

# *Practicing Jesus' Last Words*



*A Lenten Faith Journey*



# *Introduction*

What we call “the seven last words” of Jesus are based on the final seven phrases drawn from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that record what Jesus said before his death. This devotional reflects on the seven last words of Jesus through devotional and practical material that groups, families and individuals can embody during each week. Often used in worship services or contemplative disciplines during Lent, the words remind us of Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent. It is the 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter—a time when we recognize the many ways we have strayed from God and find ways to practice faith that lean in to God. Some people give up something they enjoy or enjoy doing for the 40 days of Lent, to instead focus that time, energy or money on God. Some people may give up screentime to make time for spiritual discipline or practice. Other people take up a practice during Lent, such as reading the Bible every day, spending time in prayer daily or practicing a devotional. Whatever you decide to do during Lent, may it help reorient your life toward the God we know and worship, as the Creator, Redeemer and Spirit.

Unlike the season of Advent that leads to Christmas, which tends to evoke positive feelings of warmth (like hope, peace, joy, and love), Lent tends to cover a broad spectrum of human emotions. Lent is also a longer season and helps us prepare our hearts and minds for the resurrection of Christ at Easter. But Easter does not happen without first walking through a series of harrowing events: the torment and crucifixion of Jesus. This devotional covers diverse topics, including forgiveness, relationships, suffering, need, fulfillment, surrender, humility, grief, and resurrection. As such, you may find yourself experiencing a broad range of emotions as you move between very challenging but also positive topics. This is part of the season of Lent—a time when we celebrate the amazing things that Jesus has done and recognize the immense sacrifice of God in Jesus’ death on the cross.

This devotional can be used in small groups or at home. Although it is geared toward groups, it can be done with individuals of any age and may be particularly beneficial in intergenerational environments. Most weeks, there are five activities listed which can be done on the five weekdays in addition to doing the rest of the devotional on Sunday, or you can simply choose an activity to do along with the devotion that best suits your household. The Holy Week modules (Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday) have fewer activities according to the number of days.

We have intentionally left one day a week open to practice Sabbath. The Sabbath is a time when work ceases, extra activity ceases, and people can be worshipful before God and rest their bodies and souls. In many ways, the Sabbath is a time to celebrate God. On Friday afternoon each week, many people in the Jewish tradition will make extra preparations (like cleaning the house, making food ahead, etc.) to honor the Sabbath on Saturday. Consider what this might look like for yourself, your household and your community during Lent.

This resource is meant to be adaptive, so please use it in whichever way best fits your context.

**A note to families with very young children:** you may want to adapt some of the readings slightly or use a children's Bible to convey the messages around the crucifixion. The death of the Savior is, by its very nature, traumatic material. The goal of this resource is to help point people toward Jesus, deepen their relationships with God, and enliven individuals with the Spirit by engaging in activities which might cultivate a greater sense of awe around Christ and God's amazing love for us. For some, reading fewer verses about Jesus' death and paraphrasing the content toward age-appropriateness may be beneficial. You know your family best! This resource relies on parents to help in the spiritual education of their children.

Thank you for coming along this journey together, practicing the seven last words of Jesus as we approach Easter.

## Prayer

Show me during these Lenten days  
 how to take the daily things of life  
 and by submerging them in the sacred,  
 to infuse them with a great love  
 for you, O God, and for others.  
 Guide me to perform simple acts of love and prayer,  
 the real works of reform and renewal ...  
 help me not to waste  
 these precious Lenten days  
 of my soul's spiritual springtime.

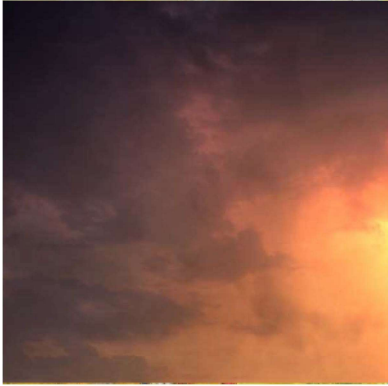
— From *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* by Edward Hays



## *Lent at Cypress Methodist Church*

<b>Lenten Bible Study - Altar'd</b>	Wednesdays	6 pm	M109
<b>Sunday Worship</b>			
Contemporary Worship	9:30 am	MAC	
Traditional Worship	11:00 am	Sanctuary	
Espanol Worship	11:00 am	MAC	
Donkey Day Celebration	11:30 - 2:30	March 23	MAC
Palm Sunday Worship	10:00 am	March 24	MAC
Maundy Thursday Worship	7:00 pm	March 28	MAC
Good Friday Worship	7:00 pm	March 29	MAC
Flowering of the Cross	10:00 am	March 30	MAC
<b>Easter Worship Celebrations</b>			
Contemporary Worship	9:00 am	MAC	
Traditional Worship	11:00 am	MAC	
Espanol Worship	11:00 am	Sanctuary	

# First Sunday of Lent



# Forgiveness

***"... forgive them;  
for they know not what they do."***

Luke 23:34

## **Opening Prayer** (based on Psalm 51)

God, of grace,  
generous in love,  
filled with mercy,  
I am aware of my sins;  
erase them and wash away my guilt.  
And God, start in me a new way. Amen

## **Thoughts to Ponder...**

When was the last time you needed to ask for forgiveness? What happened? What was that experience like? When were you last asked to forgive someone? What was that like? What did you struggle with about forgiving someone?

## **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is a difficult topic. Some people are challenged by forgiving others; some do not believe they themselves deserve forgiveness. But God, who is rich in mercy, forgives all ... yes, ALL. The Bible teaches that forgiveness can happen not because we make amends or attain goodness ourselves but because Jesus did that for us so that we can be reconciled to God. But in the Christian calendar, Ash Wednesday precedes Easter, a reminder of our brokenness before Jesus' coming, life, death, and resurrection.

On Ash Wednesday, we celebrated the ritual of ashes. Many people attended services where they received the sign of the cross on their forehead with ashes, and they left it there all day. Ashes have been used for thousands of years to represent grief and sorrow, but the sign of the cross is a relatively recent ritual which reminds us of the funeral passage "ashes to ashes and dust to dust." We come from ash and dust and will return to that ... we are mortal, fallible humans capable of both good and evil. But the cross represents Christ Jesus, who took on humanity so that we may be reconciled

with God. But a person is not only a sinner. A person is also someone who has been sinned against and in need of reconciliation, peace and grace. The ashen cross represents both our brokenness and God's grace.

**Read the Story:** Luke 23:32-34

## Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to forgive?
2. What feelings surface when you think of forgiving someone who has hurt you?
3. How can we forgive and still see that justice is done?
4. What does it mean to be forgiven by God? How does this make you feel?
5. Are there any particular areas of your life where you need to seek out God's forgiveness?

## Practicing Jesus' 7 Last Words

Choose one (or more) of the following activity options to do this week as you consider forgiveness.

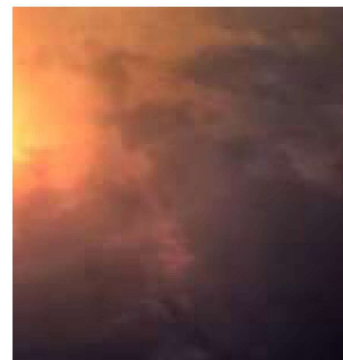
**Confession:** Confession is a term that means admitting to wrongdoing. Sometimes we need to confess the ways we have done something wrong, and sometimes we need to confess the ways we failed to do something right. Spend some time alone or with your household praying prayers of confession to God.

**Hand washing:** We wash our hands to protect against germs, but hand washing can also be a ritual (or spiritual practice) where we remember how God has cleansed us of our sins and made us white as snow. Fill a bowl with warm water and take turns washing each other's hands. While you do, you can read Psalm 51:7. Then, dry each other's hands with a clean white towel.

**Meditative music:** Listen to the song "Refiner's Fire" or "Create in Me a Clean Heart." While you listen, sit somewhere comfortable, close your eyes, and let the music be a prayer from your heart.

## Closing Prayer (from Psalm 51:10-12)

Holy God, create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence or  
take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.





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