

WALKING *with* JESUS

Devotions for
Lent & Easter



Editors of *Mornings with Jesus*

A GUIDEPOSTS DEVOTIONAL

ASH WEDNESDAY

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

1 TIMOTHY 4:4 (NIV)

LATELY, I'VE BEEN DOWNHEARTED, PLAGUED by negative thinking. My work wasn't going well, and I was discouraged. I couldn't even muster the enthusiasm to spend my regular devotional time with Jesus. But today I had a reason to cheer up. Whatacatch was back! My favorite item at Whataburger is the fish sandwich. But several years ago, the fast-food restaurant took Whatacatch off the menu except during Lent. But today was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. My daughter Brooke and I headed to lunch.

"If I play my cards right, I can have forty fish sandwiches," I said.

"Aren't you supposed to *give up* something for Lent?" Brooke asked. I would have answered but my mouth was full. Life was good again!

After I finished my sandwich, a nudge from Jesus got me wondering. Why wasn't I this happy every day of my

life—grateful for waking up each morning with the gift of another day? Why did it take a sandwich to make me appreciate the life Jesus had given me? Then and there, I decided what I would give up for Lent—negativity and ungratefulness! And I would *give* thanks to the One who made this great gift of life possible.

I asked Jesus to forgive me for skimping on our time together and promised I'd do better. And I'd make it a habit to express my gratitude the moment I opened my eyes. Who knew a fish sandwich could be such a good teacher?

PAT BUTLER DYSON

FAITH STEP

As soon as you awaken each morning, thank Jesus for your life. Then pursue a day worthy of His gift.

THURSDAY

*Let Your mercy, O LORD, be upon us,
just as we hope in You.*

PSALM 33:22 (NKJV)

AFTER MY DIVORCE, MY BIGGEST WORRY was my children—how they would be affected. They had been, and still are, the most important aspect of my life. Loving, protecting, and guiding them—and teaching them about Jesus—were and still are my focus. Mothering is my greatest calling. The coming apart of our family was something I never wanted, and I felt deep shame about it. I had so much guilt for allowing this difficulty into their lives.

The divorce was final in winter. As springtime came and Easter approached, I desperately looked for signs of life. I wanted to believe Jesus was going to do a new thing. I hoped it would spring up any moment (Isaiah 43:19), but what I mostly felt was tired. Empty. Sad and lonely. It was strange doing all the usual activities and planning for the holiday on my own, without my husband. Easter morning, I was overjoyed to have my kids with me, but there was palpable weirdness to our celebration.

Jesus's resurrection from the dead took on new meaning for me that year. In many ways, my old self had died and was buried. I was forced to let go of the illusion that I had control over my life, my kids, and even the rate at which we all would heal. I threw myself on His mercy and waited, like a seed in the ground, hoping and trusting Jesus would raise me up and cause me to bloom in His time.

GWEN FORD FAULKENBERRY

FAITH STEP

Start some indoor seeds or buy bulbs to force.
Watch, wait, and trust sprouts to shoot up as you
pray for Jesus to raise up hope inside of you.

FRIDAY

God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 (NLT)

I COULDN'T WAIT TO TRY THE same-day home delivery benefit of my discount store membership. But I felt disappointed when my first order was dropped off. The store had made a few substitutions. The eggs were not extra-large, the pizza sauce was not our favorite brand, and the canned tomatoes were a different size from what I needed for a recipe. This feature did not turn out to be so convenient and timesaving after all.

Substitution isn't always a bad thing; it can be necessary, which is a major theme throughout the Bible. God designed the system of sacrifices and offerings laid out in the first seven chapters of Leviticus to atone for the Israelites' sins. This foreshadowed the day He would send the perfect Lamb, who would carry the sins of the world to the cross.

Jesus lived a sinless life, but He willingly offered Himself as a substitution for our punishment. Only the sacrifice of

the sinless Christ was enough to bring forgiveness for our sins. Every bit of the horrific sorrow, abuse, pain, and suffering that Jesus endured paid for my sin. And for yours. I'm not sure I can ever comprehend such love.

Some days I'm tempted to substitute other activities for time I should spend with Jesus. But I find contentment and purpose only when I give Jesus first place in my heart. Nothing, and no one, can ever replace Him.

DIANNE NEAL MATTHEWS

FAITH STEP

Have you been trying to substitute something in the place Jesus should have in your life? Talk to Him about that.

SATURDAY

*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and
he will reward them for what they have done.*

PROVERBS 19:17 (NIV)

LAST SUNDAY AFTER ATTENDING CHURCH, my husband, Michael, and I grabbed a quick lunch at Taco Bell before running a couple of errands. Walking out of the restroom after eating, I saw a young man in his late twenties make his way toward the exit. He held a Taco Bell sack in one hand and pulled a red carry-on bag with a duffel attached to the top, with the other. But what really caught my eye was the way the man looked at Michael. With piercing eyes, he whispered “Thank you” before walking out the door.

I was puzzled. Michael explained the man’s card was denied when he tried to pay. “But he had a nice attitude about it and wasn’t belligerent or angry, like some folks I’ve seen when this happens,” Michael said, as he shrugged. “So I gave him cash to pay for his food.”

I smiled. There have been several instances where Michael has done something like this during our 33-year marriage, a sneaky little act of kindness. I’m usually so preoccupied with

my to-do list or where I'm going next that I may not notice people in need or their problems.

I've read many biblical accounts of how Jesus showed compassion to people in need: the outcasts, blind and sick people, and poor people. Reminded by Michael's charitable gesture, I pray that I, too, will grow in the gifts of showing Christlike compassion and mercy.

JENNIFER ANNE F. MESSING

FAITH STEP

Look for opportunities to do acts of kindness for friends, coworkers, family members, strangers, or anyone Jesus places in your path this Lenten season.

SUNDAY

*Don't embarrass me by not showing up;
I've given you plenty of notice.*

PSALM 31:17 (MSG)

I WENT TO TEACH AT THE community center, but no one showed up. *They stood me up!* The next day, one of the students called, asking if I'd be there tomorrow. I said I'd been there yesterday, but no one showed up. She responded that they'd *all* shown up and waited for *me*. Then it dawned on me. Two of my clocks in the house and my clock in the car hadn't been changed to daylight savings time. And the clock at the community center was also an hour behind. It turns out, I was the one who didn't show up!

The next week, my mentor/coach in the UK didn't show up for our weekly online appointment. The following week, same thing again. Stood up *twice*—two weeks in a row, I messaged him to say I was waiting for our appointment. He asked if we'd changed our clocks or something. It turns out, they don't change *their* clocks until three weeks *after* the US. I'd been showing up to our appointment an hour early.

Jesus, why such confusion? Why can't we all be on the same time? And stay on the same time? Interrupting my grumbling, Jesus pointed out that He always shows up for me. No matter what time it is, day or night, Jesus is always on time. He reminded me of how He showed up for me at Calvary. By contrast, my struggle with time changes suddenly seemed insignificant.

CASSANDRA TIERSMA

FAITH STEP

While contending with daylight savings time changes during Lent, thank Jesus for His perfect timing in showing up for you at the cross. Also, double-check your clocks!