

*No theology is genuinely Christian  
which does not arise from and focus on the cross.*

– Martin Luther

[This devotional is designed to help you weave reflections upon the time leading to the crucifixion with your personal need of a Savior. It can be read alone privately. But I think it is best to do this together as a family. Make use of everyone present as much as you are able. Don't just get through the material as fast as you can. Be creative as you use the instructions throughout this guide.]

**Psalm 65:1-4** TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. A SONG. Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed. <sup>2</sup> O you who hears prayer, to you shall all flesh come. <sup>3</sup> When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions. <sup>4</sup> Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

[Opening Prayer followed by a short season of silent preparation. Have one person begin by asking God for his grace and mercy to leave the concerns of the world behind and to focus rather on your personal need for such a Redeemer as Jesus.]

**Luke 22:1-6** Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. <sup>2</sup> And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. <sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. <sup>4</sup> He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup> And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Betrayal can only occur after someone has given you both their love and their trust. To betray is to sin against one's love and trust.

[Think quietly to yourself. Or have one or two people present comment on why it is significant that the cross occurred by means of a betrayal.]

**Psalm 38:1-22** A PSALM OF DAVID, FOR THE MEMORIAL OFFERING. O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath! <sup>2</sup> For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me. <sup>3</sup> There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. <sup>4</sup> For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. <sup>5</sup> My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, <sup>6</sup> I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. <sup>7</sup> For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. <sup>8</sup> I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. <sup>9</sup> O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you. <sup>10</sup> My heart throbs; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes- it also has gone from me. <sup>11</sup> My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off. <sup>12</sup> Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate treachery all day long. <sup>13</sup> But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth. <sup>14</sup> I have become like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no rebukes. <sup>15</sup> But for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer. <sup>16</sup> For I said, "Only let them not rejoice over me, who boast against me when my foot slips!" <sup>17</sup> For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever before me. <sup>18</sup> I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin. <sup>19</sup> But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully. <sup>20</sup> Those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good. <sup>21</sup> Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! <sup>22</sup> Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

[After reading aloud the above passage, take a minimum of 5 minutes to reflect on each phrase of David's prayer. Identify ways in which you can express the same attitude to God today. Use David's prayer to guide your own prayer (conversation) with God.]

God does not intend for his people to live every day in perpetual mourning. But mourning is often appropriate and serves a good purpose in God's wonderful providence. At this time, focus on the spiritual reasons for mourning:

- Mourn because loved one's continue to live in rebellion to Jesus.
- Mourn because although you have a new heart and the Holy Spirit indwelling, you still choose to sin against God and grace.
- Mourn because within you lingers a strong love of the world.
- Mourn over the pain caused by the sin of those near you.
- Mourn because of the wickedness in the world around you.
- Mourn because of the weakness of the Church.
- Mourn because you must still experience the lingering effects of the Fall upon this world.
- Mourn because Jesus is not given the praise and honor he deserves.
- Mourn...
- Mourn simply because the fullness of God's promises are not yet possessed.

**James 4:4-10** <sup>4</sup> You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? <sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

**Psalms 139:23-24** <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

[Silently, sincerely, and earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal any attitudes or actions that are displeasing to Him.]

Although mourning is necessary and valuable for God's children, your Father does not delight in your mourning perpetually. It is the road through which we arrive at true and lasting joy. The cross of Jesus is a road of mourning that Jesus walked. But this journey of pain and sorrow was endured for the purpose of redeeming sinners out of darkness in order to bring them into the light one eternal day.

**Luke 22:14-23** <sup>14</sup> And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took 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." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup> But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" <sup>23</sup> And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

[Two or more people discuss the importance of connecting the crucifixion with the Passover Meal. Do not let this go longer than 5-10 minutes. But have enough discussion such that there is meaningful reflection.]

[Sing, or simply read and meditate upon Hymn 421 – Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness]

Soul, adorn yourself with gladness, leave the gloomy haunts of sadness,  
come into the daylight's splendor, there with joy your praises render.  
Bless the One whose grace unbounded this amazing banquet founded;  
he, though heav'nly, high, and holy, deigns to dwell with you most lowly.

Now in faith I humbly ponder over this surpassing wonder  
that the bread of life is boundless though the souls it feeds are countless;  
with the choicest wine of heaven Christ's own blood to us is given.  
Oh, most glorious consolation, pledge and seal of my salvation.

Jesus, source of lasting pleasure, truest friend and dearest treasure,  
peace beyond all understanding, joy into all life expanding;  
humbly now, I bow before you, love incarnate, I adore you;  
worthily let me receive you, and, so favored, never leave you.

**Luke 22:24-30** <sup>24</sup> A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup> But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. <sup>28</sup> "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, <sup>29</sup> and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

As Jesus is willingly sacrificing himself to serve those he loves, the ones for whom he is dying are still full of the attitude of this world. They are walking contradictions. They are proclaiming their utmost devotion to Jesus, yet the attitude that oozes out of them continues to be their devotion being served. It is humbling to look at our own sinful attitudes and accept that so much that flows out of us does not reflect the servant heart of our Savior. But, the glory of the cross is double-sided. On the one side, full and complete forgiveness is gained through the blood of Jesus shed for us. But on the other side of the cross is the truth that we are placed on the back of Christ as he goes to the cross. And in his death, the deathblow is struck on our sinful nature. We are crucified with Christ. Jesus went to the cross to satisfy Divine Justice. And Jesus went to the cross to destroy sin.

[Take a few moments to pray specific prayers in which you want Jesus to make your attitude more like his servant attitude.]

**Psalms 51:4-10** <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. <sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. <sup>6</sup> Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

We must each recognize that we cannot fix the selfishness of our heart. We must simply ask God to create within us a new heart that is clean. God must renew within us a spirit that loves to serve God and others. But as we ask for a clean heart, we must continue to wrestle with an old heart that continues to love that which is unrighteous. God, in his beautiful wisdom, has chosen to leave within us, during the

course of our lives, the remains of our old nature. We are told to daily put to death this ever present enemy. This struggle often makes us weary. We sometimes doubt whether the victory will ever be entirely won. But we press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of us: full and complete righteousness. And our hope is not only for ourselves. It is for everyone who truly looks to the crucified and risen Savior for redemption...

**Isaiah 60:18-22** <sup>18</sup> Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. <sup>19</sup> The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. <sup>20</sup> Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. <sup>21</sup> Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified. <sup>22</sup> The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will hasten it.

The above passage helps us to see a day when all God's people will be righteous. God promises that he is hastening this day. How important is it to you that your Savior is faithful and true? Of course, your redemption depends upon His faithfulness to finish the work that he has begun in you.

[Give opportunity for anyone who desires to offer prayers of thanksgiving that, even though we remain in the storm, Jesus is a faithful redeemer who will not cease from working upon us and in us until all his people are fully like him.]

**Luke 22:39-46** <sup>39</sup> And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." <sup>41</sup> And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." <sup>43</sup> And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. <sup>44</sup> And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. <sup>45</sup> And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

The strength of even the most committed of Jesus' followers is not strong enough. It is not our strength to pray or to read and follow God's commands that matters. Ultimately, it is the strength of the prayers of Jesus for us that we depend. Unless you have felt the limits of your strength, you will not with desperation cling to Jesus to save you. If Jesus were to cease praying for you even now from his throne in heaven, your strength would fail in a moment. Jesus alone, of all people who have ever walked the face of this earth, was willing to die to this world. Jesus went alone to the cross. We only go to the cross strapped to his back. He carries us to our death. This is our only hope.

**Luke 22:47-53** <sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, <sup>48</sup> but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" <sup>49</sup> And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" <sup>50</sup> And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? <sup>53</sup> When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Darkness is a world that lives in ignorance of the glory of God.

Darkness is a world that rejects the righteousness of God's character.

Darkness is a world in which Satan weaves his webs of deception.

Darkness is a world that distorts and twists that which God has made good.

Darkness is a world in which true love of God and neighbor is absent.

Darkness is a world that lies under the just wrath of God.  
Darkness is a world that mocks and beats and crucifies its Redeemer and Lord.

**Luke 22:63-65** <sup>63</sup> Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. <sup>64</sup> They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" <sup>65</sup> And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

**Psalm 130:3-6** <sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. <sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

Before the Incarnation, those who yearned for redemption from their sins were waiting. They were waiting for God to fulfill all of his promises to Abraham. For us, Jesus has come. God has demonstrated his faithfulness to his promises. The Holy Spirit has been poured out from heaven. And yet, we too continue to wait. We wait for his return. And we wait each morning for fresh workings of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to grant us fellowship with God and freedom from sin.

[Take time silently to confess your weariness in waiting. Confess that in some ways you have ceased waiting and just decided to go on with life. Confess to God your failure to truly yearn for his return. Confess any anger or bitterness that may have grown up within you towards God because His power to free you from your sin has not happened like you thought. And cry out to God for a renewed strength to continue waiting.]

**Luke 23:13-25** <sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore punish and release him." <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"- <sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. <sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, <sup>21</sup> but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" <sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him." <sup>23</sup> But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

From a human perspective, Jesus was sent to the cross unjustly. He had no sin of his own. He had no guilt for which to pay. But from His perspective, he chose the cross. He bore on his shoulders your sin. Barabbas was released, even though Barabbas was full of guilt. You are like Barabbas.

[Have two or more people discuss how they would feel if they were in the place of Barabbas.]

**Luke 23:32-43** <sup>32</sup> Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

From the perspective of the crowd, Jesus did nothing for the thief beside him. He spoke words. But he did nothing that could be seen. The thief only apprehended the blessing as he believed the promise of Jesus' words.

[Have one or more people speak to what it means for them personally to believe Jesus' words.]

Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, See him dying on the tree!  
'Tis the Christ by man rejected; Yes, my soul, 'tis he, 'tis he.  
'Tis the long-expected Prophet, David's Son, yet David's Lord;  
By his Son God now has spoken: 'Tis the true and faithful Word.

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning, Was there ever grief like his?  
Friends through fear his cause disowning, Foes insulting his distress;  
Many hands were raised to wound him, None would interpose to save;  
But the deepest stroke that pierced him Was the stroke that Justice gave.

Ye who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the Sacrifice appointed, See who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost;  
Christ's the Rock of our salvation, His the name of which we boast.  
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!  
None shall ever be confounded Who on him their hope have built.

**Luke 23:44-49** <sup>44</sup> It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" <sup>48</sup> And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup> And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

[Have one or two people explain why it is good news that Jesus, at the moment of his death, continued to commit his spirit to His Father.]

As believers, we stand in two worlds. One is a world of darkness that is doomed to destruction. The other is a world full of the light of Jesus Christ.

[Read the following Old Testament passages and learn from their hope in the coming Day. After reading them finish your time together with prayers of thanksgiving that in Jesus Christ our Day has come.]

**Psalms 30:10-12** <sup>10</sup> Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me! O LORD, be my helper!" <sup>11</sup> You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, <sup>12</sup> that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

**Isaiah 60:1-2** Rise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. <sup>2</sup> For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

**Isaiah 51:11** <sup>11</sup> And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

**Jeremiah 31:13** <sup>13</sup> Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

Martin Lloyd Jones once said:

“You will never know God as Father except by Jesus Christ, and in particular, by his death upon the cross... Look there, gaze, meditate, survey the wondrous cross. And then you will see something of him.”