of praise. His hope is renewed and his joy restored as the psalmist is reminded of God’s faithful and steadfast love. A renewed hope and joy that results in the psalmist lifting his hands and voice in praise to God.

After waiting expectantly for nine months, Dorinda and I received the call that our son and daughter-in-law’s second child, Luca Gold, or Goldie as she is affectionately remembered, was born. God would bring her into our lives for a very brief forty minutes and then she would leave to be with Him for eternity. In the months to follow, our family found ourselves in a very hard and lonely place seeking, needing, and longing for God’s presence. We discovered in the midst of the heartache and pain that God was there, loving and caring for us through the friends and fellow believers who led us to worship Him, always pointing us toward the hope we have in Christ.

May we be reminded during life’s struggles and the longing within us for something better, that God is with us even when we may not feel Him. We can be confident that God’s steadfast love for us is protecting, healing, and filling us with His hope and peace.

Pray

Lord, You know our deepest yearning, our deepest thirst. Come to our aid, be present in our need. Then use us to be Your presence for others who are longing and hoping and craving for Your steadfast love. Amen.

Jim Gifford

Jim serves as Dawson’s Minister to Adults. His life verse is 2 Timothy 2:2, which reminds him to be steadfast in teaching and discipling others. He and Dorinda are parents to three adult children, and Pops and Dinda to Moses, Birdie, and Loxley.
THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP


Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

*Jesus, Luke 9:62*

**Reflect**

For eight chapters, the Gospel of Luke describes the coming of Jesus Christ and His early ministry. His disciples witness Him teach with wisdom, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cast out demons, and bring the dead back to life. They were “astonished at the majesty of God” (v. 43).

However, the narrative takes a drastic turn here in chapter nine. For the first time, Jesus explicitly named the path awaiting him—one involving suffering, betrayal, and death. Then He chose that path: “He set his face to go to Jerusalem” (v. 51), where He would suffer, be crucified, and die. He chose the way of the cross.

The disciples were slow to understand what Jesus meant. They were still excited by the glorious acts of Jesus’ life so far. This exclusive focus on glory leads them to argue about who is the greatest. Then they wonder if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy people who rejected Jesus. In both instances, they have yet to see the cost of discipleship.

We then reach one of the most difficult parts of the chapter (vv. 57–62). Three anonymous followers declare their allegiance to Jesus, but each with a condition. The first implies a need for a stable home—a “place to lay my head.” The second wants to fulfill his cultural duty to bury his father. This was one of the most sacred responsibilities for a Jewish son. The third wants to say his goodbyes to family and friends. Jesus’ response sounds harsh: He implied that none of them was fit for the kingdom of heaven.

We would be remiss to say Jesus prohibited these actions. He was not trying to destroy families or deprive friends of meaningful farewells. He was, after all, a Jewish man who respected and obeyed the Law fully. However, His words highlight the cost of discipleship. Following Jesus means an allegiance without conditions. It means submitting all of one’s ambitions, goals, dreams (however good they may be!) to God. It means reordering priorities, making sacrifices, giving up old habits, and choosing the way of the cross.

**Pray**

Father, we are tempted like these early followers to place conditions on our commitment to follow You. Reveal our competing allegiances and grant us the strength to turn from them. Lead us in the way of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who shows us the joy and the cost of discipleship.

*Kyle Young*

Kyle is a leader for Crossroads (Dawson’s Hispanic Youth Group) and volunteers in the Hispanic Congregation. He served as the Missions Intern for more than two years while at Beeson Divinity School.
MUCH MORE THAN ALL

Luke 10; focused on 10:25–37

“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Luke 10:36–37

Reflect

There’s a line, right? For who, exactly? Just how much do I have to do? We all want to know just what we’re getting into, how far we can take it before we go too far, how much it will take to justify ourselves without getting inconvenient. We want to do just what’s required and get defensive about whether we’re doing enough.

In this passage which includes the parable of the good Samaritan, we see Jesus responding to a question contained in each of the Synoptic Gospels. When asked by a lawyer, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”, Jesus prompted the man to sum up the Old Testament law with the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Despite all the Old Testament provisions of sacrifice to atone for sins, Hosea 6:6 tells us that God doesn’t desire sacrifices, but steadfast love, also translated as mercy. This is echoed in Mark 12:33 where Jesus’ answer to the question of the greatest commandment—to love God with this steadfast love and to love, with mercy, our neighbor as ourselves—is described as “much more than all” the sacrifices or religion we could try to do for ourselves.

However, the lawyer in Luke’s passage, answering his own question, still wanted to justify himself and draw a line about who qualifies for this “neighbor” treatment. At this, Jesus tells the parable of an unexpected neighbor, a disdained Samaritan, who gives a stranger left for dead on the side of the road, much more than what was conventional or convenient. Jesus shifted the line.

Just like this Samaritan, Jesus came to us, with a “much more than all” kind of mercy, saving us from our sin when we were left for dead on the side of a road. Jesus didn’t so much shift the line as remove the line. In response, we are called to move beyond our self-centered, self-justification and do likewise, showing mercy to unexpected neighbors all around us.

Pray

God, we love You because You first loved us, and sent Jesus to show us mercy and to bring us back into relationship with You. We confess that we are often focused on ourselves, and ask that Your Spirit would help us to focus on loving even our unexpected neighbors. Amen.

Brittany Mathis

Brittany Mathis grew up at Dawson, with her parents, Karen and John Bergquist. She now teaches an 11th grade Life Group and loves serving the Chapel Choir each week with her husband, Eric.
TEACH US TO PRAY

Luke 11:1–28; focused on 11:1–8

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

Luke 11:1

Reflect

Of all the spiritual disciplines, prayer can be one of the most difficult. Because of its private and personal nature it can quickly be drowned out by the tasks and noise of each day. How is prayer a priority in our lives? Once again we see the example of the importance of prayer from Jesus. Luke took specific notice of how often Jesus prayed. Jesus prayed when He was baptized (Luke 3:21), He withdrew into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16), He prayed all night (Luke 6:12), He prayed alone (Luke 9:18), He prayed when He was transfigured (Luke 9:28–29), and in today’s passage, we discover that Jesus was praying in a “certain place.”

We know the importance of prayer, but it is helpful to be reminded in the pages of Scripture of how it was a consistent part of the life of Jesus. May we be stirred to be more intentional and consistent in our prayer lives.

How do we pray? Maybe that is your question today. You may be a newer believer or one that has followed Jesus for a while, but you need to be reminded of how to pray. Well, you are in good company. The disciples had the same question. There are amazing books, articles, and blogs on prayer, but the disciples went to the source and asked to be taught how to pray. Imagine being in a class on prayer taught by the Lord Himself. Wouldn’t we all be furiously taking notes?

Jesus says, “When you pray say, ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation’” (Luke 11:2–4). Jesus also taught about prayer in Matthew 6, but the words are not exactly the same. May this be a reminder that it is not about reciting the words perfectly, but praying along these lines from the humble heart of a child to the Holy Father.

As God’s children, we approach Him as Father and begin with lifting up who He is. He alone is holy, no one can compare to Him. Just as a child would approach a parent with a need, come before your Holy Father and seek Him for help with your need and humbly confess your sins. May we be reminded that we are utterly dependent upon Him.

Pray

Lord, teach us not only to pray but to value prayer. Give us eyes to see idols and spiritual laziness that is pressing prayer to the margins or even off the pages of our days. Thank You for Your guidance, may it shape our approach, our requests, and our confessions as we humbly seek You.

Danielle Bell

Danielle Bell, Dawson’s Minister to Children, is a respected children’s ministry leader and trainer with more than 23 years of Children’s Ministry experience. She is a regional and national conference speaker and a frequent contributor to Children’s Ministry Magazine.
THE LIGHT IN YOU


"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness."

Luke 11:34

Reflect

Today we continue our Lenten journey in Luke 11: 29–53. As the passage opens, we see Jesus giving a warning to the crowds who continue to grow around him. Jesus called them “an evil generation” who “seeks for a sign” (v. 29). Jesus reminded the crowds that the people of Nineveh were sent a sign from God through Jonah’s preaching. He said that the people of Nineveh chose to respond to God’s message with repentance. Next, Jesus reminded the crowds that the “queen of the South,” who 1 Kings 10:1 and following tells us is queen of Sheba, traveled a long way to “test” Solomon. When she heard of “the wisdom of Solomon,” she believed. Conversely, the crowds gathering around Jesus were hearing the Gospel from Jesus Himself and rejecting it. Jesus warned the crowds that there would be judgment upon their generation for “behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

Jesus continued by drawing a correlation between His message and a light (v. 33). No one lights a lamp only to cover it up. The light is put on display for all to see (v. 34). If you see Jesus as the Messiah, you will be full of His light; but if you do not see Jesus for who He truly is, you will remain in darkness (v. 35). Be mindful to remain focused on the true light of Christ (v. 36). When you remain focused on Christ, your entire being will be full of Christ’s light, and it will shine on all of those you meet.

Jesus is not keeping the light of His message a secret here; rather, He puts it on display for all to see that He is the long-awaited Messiah. In the verses that follow, Jesus gave a series of “woes” to the Pharisees and lawyers in the crowd. In a nutshell, Jesus exposed their spiritual blindness all the while warning of their impending judgment should they choose to continue to reject Him.

This passage serves as a reminder to Christians as well as a call to action. This Lenten season, let us ask God to examine our hearts and remove any spiritual blindspots that we may have hidden within so that we may shine the light of Christ.

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending the light of Christ to a dark world. During this Lenten season, continue to remove any spiritual blindness that might be in our hearts. God, allow us to be lights that shine for You.

Matt Griffith

Matt and his wife, Dana, have been members of Dawson for 10 years. Matt serves as a Deacon, is on the Finance Team, and co-teaches a 6th grade Life Group.
SEEK HIS KINGDOM

Luke 12:1–34; focused on 12:12–32

“Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

Luke 12:31

Reflect

The words of Jesus in Luke 12 warn us of hypocrisy, covetousness, and anxiousness. As Christians, these are feelings and attitudes that many of us struggle with on a daily basis and can oftentimes be significant obstacles to our personal relationship with Christ. Of even greater concern is that each of these are often interconnected and can manifest themselves together.

While speaking to the crowds who followed Him, including His disciples, Jesus began with a warning of “the leaven of the Pharisees.” Leaven is a metaphor for hypocrisy, as it only takes a little bit of leaven to affect a great mass. This was especially important for the disciples to remember, as hypocrisy can often be strongest in those who enjoy high levels of stature or success.

We then hear the “Parable of the Rich Fool” who has become more concerned with justice related to his inheritance rather than the covetousness that was at the root of his question for Jesus. As the man asked Jesus to take a side in an inheritance matter, Jesus used this opportunity to address our need to guard ourselves against covetousness. In verse 15, Jesus said, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Jesus then spoke to His disciples directly regarding anxiousness. He used examples of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. God feeds and clothes each of them, as He also provides for each of us.

Worry often comes concerning material things in life and distracts us from having faith and trust in Him to provide. Jesus says in verse 31, “Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” Jesus does not say to trust God sometimes, usually, often, or in certain circumstances. No, this is how we should approach everything in our lives because He is our sole Provider of all good things.

Pray

Lord, in this season of Lent, give us a heart of gratitude. Help us be guarded from hypocrisy. Grant us resistance from the temptation of coveting and calm our anxiousness as we seek Your kingdom and Your righteousness.
LEANING IN OR LOOKING ON?


“But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.”

Luke 15:28

Reflect

The beginning of Luke 15 tells us that two groups had gathered to hear Jesus share parables. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1–2).

One group was leaning in, longing to listen to Jesus. The other group was looking on, passing judgment on Him. While both groups heard the same parable, only one group understood the need for repentance, the love experienced through forgiveness, and the hope of restoration.

We see a repentant son. After leaving home and trying to make things work on his own, he recognized his inability to sustain himself. He had lost everything. At a point of total desperation, having exhausted every other option of fulfillment, he turned to head home to his father in humility.

We see a forgiving father. When he saw his son he ran and threw his arms around him! He called for a celebration “for this son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24a). This father had not lost hope! His heart was full of compassion! He didn’t merely stand around. He went running!

We see a prideful brother. He was angry and refused to celebrate. He said to his father, “Look, all these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends” (Luke 5:29). Heartbreaking! In his efforts to prove himself to be righteous, he missed out completely!

Just as the father desired total restoration in his relationship with his son, God desires this same relationship with us. Are you leaning in, totally depending on God and living through the finished work of Christ? Or, are you looking on, depending on yourself and trying to be justified through your own efforts? Whether you are leaning in or looking on, picture your Heavenly Father with His arms open wide! He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to open wide His arms on the cross for your sins.

Pray

Lord, like the repentant wayward son, we have sinned against You. Like the prideful older brother, we are in need of a humble heart. Forgiving Father, thank You for providing salvation through Jesus Christ. Through Your love, help us to have open arms to extend grace and mercy to others. Amen.

Kristen Torres

Kristen, Dawson’s Minister of Spiritual Development, has attended Dawson all her life and has served on staff for 12 years. She is blessed to do life in this Family of Faith alongside her husband, Angel, her son, Dante, and her parents, Bill and Jeanne Wear.
BLESSED ARE THE FORGIVEN

Psalm 32

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Psalm 32:5

Reflect

Today we turn our attention to Psalm 32—a hymn of penance and thanksgiving. Wrapped within these 11 verses, we find King David offering invaluable instruction on the nature of true blessedness. Or put another way, he is answering the age-old question, “Who can truly be happy (blessed)?”

The answer, David says, is simply this: those that are truly happy and blessed are those that are forgiven. Although Christ is not mentioned by name in this Psalm, the beauty of the gospel message is on display as we read about how the Lord covers our sins and does not count our iniquity against us (vv. 1–2). Just as God covered Adam and Eve with animal skins in the Garden of Eden, so the Lord covers us with Christ’s robe of righteousness when we are pardoned from our sins.

David notes that oftentimes we ignore that God is ready and willing to forgive our sins. Instead, we drag our feet and keep silent, feeling the weight of our guilt and shame (vv. 3–4). We attempt to conceal our wrongdoing, foolishly thinking we can hide from God. The repetition of the word “cover” in verses 1 and 5 draws our attention to the fact that we are helpless when it comes to our own sin (Ephesians 2:1). When God “covers” our sins, He graciously blots them out; when man “covers” his own sin, he is sinfully hiding it. What a kindness the Lord shows us when we feel His hand heavy upon us anytime we sit in unrepentant sin (v. 4).

David concludes his hymn with shouts of joy and we can join him in saying, “rejoice, O righteous” (v. 10). Because of Jesus’ atoning work on the cross, we can boldly “draw near to the throne of grace” knowing He is ready to forgive (Hebrews 4:16). What mercy He shows us anytime we come before Him with repentant hearts in prayer! He is not only “faithful and just,” but also gracious and kind, to forgive us our sins. And it is only in being forgiven that we can fully understand just how blessed we truly are.

Pray

Gracious Father, we come to You with a humble and repentant heart asking Your forgiveness for the wrong we’ve done. We have sinned against others and sinned against You. Thank You for covering us with Your mercy and granting us Your pardon.

Liz Cuenin

Liz Cuenin is Dawson’s Discipleship Associate. She is an avid reader and a big fan of exploring new places. Currently, she is attempting to survive her first year of seminary.
**READY OR NOT, HERE I COME. ARE YOU READY?**

*Luke 12:35–59; focused on 12:35–40*

“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

*Luke 12:40*

**Reflect**

While the title of this devotion seems like a line from a game of “Hide and Seek” and not part of a Lenten devotional series, it can be a serious matter as we look at our preparedness for the coming of Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. In verse 35, Luke gives us two visual elements as he describes the preparedness for the return of the Master from a Wedding Feast: we are to be “dressed” and we are to “keep our lamps burning.” Why would Jesus instruct us to do this? It is doubtful any of us would be undressed and without our interior lights and front porch lights burning fully while awaiting the arrival of company. Arguably, this is more likely when a guest is one of great stature. Imagine being notified the Queen of England had requested to visit your home at a specified date and time during a visit to the United States. You would most assuredly work to ensure your home was immaculate and would either wear your finest outfit or rush to purchase an outfit worthy of the Queen.

It is doubtful anyone reading this has a home, or furnishings, on a comparable level with Buckingham Palace, yet the hosts would clean, vacuum, polish, dust, and even likely replace burned out light bulbs in their home. In today’s world this seems not only appropriate, but expected, and something commonly done with the great anticipation of receiving a guest few on this earth have ever received in their home.

As we look at Luke 12, why would we not approach preparing our hearts for Jesus’ return with the same enthusiasm and excitement as if receiving a visit from the Queen? Have we delayed our own preparation for His coming since we do not have an appointed day and time? Do we have our lamps and front porch lights off?

As we focus on the coming of Jesus, we are challenged to be faithful to God’s commands. This is done daily by seeking to be closer to God through prayer, the reading of His word, and showing the fruit of the Spirit. Since we do not have an appointed time for His return, it is easy to become consumed with our own pleasures (work, family, greed, etc.) and be unprepared. As we encounter this exciting season of Christendom, we should all prepare for His arrival. As certain as the sun rises in the east, He will come again, whether we are ready or not.

**Pray**

God, grant us the strength and diligence to focus on Your eternal promises. May we spend each day in prayer and immersed in Your word as we prepare, and clothe ourselves for Your coming. Grant us the desire to daily keep our lamp burning, as a shining light to others.

**Collins Compere**

Collins has been active at Dawson since 1994 by teaching Mission Friends, Financial Peace University, 2nd Grade Life Groups, and serving on the Finance Team. His wife, Jennifer, and children, Emma Kathryn and Stuart, are also actively engaged at Dawson.
THE GREAT BANQUET
Brunswick Monogrammist
THE EFFORT THAT IS WORTHWHILE

Luke 13; focused on 13:22–30

"Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

Luke 13:24

Reflect

In today’s passage, Jesus was asked a question about eternal life (v. 23). The way He responded gives insight to a prophetic revelation and an urgent invitation.

Someone in the crowd asked Jesus a curious and perhaps well-intentioned question: “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Jesus in his wisdom and understanding of the heart of man, did not answer the question. Rather, He focused on the responsibility that each individual has regarding his or her salvation: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”

Striving implies that entering through the door will present certain difficulties that will require devotion, discipline, obedience, and perseverance to overcome. This does not mean that salvation is achieved by our own human efforts but through faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8–9). However, saving faith still comes with daily challenges and the need for continuing transformation.

Jesus said “I am the door” (John 10:9). A door provides access and is not meant to simply be admired or acknowledged. Similarly, it is not enough just to know about Jesus, to hear about his teachings, to admire His life and miracles; rather, it is essential to make the decision to go through Him to obtain salvation and eternal life (John 14:6).

One day that opportunity will come to an end. The door will close, and even though many will want to enter believing that they deserve it because they attended church every Sunday, tithed, or did good deeds, God will not know them and will even call them evildoers. The most surprising thing will be that in the kingdom of heaven we will find many that we did not expect to, and we will miss many that we anticipated to find. The last shall be the first, and the first shall be the last (Matthew 20:16).

Pray

Father, help us to always strive to go through the narrow door that leads to eternal life, while it remains open.

Maria Mosquera

Maria serves alongside her husband, Rev. Bayron Mosquera, in Dawson’s Hispanic Ministry. She has written articles and devotionals for WMU’s Spanish magazine, Nuestra Tarea. Maria and Bayron have two grown children, Evelyn and Byron Jr.
THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

Luke 14; focused on 14:25–33

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:27

Reflect

Nearing the end of His ministry, Jesus was traveling on the road to Jerusalem knowing that the cross was soon to come. Surrounded by crowds of people anxious to hear what He would say or see what miracle He would perform next, Jesus instead shocked the crowd by saying, “if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

It is easy to focus on the word hate here and take it literally. However, this does not mean we should hate and despise others; rather, the word hate in this context means “to love less.” Therefore, as disciples we should be devoted to Christ such that no other relationship compares to the love we have for Him.

Jesus knew that many people were following Him for the wrong reasons and challenged them by saying, “whoever does not bear His own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Jesus carried a literal cross, facing pain and a death He did not deserve, to become the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. He willingly did this for you and me because of His unwavering love for us. If we desire to be His disciple and have a relationship with Him, we must bear our cross. This means whole-heartedly seeking Jesus, no matter the cost, and denying ourselves earthly desires and pleasure, trusting that Christ is enough.

The decision to be a disciple of Jesus requires commitment, so one must count the cost. Our relationship with Christ should become the most important, and we must love Him enough to make sacrifices daily to carry our cross for Him. Thankfully, we find hope knowing that we are not alone and Christ is with us.

Pray

Lord, help us devote ourselves to You and love You above all else. Grant us courage to be Your disciples and to carry our cross daily. May we find strength in knowing that You are with us in this decision.
**GOD’S LOST & FOUND**

*Luke 15; focused on 15:4–10*

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?”  

*Luke 15:4*

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**Reflect**

Have you ever lost something important, maybe not of great monetary value but nonetheless very important to you? When you did, you probably could not think of anything else except finding it, almost obsessively doing everything you could to search for it. Is the same thing true when God loses someone?

We often refer to people who do not know Jesus as being “lost.” In what sense are they lost? They are lost from God. They have wandered away from Him. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd knew that he must find the lost sheep to save him from certain death. In the parable of the lost coin, the woman had to find the coin because of its value to her.

There have been many sermons preached on Luke 15 because it is so rich in important truths for us. But let’s look at one key point today—the initiative of the shepherd and the woman who put aside everything else to find what was lost. It was their single focus and passion. The point is: that is God’s single focus and passion.

William Barclay said, “The one absolutely new thing that Jesus taught men about God is that God actually sought and searched for man.” Malcolm Tolbert said, “The life of Jesus is God’s quest for His lost sheep.” Luke says later in Luke 19:10: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” God wants every person on earth to be saved! We must respond to God and accept salvation through His Son, but we need to remember that God desperately wants to “find” us.

How does God usually seek people today? It is through us. We are God’s hands and feet—His Ambassadors—to seek the lost. Leaving the 99 means leaving our comfort, security, and selfish desires to join God on mission to bring the lost home.

Do we share God’s passion to find the lost and bring them home? Are we willing to set aside other things to do that?

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**Pray**

Lord, give us strength and passion to leave our comfort zones to join You on mission to seek the lost. Give us a burning desire to see every person come to know You as their Savior.

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**Tom Thompson**

Tom and his wife, Glenda, have been members of Dawson for 25 years. He served on staff for 10 years and is now a volunteer leader for Dawson’s Go Love Tell mission work in Maine.
WHAT NOW?

Luke 16; focused on 16:1–13

The manager said to himself, "What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg."

Reflect

Often these verses are a reminder that we cannot serve both God and money. For most people, it is often not a choice of God and money or good and bad. We know the difference, but we choose “good things” and push the “great things”—our priorities, our loves—to the margins of our lives, which often happens gradually with small choices.

We see this beginning in verse 3 with an internal question, “What now?” Throughout life we have times when we have the same questions: “I’ve lost my job, what now? I want to be at my son’s game, but I should work, what now? I don’t have the money but I want it, what now?” We are faced with a choice and may not be proud when we reflect upon our decision. So, what now?

- Micah 6:8: Do justice, love with kindness and walk humbly with the Lord.
- 1 Peter 4:19: Trust in the Lord and continue to do good.

Those two verses are relatively easy to recite, but difficult to live by because they get to the central issue of trust. Do we trust God? Do we trust ourselves to make Christ-like decisions? Throughout the Psalms, David wrote about trusting God. Psalm 56:3 sums this up well, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you [God].”

Throughout life we will be faced with “What now?” moments. In the face of these questions, we can choose to trust God (Psalm 56:3), do justice, love with kindness, and walk humbly with the Lord (Micah 6:8), and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:19). If we are doing those things, we will consistently take the next right step as we make Christ-like decisions.

Pray

Lord, help us to trust amid questions. Allow us to choose to love with kindness in a time of decision. Enable us to reflect you as we continue to do good. Thank you.

Amy Brown

Amy is an Art Therapist at Children’s Hospital and has been a member of Dawson for 33 years. She and her husband, Warren, have been active in a variety of ways in the life of the church.
Givers, Receivers, and Takers

John 12:1–8

Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.”

John 12:7

Reflect

In John 12, the Lenten story continues six days before Passover. Six days of emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual challenges are ahead. But today we see in one day the essence of Easter: Givers, Receivers, and a Taker.

The scene for the dinner in Jesus’ honor is much different than that in Luke 10. Martha now understands how to give with the right attitude and motivation. She remains the ever-tidy doer in the Mary and Martha duo; but for the right reason—she gives while not worried about what others think. In six days, Jesus will give as a selfless servant and sacrifice.

Mary again shows us how to give with full devotion. She opens a jar of perfume (certainly not the cheap stuff) that was purposed for something special. She could have kept it for herself but instead pours it on the same feet where she previously sat to worship. Giving is costly and requires full commitment. In six days, Jesus will give His life as a costly price for ours.

Jesus graciously received Martha’s hospitality as the guest of honor. He humbly received the beautiful and intimate act of Mary’s worship. Even Lazarus, a recipient of new life, sat breathing in the sweet scent of the spikenard plant as it penetrated the room’s air. In six days, we will all receive the saving grace of Jesus’ tortuous death on the cross.

Now we come to the Taker, Judas. Smug, self-righteous, and arrogant, he bemoans and impugns Mary’s gift. He mocks Mary because he is dissatisfied that Jesus’ agenda is not aligning with his own selfish political motives. Let’s be honest, our carnal self reveals some “Judas” in us all when we want God’s will our way. In all things, Judas takes for himself, and ultimately he will take his own life.

There is no room for taking within the Easter story, only giving and receiving. Soon you will have the opportunity to honor and celebrate the saving gift Jesus gave. Receive it in total humility, knowing it was provided with great cost for you. Receive it and breathe in the full aroma of God’s grace as He gave His only Son in love for you. He gives, we receive, we cannot take.

Pray

Dear Lord, help us to never be takers. Help us to only love what we receive and to give because You gave. Amen.

Jeff Dance

Jeff and his wife, Janice, are members at Dawson. He is the Executive Director at Kassouf Healthcare Solutions, and is an adjunct faculty member at Samford University’s Brock School of Business.
GOD’S PERFECT PLAN

Psalm 126

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

Psalm 126:3

Reflect

When we were first married, my husband and I had hoped to be parents. To our surprise, things were not working out the way we thought they would. There were tons of tests, constant calendar-checking, and endless prayers. At times I would find myself crying out, “Why, Lord?” and holding to the promise stated in today’s Scripture reading that “those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy” (v. 5). Through it all we remained optimistic. If this wasn’t meant to be, there had to be a reason since God’s plan is always better. Even so, there was still a longing—a hope for the future.

Psalm 126 is a song of Ascents. It was sung in celebration of what the Lord had done when He brought the exiles home from captivity. First century Jews sang this song while traveling to Jerusalem each year for the Feasts, singing and thanking God for delivering His people. While they sang, they were also reminded about a coming savior who would deliver them once again, the long-awaited Messiah—their hope for the future. As the people traveled up to Jerusalem and to the temple mount excited to celebrate Passover, many were unaware that God’s perfect plan for their salvation would be fulfilled in just a few short days. They had waited so long, and soon the waiting would be over.

When we brought our son home for the first time two years ago, we had no idea (as new parents) how to raise a pre-teen, but that didn’t matter because we were overflowing with joy! We are still in awe of the way the Lord did this great thing for us. God’s plan (and timing) really was perfect.

There are still more great things to come—God’s perfect plan for our salvation, through Jesus, not only delivers us from the bondage of sin, but also gives us the right to join His family as sons and daughters. Jesus is our one true Hope for the future. Doesn’t that make you want to sing with joy? Hallelujah!

Yes! The Lord has done great things for us and we are truly filled with joy!

Pray

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many, many great and wonderful things You have already done for us—and continue to do for us through Your Son, Jesus. During this lenten season, may we be evermore aware that You alone hold our future in Your hands.

Shannon Lindsay

Shannon has served on Dawson’s Creative & Communications Team for more than eight years. She and her husband, Mike, have one son, Tyler, who ranks as one of the most wonderful and greatest things that the Lord has done for them.
FORGETTING TO BE GRATEFUL

Luke 17; focused on 17:11–19

Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Reflect

In today’s passage we read about 10 men who are living with one of the most difficult trials of their time: leprosy. The people who suffer from leprosy are thrown into isolation, forced to deal with their torment all on their own. Presumably, this group of people have hit their lowest valleys. They come to Jesus, who has just arrived in town, and they cry out, “Teacher, please heal us! Save us from our agony! Give us our lives back!” And guess what? He does it. By the end of verse 14, all 10 of these men walk away with a hope for a new life and with their pain a mere memory.

Then something else happens. One of them comes racing back with an attitude of thanksgiving, of confidence, and of humility, knowing that his healer was the one and only Messiah. He exclaims, “Praise God!” and proceeds to fall at Jesus’ feet, completely in awe of what He had just done. Admittedly, I find this next verse a little funny. Jesus says, “Wait a minute? Have I not healed 10 men? Where are the other nine? No one has come to praise me except for you.” Then, he simply ends with this: “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:19).

As Christians, how often are we like the other nine who forget to be grateful for all God has done? The man could have thought to himself, “Hey God, thanks for healing me, but I’m really busy today, so I’ll just see you later.” But no, he comes back after everyone else had left, after all the hype had died down, and he said “Praise God!” He remembered to be grateful.

What does it look like for us to keep praising God and to be grateful even when everyone (and everything) seems to demand almost all of our time and attention? When things are falling apart around us, do we remember to keep praising His name? In Luke 17:19, Jesus does not say that the man is healed by doing life on his own. Instead, he is healed because of his faith.

I challenge you to live the same way: to know that your healing—your whole life—is not determined by your own efforts, but by keeping an unwavering faith in our Lord, even during your toughest moments—and remembering to give praise to the only One who is worthy.

Pray

Dear God, we ask that You help us live by faith and not by sight. We ask that You remind us of Your goodness at every moment, even when we are in the valley. Lastly, we ask You to remind us that You are God, and we are not.

Morgan Champion

Morgan is from Charleston, SC, and attends Samford University. Her major is Religion, and she hopes to work in ministry and spread the light of Jesus. When she’s not in Birmingham, Morgan enjoys spending time with her friends and family and loves going to Disney World.
AUTHENTIC HUMILITY

Luke 18; focused on 18:9–14

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:14

Reflect

Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is one of several in Luke regarding prayer. Here, in verses 9–14, Jesus reveals the authenticity of prayer. Most of us find this parable straightforward. The church-going, rule-following Pharisee offers haughty, self-righteous words that we almost intuitively know should not be our prayer. In contrast, the lowly tax collector moves away from the crowd and asks only for mercy. Jesus says he went home justified.

So pray like the tax collector, be humble before God.

But, how do you have a humble heart in prayer? If we simply try to avoid the Pharisee, our prayer might become something like, “God, thank you for making me humble and not like the boastful Pharisee.” Even as we seek humility, we may find ourselves comparing our traits, qualities, and actions, be they righteous or not, to those around us. After all, according to Jewish standards, the Pharisee is righteous, but he is not justified.

Righteousness, or success, is based on what we can do. The Pharisee has an inward focus, offering what he has done to be found worthy of God’s love. In Luke 16:15, Jesus spoke directly to this. No matter how much we give or how much we do, we will always fall short.

The tax collector has an outward focus, recognizing the full extent of his shortcomings, and pleads only for mercy. He understood the divine nature of God, revealed ultimately through his Son, Jesus. God loves us and seeks to make us whole again. Jesus called the tax collector justified because he is counted righteous by God, not judged by the standards of men but by who God is. Loving. Compassionate. Merciful. In this sense, humility is simply a willingness to receive God’s acceptance and love.

Pray

God, humble our hearts as we come to You in prayer. Let Your immense love, incredible sacrifice, and enduring grace overwhelm our shortcomings, and let Your Spirit fill us with the peace that we are lovely in Your sight through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Chris Whaley

Chris and his wife, Kathleen, have been Dawson members for five years. While it was the music and previous Bible Study connections that originally brought them here, their Life Group and ministries for their sons, Samuel (5) and Hudson (2) have truly made it home.
SECOND-GUESSING GOD

Luke 19; focused on 19:1–10

But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner.”

Luke 19:7

Reflect

As chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was under no illusion. He knew he was a sinner. In fact, the word tax collector was synonymous with “sinner” in his day, since they routinely took over and above what was required by the Roman government and kept it for themselves. Was he present when John the Baptist preached his message of repentance along the Jordan River? (Luke 3:12–13) Tax collectors were among the first to respond and wanted to know what they needed to do. John had told them not to take more than what was required by the government. Maybe Zacchaeus had begun to follow that instruction but still felt troubled.

As he climbed the tree to see Jesus better, was he hopeful or apprehensive? Jesus was known to call people as He saw them, particularly hypocrites. As Jesus pushed through the crowd and approached the tree, He addressed Zacchaeus by his name. Not only that. In saying, “I must be a guest in your home today,” Jesus demonstrated His willingness to meet people where they are; and yet, He always calls them to more. We read that Zacchaeus responded quickly and “took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy.”

The reaction of the crowd was quite the opposite. “Who, him? Jesus, he’s the last person you should be hanging out with, much less using in your ministry. He cheated us for years. Not him!”

Luke wants us to know that when God changes a person’s heart, we will see evidence in their words and actions. Zacchaeus shows proof of this change by pledging half of his fortune to the poor. And for those he had cheated, he committed to repaying them a punitive amount. He had truly changed his course and was now trusting Jesus with his future.

Pray

Lord, during this season of Lent, remind us that You can use anyone who is humbly submitted to Your plan regardless of past sin. Thank You that what was great news for Zacchaeus is still great news for all of us today.

Gina George

Gina has previously served in Dawson’s Student Ministry and currently enjoys volunteering in the nursery and with Dawson’s Preschool Ministry. She and her husband, Brian, are active at Dawson in a variety of ways.
THE WICKED TENANTS

**Luke 20; focused on 20:9–19**

The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

Luke 20:19

**Reflect**

The characters in this passage are reflective of the kingdom of God and would have been understood by the religious leaders. The vineyard owner represents God, the tenants represent the religious leaders, and the servants represent God’s prophets.

In this parable, we see God’s continued efforts to bring His people back to Himself. Just as the owner of the vineyard sent his servants to the tenants, yet received no response, pleas for repentance made by God’s prophets to the people, had also been ignored—especially by the religious leaders.

In a final attempt to turn the tenants back to respect and obedience, the owner of the vineyard sends his own beloved son to them, but the tenants conspired together and killed him. By ending the parable this way in verse 15, Jesus foretells His own death by the religious leaders.

In this parable, we notice several things. One is that there was no respect at all for the son. The tenants saw a perfect opportunity to grab authority for themselves by killing the son (vv. 14–15). The religious leaders did not care about pleasing God, they were more interested in their own power. The second thing is that God will pass judgment on the wicked of the world. Judgment was handed out to the wicked tenants, but it did not mean the end of the vineyard. The vineyard was taken away from any who would not submit to God’s authority and is given to those who do. Lastly, the reference to the “cornerstone/capstone” in verse 17, is symbolic of Christ, whom the Apostle Paul referred to as the “Chief Cornerstone” of the Church (Ephesians 2:20).

The scribes and the chief priests, having realized that Jesus was talking about them, would now look for ways to arrest Jesus while continuing to reject Him and His authority. God had spoken so many times to His people giving them so many opportunities to repent and turn back to Him and yet they failed to listen.

**Pray**

Lord, grant us ears to hear from You in all circumstances. We submit our hearts to You as obedient children. With open eyes we seek You; we obey Your instructions through Your word. Teach us to not rely on our own knowledge and strength but to depend only on Your wisdom and power.

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**Wafa Abawi**

Wafa has been a member at Dawson since 2007. She is a member of the Arabic Congregation and sings in the Sanctuary Choir. Wafa is married to Adel Abawi and has three children: Crestin, Rana, and Peter.
Gifts

Luke 21; focused on 21:5–19

“You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”


Reflect

Have you ever felt obligated to give a gift? An easy approach in those situations is to just decide how much to spend and purchase something that seems appropriate. Often there isn’t much thought given by the gift giver, and likely the gift receiver’s appreciation matches the giver’s enthusiasm.

Think about some of the more memorable gifts you have received. Your list probably includes gifts that were of little value by earthly standards, and yet, they were priceless to you. Why is that? How is it that something that appears to be valueless can actually be priceless? Likely it is because those gifts were from the heart. What about a card from your wife that encourages you during a challenging time at work? I still have that one. What about a bookmark from your 7 year-old daughter that says, “I’ll love you forever. I’ll like you for always. As long as I’m living my daddy you’ll be.” I still have that one, too. And there are others. I am blessed to have many heartfelt gifts. Stuff comes and goes, but gifts from the heart last a lifetime.

As I consider the significance of the widow’s offering, it clearly touched Jesus’ heart, not because of the amount, but because of her motivation. Her gift was a reflection of her heart. Jesus made a point to tell those nearby, likely His disciples, what was happening.

During the Easter season, as we consider the significance of Jesus’ gift to us, may we never forget that it is a gift from the heart. By earthly standards, another man died. By heavenly standards, the ultimate gift was given, one so great that it bridged heaven and earth. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

It is a gift from the heart of God.
Have you accepted His gift?
It doesn’t just last a lifetime; it lasts for eternity.

Pray

Father, thank You for the gift of Jesus, our Savior, a gift from Your heart. Help us to share this gift with others during this Easter season and throughout the rest of the year. Amen.

Tom Lewis

Tom is married to Ginger. They have been married for 33 years and members at Dawson for 20 years. Together they teach a Young Adult Life Group.
JUDAS’ CHOICE
Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.

Reflect
This setting is full of twists and turns connecting the past with the future. Luke 22 opens with the celebration of Passover, an annual reminder of the sacrificial lamb and how God made provisions to save His people.

But the story turns when the chief priests plot to end the life of the One who came to bring life. Was it because they were afraid, or that they would lose their power, control, and their place in society because of Jesus’ teachings?

Jesus called Judas as one of the 12 to follow Him. He heard Jesus’ teachings and parables and saw His healings and miracles firsthand.

It’s easy to think Judas committed the ultimate sin imaginable. On the other hand, some may feel sorry for Judas as if he didn’t have a chance. But, this evaluation overlooks the fact that Judas opened the door for Satan to enter when he made the choice to betray Jesus for money. After that, he sat down at the table with his known sins and made no confession. Satan made a relentless assault on Judas’ soul as he does on everyone who chooses to follow Jesus.

Satan may have thought he was thwarting God’s plan through Judas, but the result shows how impossible that was. God knew of this disastrous turn of events long before it occurred. God was not blindsided when Judas betrayed Jesus, and God is not blindsided by the betrayals that come in our lives. Despite our hurts, brokenness, and disappointments, God made a way to save us from our sins and to give us eternal life (John 3:16). Even though Judas chose betrayal, Jesus became the sacrificial lamb who took away the sins of the world.

Just as Judas could not shift the blame for his choice, we can’t blame another person or rationalize our sinful choices. Continuing to make them robs us of the abundant life that Jesus came to give us. Examine the choices you made this week: did they bring you spiritual health and joy or rob you of it? God is always seeking to forgive us and make us new.

Pray
O God, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who paved the road of salvation for us. Help us to remember that each day is Easter.

Zhaleh McCullers
Zhaleh was born in Iran and raised as a Muslim. She became a Christian when she was 42 years old. Her husband, Jim, along with her sons Clayton, Kelly, and Christopher, were all witnesses when she was baptized as a follower of Jesus.
TRIUMPH

Psalm 31:9–16

My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.
Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

Psalm 31:15–16

Reflect

This is the day we traditionally call “Palm Sunday.” We learn what happened on this day from the Gospel accounts: Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey; the people cut palm branches and laid them on the road, along with their cloaks; and people went before and after Jesus waving palm branches and proclaiming, “Hosanna...Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

In many Bibles, this story is found under the heading “The Triumphant Entry.” A quick glance may give the impression that Jesus was finally being heralded for who He really was. And yet, we know the people who shouted “Hosanna” in those ancient streets were shouting to the earthly king they thought they wanted instead of the eternal king already in their midst.

Many people wanted Jesus to be something He was not. His definition of triumph was different than that of the crowds, the religious leaders, and even His disciples. Jesus’ triumph was not found in the fickle adulation of the crowd. Jesus’ kingship would not be about military conquest or unbridled power but about peace and the rule and reign of God in the lives of those who chose to follow Him.

In our Scripture reading today from Psalm 31, David appealed to God during a time of intense persecution. Despite his distress and physical and emotional fatigue, the Psalmist again and again expressed his unwavering trust in his God, the One who would deliver him. This was Jesus’ experience on Palm Sunday as well. Jesus gave up His life fully and freely and trusted His Father for the ultimate deliverance.

We can trust God for deliverance as well—not just from our circumstances or our brokenness or our pain—but from our last great enemy, death. God’s power defeated death. When we trust Jesus’ finished work for us on the cross, we receive abundant life in the present and endless life with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—in eternity. For Jesus and for us, the day of the triumphal entry was merely a shadow of the true triumph that would come in just a week.

Pray

Good Father, may we, like Jesus, put our complete trust in Your love for us and in Your power to deliver us.

Jan Kennamer Hart

Jan is married to Ricky and is a graduate of Auburn University and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She has served on Dawson’s Ministry Staff for 15 years and teaches a weekly small group Bible Study for young women.
FOLLOWING AT A DISTANCE

Luke 22:54–65

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Reflect

Our passage follows the betrayal of Jesus with a kiss from Judas. Now, as Jesus is seized and kept under guard at the high priest’s house, we can only imagine the shock and fear that Peter and the other disciples must have felt. Peter, who had violently resisted the temple troops to prevent Jesus’ arrest just hours before, now follows “at a distance” trying to blend into the crowd. Jesus had predicted in the garden that same night that Peter would deny him three times before the crowing of the rooster (Mathew 26). When Jesus had confronted him in the garden, Peter boldly contradicted Jesus, almost boasting that he would die before betraying Jesus. How quickly Peter’s mindset and attitude changes to one of self-preservation once the stakes are raised and he is recognized as one of the disciples by a girl in the crowd. It’s shocking to see that Peter’s denial of Jesus is just as immediate and vehement as his defending of Jesus that same night. Then Peter not only doubles down, but then he triples down, denying Jesus three times.

What could possibly have led to this complete reversal? The sad truth is that we are a lot like Peter. We rely on ourselves too much until times get tough, and then we find ourselves in trouble. We are proud to call ourselves Christians, but, we often fail to do many of the things that would protect us in times of trial and temptation.

We know that spending time in prayer, Scripture reading, and worship can guard against sin and protect us with spiritual armor, but we often don’t make those things the top priority of our “busy” lives. The fact that Peter, who spent every day with Jesus, could still fall victim to pride and over-confidence should be very sobering to those of us today who walk “at a distance.”

Undoubtedly, Peter was influenced by his surroundings in the crowd—just as we are influenced by the world we live in today. If we don’t anchor our hearts and minds in the Gospel, we, like Peter, can be easily swept away and overcome by the currents of a worldly culture that surrounds us and crowds into our lives every day. Fortunately for us, we worship a God who seeks a relationship with us each and every day, and who will protect us!

Pray

Lord, help us to rely on Your strength, not our own. Help us to maintain a close walk with You daily. Let us understand that we are weak and that all of us can easily be overcome by sin if we allow pride and overconfidence to govern our lives.

Ty Arendall

Ty grew up at Dawson from birth, where his grandfather, Edgar M. Arendall, served as Senior Pastor for 40 years. Ty’s wife, April also grew up at Dawson. They have two sons: Will (14) and Josh (12). Ty is the Principal at Vestavia Hills Elementary Dolly Ridge.
SONS OF GOD


“But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.”

Luke 22:69–70

Reflect

“As soon as it was day…” we read in Luke 22:66. Jesus has endured an unlawful trial the previous night—arrested, falsely accused, and denied a proper hearing—“The elders of the people, both the chief priests and scribes came together and led Him into their counsel, saying ‘If you are the Christ, tell us’” (v. 67).

As we ponder again the sufferings of our beloved Savior and Lord, the injustice, the false accusations, and the unbelief of those who questioned who He really was, the scene is heart-wrenching. How can we relate to His pain and agony? To be forsaken by your friends, denied by your companions, and mocked and abused by your accusers. I dare say none has endured such grief, pain, and heartache.

Despite Jesus’ wonderful words of life, His many miracles, His love for His people, even the raising of Lazarus—the leaders still refused to believe Him. They refused to accept Him as their Messiah, the Anointed One.

Jesus, knowing their hearts, knew they would not believe him (v. 68). But then He started with this statement: “Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God” (v. 69). One day He would sit in judgment of them, and His judgment would be just. They knew this was a clear reference to the Messiah from Daniel 7:13–14, yet they persisted in refusing to acknowledge who He was.

“Are you then the Son of God?” So He said to them, “Yes, I am” (v. 70). Now they had heard the truth, but instead of falling at His feet and worshipping Him, they believed they had their evidence to send Him to the cross. They were in fact crucifying the very Son of God for telling the truth! The tragedy of not believing, receiving, and trusting in Christ! May we be faithful and delighted to share the truth of the Gospel to a lost and dying world—Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Pray

Heavenly Father, we worship and adore You and thank You that the life we now live in the flesh, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. In the glorious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Connie Burks

Connie and her husband, John, are members of the Wilson/Wear/Redding Life Group. She is a Spiritual Counselor at Kid’s Connection and has a passion for studying God’s Word.
SUPPORTING DEPRAVITY...CRUCIFY HIM!


But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

Luke 23:5

Reflect

In Luke 23:2–25, the accusation of Jesus is the topic of discussion—with the chief priests, religious leaders, and “council” being the loudest accusers. This Scripture tells us that the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him; they were fierce; and they became desperate. Across translations we read the crowd being described as urgent, insisting, and desperate to get their point across that Jesus had basically been wrecking their world.

Jesus had traveled all over Judea forgiving sins, healing the sick, driving out demons, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God and repentance, challenging the religious law of the land, dining with sinners, and sending His disciples to preach the Gospel and heal everywhere.

The issue at hand for the religious leaders and Pharisees was that what He preached went against their normalcy, against their scheming way of “earning” a living. Jesus confronted wrongs regardless of the consequences. He called hypocrites hypocrites—regardless of their “social standing.” According to Luke 11:45, the message Jesus taught was “insulting” to some.

The real issue at hand was Jesus always spoke the truth, be it politically correct or not. As a result, the revolt had culminated to where we find ourselves in Luke 23. The religious leaders had absolutely stirred up the people to be against Jesus—regardless of what evidence there was of Jesus working for the good of their people and their land. It seems to me the reasoning for the revolt against Jesus was all about self-indulgence, where folks stood to lose temporarily and had no thought of the eternal. After the many miracles Jesus had completed throughout Judea, the crowd’s response was “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

These are our three questions: Are we listening to Jesus and fellowshipping with Him, or are we telling Him what we want and what He needs to do for us? Are we crucifying Him and His message of salvation with our attitudes of political correctness and personal gain? Should we be surprised if we are ridiculed for taking a stand for Christ?

Pray

Lord Jesus, please forgive us because we are sinners. We desperately need You in our lives. Please, Lord, abide in our hearts and allow us to fellowship with You each moment of every day. Thank You, Lord, for not turning Your back on us. Amen.

Charlie Douthit

Charlie Douthit is a sinner in desperate need of Christ. As a husband and father of four, his family will tell you in so many words this is absolutely true. Having previously taught Middle and High School Life Groups, he currently co-teaches a Young Adult Life Group.
AROUND THE TABLE


And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

Reflect

How many times have you been around a table with family or friends, enjoying each other’s company, and unity is broken by a disagreement? I have been around a table on a few occasions when a conversation turns sour by a difference of opinion or because of a harsh comment.

What comfort I find in Scripture when people do things like I do, or have experiences like I’ve had. In the holiest of moments, when Jesus is offering bread and the cup to His disciples, a dispute arises.

The disciples are arguing about which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. Jesus responded in a way much like He does throughout Scripture. He speaks in a seemingly “upside-down way” as it related to the culture into which He was speaking (and into ours today). He said, “The greatest among you becomes as the youngest and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves?” Jesus exemplified for His disciples, through His life and ministry, servant leadership. It seems as if the one of greater importance would be the one reclining around the table being served, but the exact opposite is true. To lead well, you must serve well and consider others before yourself.

Jesus’ response to the dispute at the Last Supper reminds us that what we naturally value needs to be laid at Jesus’ feet in order to receive proper perspective. The things of this world that we desire to hold on to and have control over (our life, our position, our strength) must be submitted to our Heavenly Father.

I have always been struck by Da Vinci’s painting of the Last Supper as I see how peaceful Jesus looks with disorder all around Him. Even though we do not know what the Last Supper looked like, we do know we serve the Prince of Peace who loves us and can handle His disciples’ disputes. Through Christ, we have the ability to loosen our grip on things that the world around us values, and look a little “upside down” to our culture. We can even walk in peace when things around us are not peaceful.

Pray

Lord, thank You that You loved Your disciples in the midst of their imperfections. We too are flawed and prone to think in earthly, temporal ways. Help us to draw close to Your teaching and lean in to Your life-giving Word.
GENTLY USED

Luke 23:26–46

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

Reflect

When you finally finished your shopping, you always smelled like mothballs. No matter how short or long your visit to the Style Station was, you’d depart with that smell—proof that you’d been there. And even though it was 45 minutes outside of town, Baylor students would make their pilgrimage there multiple times a year, looking for a costume for that themed party, an iconic garment from a past era, or a treasure that would draw the eye of those they walked by on campus. The vintage clothing business was popular, in part because you got to enjoy the pieces of someone else’s experience, the clothing of someone else’s life.

We can draw a similar parallel to an event that happened on that Good Friday. After Jesus had made His way through the city, after He’d stumbled multiple times and the Roman soldiers conscripted an unsuspecting man to carry His cross, and after the executioners stripped Him of his clothes and nailed Him to the cross, it was then that the soldiers cast lots for our Messiah’s clothing. This was their right, after all. The reward for a Roman soldier, at least for those who crucified a condemned criminal, was to keep the clothing of the man they crucified. And so Luke, like Matthew and John, tells us of this profane distribution of the clothes of Christ. The soldiers, with their backs to the crucified Savior, foraged through His garments, claiming them for themselves. So do we.

We take the things of Jesus but often leave Him behind. We dress up to look like Christ, choosing easy Christianity over a discipled life. We pick through a pile of clothes—things that may be cut by a whip, bear a hole from a thorn, or are soiled from spilt blood—even as Christ is beckoning us to the cross. We rummage through the trappings of Christianity, while missing Christ Himself.

All the travel with none of the toil. All the patina with none of the pain. All the style with none of the sacrifice.

So today, may we put aside our search for a gently pre-worn discipleship, instead embracing the One in whom our faith rests. The price has been paid, and the gift is beyond what we could ever afford.

Pray

Crucified Christ, who wore our sin and shame, grant that we might choose Your way even when it will cost us, so that through us, Your gift of love might be extended to the world around us. Amen.

John Woods

John is the husband of Lindsay and parent to Hudson, Emma, and Mason. He serves as the Music & Worship Pastor at Dawson alongside a team of other committed and passionate minister-musicians.
WAITING FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 23:50–56

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

Reflect

Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He took Jesus’ body and wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. He was a member of the council, and a part of the Sanhedrin, the same ruling class that orchestrated Jesus’ crucifixion. However, Scripture also tells us Joseph of Arimathea was a good and righteous man. The Greek word for righteous here is “dikaios.” It is the same word used to describe Adam and Eve’s son, Abel, Jesus’ earthly father Joseph, and John the Baptist. We’re told that Joseph of Arimathea did not consent to the council’s plan. He didn’t vote for it or agree with it. Luke 23:51 clearly states that Joseph was “waiting for the kingdom of God.”

From the Scripture alone, we can infer that Joseph of Arimathea believed Jesus Christ was the Messiah and had faith in His claim that the kingdom of God was at hand. Unfortunately, this was not a popular opinion at this time. Jesus had just been ridiculed and put to death on a cross for stating this truth. His disciples, followers, and loved ones were fleeing into hiding or standing to the side mourning as Jesus breathed His last breath.

Joseph of Arimathea, on the other hand, took action. He would surely face personal scorn from the other religious leaders for his actions, but he was more focused on Jesus and the kingdom of God. His actions were risky to his reputation and to his personal finances, yet Jesus was worth the cost. We know that three days later Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave. After revealing Himself to the disciples, He eventually ascended to the right hand of God the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in those who believe in His name. He also told us He is coming back! We don’t know when, but Jesus instructed us to be ready. As we await His return, may we be Joseph of Arimathea, who put aside our reputation and possessions and live good and righteous lives while waiting for the kingdom of Heaven.

Pray

Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice He willingly made on our behalf. And thank You for Joseph of Arimathea, who provides an example for us of how, as believers, we can be strong, courageous, and ready to act on Your behalf as we await the kingdom of Heaven.

Marty Dunn

Marty is married to Casey, and they have two children, Sam and Linley. Marty is passionate about studying and teaching God’s Word. She also has a Bible reading YouTube channel.
But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 24:1–3
Reflect

What are your most memorable family traditions on Easter? One of my earliest memories was our family’s Easter egg hunt. We would gather at my grandmother’s house armed with our Easter baskets. But honestly, we didn’t hunt eggs, rather we pursued one legendary egg—the prized $100.00 egg. This one egg was carefully hidden and contained a lifetime of riches in the mind of a six-year-old-boy. You can imagine my disappointment when one year my uncle made the pre-Easter Egg hunt announcement that he didn’t hide the “money egg” that year. He assured us that there was still some really good candy to be found hidden in the rest of the eggs. Years later, I realized that my uncle had grown a bit stingier with his Easter egg money and decided to end the tradition. I’ll always remember what I didn’t find on that Easter egg hunt.

On the original Easter Sunday morning, a group of Jesus’ closest female friends and family came to anoint Jesus’ body with spices and ointments. But if you remember the details of this story, what they didn’t find would be the discovery that would change human history. The stone that guarded the tomb of Jesus was rolled away. Where the body was supposed to be, nothing was found. But what those perplexed women did find were two angels of the Lord who announced to them and in turn to us, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

Approximately two thousand years later, that first Easter “hunt” for the body of Jesus stands as the central plot of the story of Christianity. What does that first Easter morning mean? An empty tomb ensures the forgiveness of sin for all who believe in Jesus’ finished work. An empty tomb ensures that there is hope beyond the grave. Without the empty tomb there is no human access to God’s goodness and love. The truth is that if those first visitors found what they sought, we would have nothing to celebrate this Easter season. But the good news this Easter season is in the story of a hunt that came up empty. So this Easter morning, we join in the words of the great hymn of Charles Wesley, And Can It Be That I Should Gain:

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Pray

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice.

1 Peter 1:3–6a

Dr. David Eldridge