

Central Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
Chelmsford, MA

# ***The Top Forty of the Bible!***

A Lenten Devotional Guide

Based on the Most Important Passages in the Bible



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Most people know more of the Bible than they realize, as many passages have phrases that have become part of our common vocabulary – the Prodigal Son, the Promised Land, the Good Samaritan, to name a few. Plus, longtime church-goers have heard numerous sermons on the important passages. But which are most important? What are the passages that we all should know? This devotional is an attempt to clarify that. But more importantly, it's a way to draw near to God during the season of Lent, as we look at the "Top Forty" passages of the Bible together. Lent is 40 days long, from Ash Wednesday to Easter excluding Sundays. May it be for us a time of spiritual growth through prayer, worship, reflection (please read slowly and thoughtfully) and biblical literacy!

**Wednesday, February 17**

Ash Wednesday, Lent Begins



On this day when we remember our mortality (*"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."*), let's think about why we're here. We're here to love – to grow in love, to absorb God's love and share it with all we meet. We're here to love. But don't take my word for it:

*When the Pharisees heard that he (Jesus) had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:34-40*

Prayer: Loving God, help me during this season of Lent to grow in my love for you and for others. Amen.

**Thursday, February 18**      *The Character of God*

What is the character and nature of God? This is a question that our faith seeks to answer. The Old Testament frequently answers it this way: *"The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"* (Ps. 103:8, Ex. 34:6, Num. 14:18, Neh. 9:17, Ps. 86:15, Ps. 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2). The New Testament answers this question with the highest statement one could ever make about God: God is love. The word for love used in the NT is *agape*. It's unconditional, self-sacrificing, all-embracing love. That's the heart of God. St. John put it this way:

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. I John 4:7-8*

Prayer: God of Agape, Thank You for your unconditional love. Help me to walk in this love each and every day. Amen.

**Friday, February 19**      *In the Beginning*

The Bible begins with a poem about an all-powerful God who created the world in a very orderly fashion and then made human beings to be a reflection of their Creator. Bible scholars today view Genesis 1 as an inspired literary work, not a science textbook. It's designed to celebrate the majesty of our God, the Creator of all that is!

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1) . . . and then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . . So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:26a & 27)*

Prayer: O God our Creator, help me to live this day as a reflection of You. And help me to walk gently upon this earth that You created for us to enjoy. Thank You! Amen.

**Saturday, February 20**      *Pentecost*

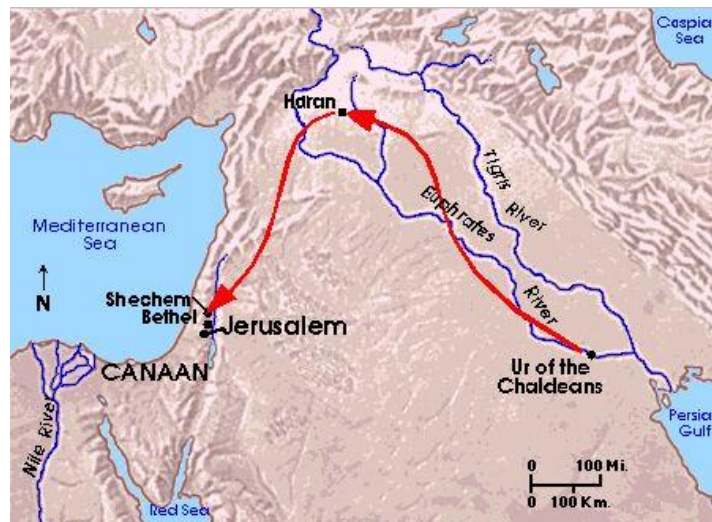
The Day of Pentecost ushered in a new age in God's relationship with humanity – the age of the Spirit, where in a new, powerful and personal way God's Spirit is available to all.

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. - Acts 2:1-4a*

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, fill me, mold me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Amen. (from the song, "Spirit of the Living God")

*(You get Sundays off in a Lenten devotional.)*

**Week #1 - A Walk Through the Old Testament**



**Figure 1** The Journey of Abraham & Sarah

**Monday, February 22**      *The Call of Abraham & Sarah*

God called Abraham & Sarah to leave their home and journey to a land of promise. They had no idea where they were going but they trusted God and started walking.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the LORD had told him. - Genesis 12:1-4a*

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust You even when the road ahead is unclear. And help me to remember that I, too, have been blessed to be a blessing to others. Amen.

**Tuesday, February 23**      *Deliverance*

Because of a famine in the land, the Israelites ended up in Egypt (think, “*Joseph & His Technicolor Dreamcoat*”). For the first 200 years, things were pretty good, but eventually the Egyptians enslaved them. That’s when God decided to get the attention of a shepherd named Moses who noticed a bush on fire yet not consumed:

*Then God said to Moses, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.      - Exodus 3:5-8a*

Prayer: Holy God, help me to be reverent before You - to walk, pray and live on holy ground. And help me to remember that You are a God of justice who has called me to help repair the world. Amen.



**Wednesday, February 24**      *The Big Ten*

The Ten Commandments are found Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Notice that the first 4 are about loving God and the next 6 are about loving our neighbor.

1. *You shall have no other gods before me.*
2. *You shall not make idols.*
3. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*
4. *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*
5. *Honor your father and your mother.*
6. *You shall not murder.*
7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
8. *You shall not steal.*
9. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
10. *You shall not covet.*

The Methodist Missionary E. Stanley Jones once said, “*We don’t break the Ten Commandments. We break ourselves upon them.*”

Prayer: Holy God, help me not to break myself on what You have written in stone; but instead help me to honor and serve You by living as You designed me to live. Amen.





## Week #2 – A Walk through the Poets & Prophets

### Monday, March 1 *The Most Famous of Them All*

King David, the author of the most famous chapter in the Bible, was a shepherd when he was a boy. The experience gave him a beautiful image of how God cares for us. Please note the shift that occurs about halfway through – from thinking *about* God . . . to talking *with* God. An important distinction!

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. – Psalm 23 (New King James Bible)*

Prayer: Good Shepherd, be my guide. Lead me in your path. Restore my soul when I need it. Comfort me in the valleys. Feed me at your table. Let your goodness and mercy walk with me until I dwell with You forever. Amen.

### Tuesday, March 2 *The Laments – “How long, O Lord?”*

There are 150 psalms in the biblical collection; and there are various types – songs of praise, prayers of faith & trust, etc. But the largest number of psalms are called, laments. They're blunt, passionate cries for help, often going back and forth from faith to despair. Psalm 42 is a good example of a lament.

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, “Where is your God?” . . . Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. My soul is cast down within me . . . Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God, my rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?” Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*

Prayer: Thank You that You can handle my doubts, my fears and my cries of despair. Help me to pray through them all, so that I can find You, my help and my God. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 3**                      *The Word of the Lord*

The prophets of the Old Testament were God's megaphones. They spoke "the Word of the Lord," God's will for God's people. The prophet Micah put it so beautifully.

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? - Micah 6:8*

Prayer: Loving God, help me to make the world more just and fair. Teach me to live each day in kindness and to always walk humbly and gratefully with You. Thank You for making your will so clear. Amen.

**Thursday, March 4**                      *Amos Speaks*

The Prophets lived on the edge of society, and when they saw something contrary to God's will God compelled them to speak up. Amos saw that the people of his day were very religious but not very holy. Take a look at these verses from Amos 5:

*Hear this word that I take up over you in lamentation, O house of Israel . . . Because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate . . . Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph . . . I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. – Amos 5:1, 11-12, 15, 21-24*

Prayer: God of Justice, help us to live our religion by working for justice for all. Amen.

**Friday, March 5**                      *The Suffering Servant*

Prophets prophesied. They spoke God's words to the people of their day. And sometimes they spoke of things to come. Micah foretold of the Messiah being born in Bethlehem. Isaiah wrote of God coming to the people as a child, born to a young maiden/virgin. Zechariah told of the Messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. But no passage in the prophets has been more important in understanding the work of Christ than Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. Take a look at a few of these verses:

*See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high . . . Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity . . . Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him*

*stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities . . . He poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Prayer: Thank You, Dear Jesus, for your sacrifice of love for us and for our salvation. Receive our eternal thanks. Amen.

**Saturday, March 6**

*A Whale of a Story*

Believe it or not the Book of Jonah is one of the most important books in the Old Testament. Jonah was called to go to Nineveh. The Ninevites were not Jewish; they were Gentiles. God's call to Jonah foreshadows the New Testament and a Gospel of God's Love for all people.

*But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. – Jonah 4:1-2*

Prayer: Thank You, Loving God, that your love is not just for one people, but for all. Help me embody your love, this day and always. Amen.

**Sunday, March 7**

*"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Worship the Lord with gladness!"*

## **Week #3 - The Person & Work of Christ**





**Monday, March 8**                      *Love, Sweet Love*

Rabbi Harold Kushner calls the Hebrew scriptures a “love letter” from God to the people. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the ultimate living love letter from God to us. He’s God’s Word to us made flesh (John 1:14). Jesus spoke so clearly about his love the night of the Last Supper. Think about the love that God the Father has for God the Son. That very same love is extended to us.

*“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.” – John 15:9*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how can I ever thank You enough for your love? Receive the thanks of my heart and my life lived for You. And use me this day to be a vessel of your love to others. In your holy name. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 9**                      *Abundant Life*

Some folks today have a misconception when it comes to religion and specifically Christianity. They view it as a restricting, lifeless, joy-killer. Sometimes we in the church are partially to blame for that impression. But it certainly didn’t come from Jesus.

*“I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” – John 10:30*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, continue to lead me into the abundant life You desire for me. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 10**                      *Messiah*

The Jews longed for the Messiah, the promised one, who would redeem Israel. Jesus claimed to be the one they were waiting for, as evidenced by the passage below. The Messiah would be a great, divine Savior who would redeem Israel. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world, yet he has ushered in a new age – the age of grace and atonement. And like the great leader that the Messiah was to be, he has shown us the way to live for God’s kingdom here on earth.

*Jesus said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. – Matthew 16:15-17*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to live this day as if You really are my Messiah. Amen.

**Thursday, March 11**                      *John 3:16*

For many John 3:16 sums up the Good News of Jesus Christ better than any other passage. There’s a guy who travels all over the county to the most watched sporting events just so he can hold up the sign, “John 3:16” when the camera is pointed in his direction. Which verse sums up Christ best to you? Or can one verse even begin to capture his significance?

*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*

Prayer: Eternal God, thank You for the gift of Christ. Thank You that the eternal life he brings starts here and now with You. In His Holy Name. Amen.

**Friday, March 12** *Atonement*

The word means what it spells out, At-one-ment. Atonement is the bringing together of two parties who were previously not reconciled. Christians believe that the Cross of Jesus Christ has achieved our atonement. It's nearly impossible to explain how, but not incredibly hard to experience. As we remember the events of Holy Week and Good Friday in a few weeks, we'll see God's love poured out for us, and it will bring us to God.

*"For Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" - 1 Peter 3:18*

Prayer: Loving God, help me to allow the Cross of Christ to continue to do its work of bringing me to You. Amen.

**Saturday, March 13** *A Shared Victory*

I'll never forget when the Red Sox finally won the World Series in 2004, after an 86 yr. drought. They held rallies all over New England, taking the World Series trophy with them. Folks got their pictures taken with the trophy. And everywhere they went the players held up the trophy and said, "This is for you, New England! We won this for you!" Big Papi said it again at the 2013 World Series Celebration – "This is for you, Boston!" Christ's victory over the grave is a lot like that, only far more important, of course. It's a shared victory. He won it for you and for me.

*"Because I live, you also will live" - John 14:19*

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, that your victory over death is mine as well. Amen and Amen!

## **Week #4 The Most Important Teachings of Christ**



**Monday, March 15**

The Model Prayer

Here's the Lord's Prayer from Matthew, Ch. 6:9-13

*"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."*

Here's the Lord's Prayer from Luke, Ch. 11:2-4

*He said to them, "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 indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."*

Note how short the prayers are. Prayers don't have to be long and wordy to be heard! You also see that neither version has the ending we use: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." That sentence is not found in the earliest manuscripts. It was a common ending for Jewish prayers in the First Century, and most likely was used by Jesus on many occasions.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray the prayer You gave us with sincerity, honesty and humility. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 16**

*Neighbor Redefined*

One day Jesus was having a discussion with a religious scholar about the great commandments to love God and neighbor. The scholar then asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Here's his response:

*"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." - Luke 10:30-37*

Prayer: Lord, help us to realize that anyone in need is our neighbor. And help us not to pass by on the other side of the road. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 17**

*The Parable of the Forgiving Father*

Luke 15 is one of the greatest chapters in all the Bible. Jesus gives 3 illustrations to teach us what God is like. God is like the homemaker (God is like a woman? Scandalous!) who loses a coin and turns her house upside-down to find it. God is like the good shepherd who knows all his sheep by name and goes looking for the lost one. And God is like this incredibly forgiving father . . .

*Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. – Luke 15:11-24*

Prayer: Gracious Father, we, too, are prone to wander from the spiritual home we have in You. We, too, squander our inheritance. Thank You for your loving grace which makes every fresh new start possible. Amen.

**Thursday, March 18**

*Where God's Blessings Can Be Found*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. – Jesus in Matthew 5:3-13*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have shown us where blessings are found. Teach us the humility of being poor in spirit. Teach us what meekness is. Help us to be pure in heart, to thirst after righteousness, to be peacemakers and merciful, even when we're misunderstood. Bless us in this quest, as You promised. Amen.

**Friday, March 19**

## With Us Always

I love the end of Matthew's Gospel. Sometimes we save the best for last. Jesus seemed to. Here we receive our marching orders, the call to discipleship, and the Trinity formulated. We also receive an amazing promise.

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

- Matt. 28:16-20

Prayer: Lord, we were not there on that Galilean mountain, but we have heard your call to be faith-filled disciples and to share that discipleship with all who will follow. Thank You that You walk with us every step of the way; always and forever. Amen.

**Saturday, March 20**

## Foolishness?

Let's face it, some of Jesus' teachings are so challenging that they appear almost foolish by human standards. Maybe that's why St. Paul called us to be "Fools for Christ" (I Cor. 4:10). Take a look at these verses which express some of the unique ethics of our Savior:

*"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. – Matthew 5:38-42*

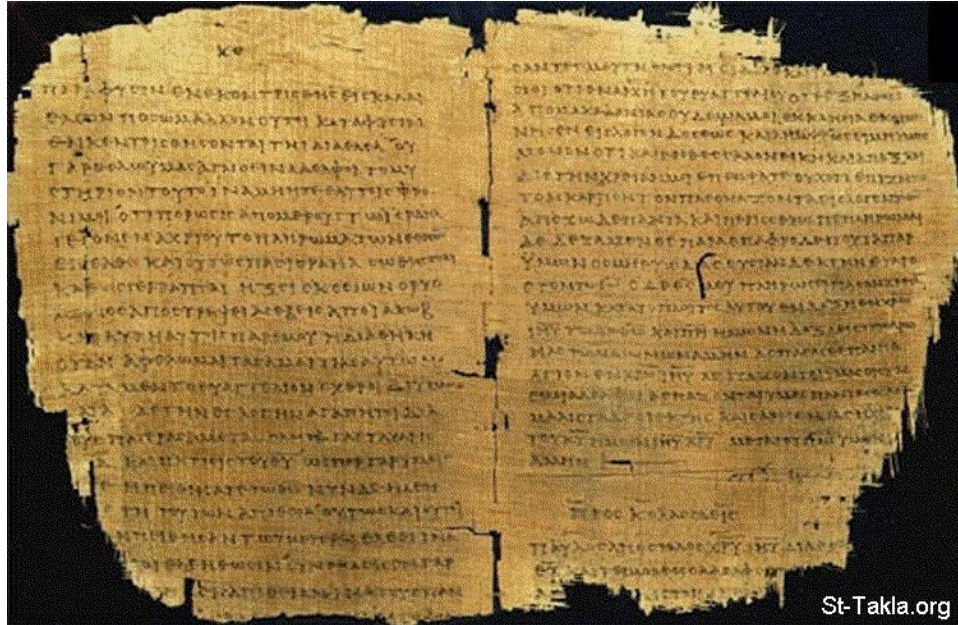
*"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? - Matthew 5:43-46*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your teachings are demanding and often stretch us beyond what we consider common sense. But as your followers, your apprentices, teach us the wisdom of your ways even when at first they might seem like foolishness to us. Amen.

**Sunday, March 21**

*"Jesus went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom." - Luke 4:16*





Copy of St. Paul's letter to the Romans c. AD 180-200 Greek text on papyrus

**Monday, March 22**

*So much in one chapter*

Romans 8 is also on the short list for Greatest Chapters in the Bible. Here's a sampling:

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. – vs 1*

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God. – vss 14-16*

*Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. – vs 26*

*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. – vs 28*

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. – vss 35, 37-39*

Prayer: Take one of the verses above and meditate upon it. Pray it into your life and soul.

**Tuesday, March 23**

## The greatest of these

St. Paul was the first theologian of the Christian Church. Through his letters and teachings, he shaped much of our theology and faith. He's truly a theological giant. But he said there's something more important than theology:

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

Prayer: Dear Lord, make me a person of faith, hope, and love. Especially love. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 24**

## All are One

In ancient times there was a prayer that was sometimes said by Hebrew men: "Lord, I thank Thee that Thou has not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman." The Apostle Paul believed that God's will was for equality and oneness; so he turned the prayer on its head.

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28*

Prayer: Loving God, help me to be a person who celebrates oneness with others. Amen.

**Thursday, March 25**

## Amazing Grace

You know the expression, "*If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.*" Well, there's at least one exception to the saying. It's the grace of God. You don't have to earn God's love. God simply loves you. You don't have to worry about losing God's love. You never earned it to begin with. It's a gift. The gift of grace.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. - Ephesians 2:8-9*

Prayer: Lord, help me to receive the gift of your grace. And help me to be a grace-filled person. Amen.

**Friday, March 26**

*“Got Fruit?”*

*On the surface it’s a nice sweet analogy – the “fruit” of the Spirit. But what the verse claims is staggering. If I understand it correctly, it’s saying that the more of God in our lives, the more love we’ll have to share. The more God’s Spirit lives in us, the more joy we’ll have, more peace, more patience . . .*

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. - Galatians 5:22-23*

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, fill me, so that I may know your fruit. Amen.

**Saturday, March 27**

*Faith and Works*

Tradition has it that the writer of the Letter of James was actually the brother of Jesus. He learned an essential truth about faith from his older bro’.

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. James 2:14-18*

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, let my life show forth my faith - today and every day. Amen.*

**Sunday, March 28** is Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

**Week #6 The Holiest of Weeks**



**Monday, March 29***Hosanna*

Jesus must have experienced so many different emotions on Palm Sunday. Joy over the people recognizing the arrival of the Messiah. Yet he wept over Jerusalem and then in outrage turned over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. He also probably felt fear and anxiety, knowing he was headed right into the hands of those who opposed him.

*The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.' Matt. 21:6-11*

Prayer: Hosanna in the Highest, Lord. Ride into my heart and life, Messiah Jesus. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 30**

## Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – The Teacher Teaches

For the first 3 days of Holy Week Jesus taught openly in the temple in Jerusalem. As tax day approaches, it's probably good to remember that he answered a question about taxes by saying, "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's." He also spoke about the two greatest commandments as well as his return and the end of the age. He taught the people with some of his most famous parables – The Talents, The 10 Maidens and the Sheep & the Goats. These parables, which at first glance seem to be about the end times, are really about how we're to live here and now.

*Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." - Matt. 25:37-40*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be my teacher this Holy Week and always. Amen.

**Wednesday, March 31***Famous Last Words*

John's Gospel records 4 lengthy chapters of teaching that Jesus gave at the Last Supper, perhaps reviewing with his disciples the most important truths he had ever taught them.

*'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? John 14:1-2a*

*Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. John 14:8-9*



*'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. John 14:25-26*

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. – John 15:9*

*'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. – John 15:12-13*

*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends. – John 15:15*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your words to us are precious. Help me to hear these verses as your truths spoken directly to me. Amen. (suggestion: read the verses again, slowly, as Christ's words . . . to you.)

### **Maundy Thursday, April 1**      The Last Supper

It's called "Maundy Thursday" which means "Commandment Thursday," based on these words spoken at the Last Supper: *'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'* After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus shared the Passover Meal with them and gave new meaning to the bread & wine:

*When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. . . Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. - Luke 22:14-15, 19-20*

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the sacred meal of holy communion, which feeds us with your sacrificial love. Amen.

### **Good Friday, April 2**      *The Wondrous Cross*

The details of Good Friday are gruesome, as crucifixion was a horrific way to die. Yet Jesus' words from the Cross are faith-filled and holy. Even when he cried out in anguish, it was "MY God, MY God."

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing' . . . About three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' . . . When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished.' . . . Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. - Luke 23:33-34, Matt. 27:46, John 19:30, Luke 23:46



Prayer: What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend, for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end? O make me thine forever; and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for thee. Amen. (from the hymn, "O Sacred Head Now Wounded")

### **Holy Saturday, April 3**            Between Tragedy and Victory

Can you imagine what Holy Saturday was like for Jesus' disciples and friends, not to mention his mother Mary, who witnessed the crucifixion as well? Did they talk about the horror of the previous day? Did they talk at all? Did they remember any of his words about rising from the dead or the times he had actually raised the dead? Could they find any faith within them still? In obedience to God, they did observe the Sabbath. But I'll bet they wished they could have kept busy working instead.

*Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. – Luke 23:50-56*

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep the faith even in the darkest of times. Amen.



## Easter Sunday!

*He is Risen Indeed!*

Without Easter there's no Christianity. Jesus would have been just another crazy prophet killed for challenging the establishment too much. Without Easter, he's simply a footnote in history. There would be no New Testament, no Good News, no baptism, no communion, no church. In a very real sense, our faith began when he got up.

*After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.' So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.' - Matt. 28:1-10*

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are my living, victorious, empowering Savior! Amen and Amen!

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Thank You for reading "The Top 40 of the Bible." I trust it's been a spiritual blessing to you.

- Pastor Rich Knight

