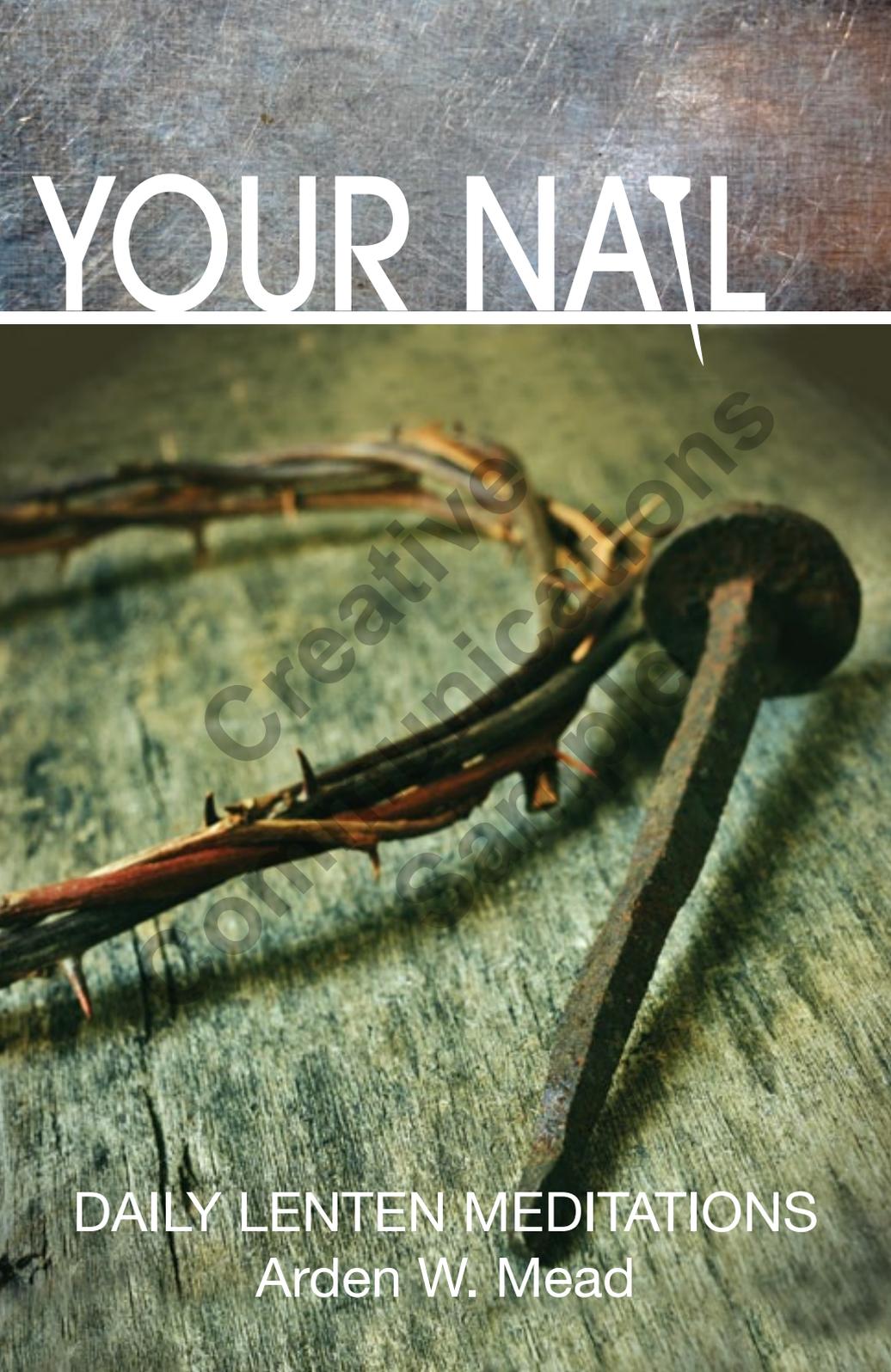


YOUR NAIL



DAILY LENTEN MEDITATIONS
Arden W. Mead

INTRODUCTION

These Lenten devotions are intended to revive the ancient Christian practice of meditation—to help you think, ponder, reflect and consider ... and eventually perhaps also to discuss ... and certainly to pray ... about the meaning of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ for you.

Some people tie a string around their finger to remind them of something. This Lent we hope the “gimmick” of a nail will serve that purpose for you, a frequent reminder to meditate daily on the crucifixion of Christ and its meaning for you personally.

Therefore, it is strongly suggested that you have available a real nail to use as the focus of your daily meditation. Like a string on your finger, let your nail remind you each day of the day’s message, a message which is summarized in the title of each day’s devotion. If you can carry just that title in your mind each day, meditation will have begun.

All of these devotions are derived in one way or another from the theme passage of Colossians 2:13b-15:

He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the Cross. And then, having disarmed all the powers ranged against us, He exposed them—shattered, empty, and defeated—in His final glorious triumphant act.



Two additional Scripture readings are suggested with each devotion, so that the Word of God may further direct your meditating and your praying. No printed prayers are offered with these devotions, because we don’t know in what direction the Holy Spirit will lead your thoughts in your meditations. Do pray, however, in your own way with your own words, as the Spirit leads you.

—Arden W. Mead, author

ASH WEDNESDAY

YOUR NAIL

Psalms 22:14-19 † Zechariah 12:10—13:1

Why a nail during Lent? Throughout these forty days these pages will try to give some answers to that question. Some of the answers are probably obvious. Others will be more subtle. And some, quite frankly, are rather contrived.

Why a nail during Lent? To help you think about something ... specifically, about the suffering and death of your Lord Jesus Christ ... and about the meaning of that suffering and death for you personally.

The nail you see on the table or carry around with you is your nail. Think about that.

But it is also Christ's nail ... think about that!

That, in fact, is your assignment for today:

Just think about it ... in the context of Lent:

YOUR NAIL!

THURSDAY

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Luke 24:44-48 † Acts 10:34-43

You have been confronted with a nail for a whole day now. What thoughts crossed your mind when you meditated on it?

Were most of them the kinds of thoughts that accuse and condemn? "This nail is one of those that spiked Christ to the cross. It was because of me that he suffered so. I deserve to be crucified, not Jesus."

All of that is true, of course; and during this Lenten season your nail will serve frequently to accuse and condemn.

But if the nail spells "bad news" when you confront it, it is also meant to proclaim the Good News. With such a nail Jesus Christ did die for you ...

to wipe out the damning evidence against you!

The same nail which signifies your sin and the punishment you deserve also bears witness to God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ!

Let the Good News impress you: "He has forgiven you all your sins!" Read what it says about a nail ... your nail ... and as often as you confront your nail today, let it remind you of that Good News:

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS!

FRIDAY
HE DIED FOR ME

John 3:14-18 | Acts 16:25-34

"He died for me." What do those words mean to you? When you think about them, what do they bring to mind?

- + He died as my Substitute ... in my place ... where I should have died ... the way I should have died ...
- + He died because of me ... if it were not for my sins, his death would not have been necessary ...
- + He died for my benefit ... to provide me with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

These are just three ways of reading that simple sentence. Another way might be to think about it one word at a time: "He" — who? why him? ... "died" — how? where? why? ... "for" — in place of? in behalf of? for the benefit of? because of? ... "me" — why me? who am I? what am I?

Today let your nail remind you of this simple but profound four-word sentence:

HE DIED FOR ME!

SATURDAY

WHAT WOULD YOUR SIGN SAY?

John 19:17-22 † John 1:43-49

Up till now in your meditations you have probably been picturing your nail as one of those which were driven through Jesus' hands or feet. That is a profitable point to ponder: "He died for me ... I caused his death."

But our theme verse from Colossians suggests that you might also picture your nail as the one which was used to fasten the sign over Jesus' head on the Cross. The wording on that sign read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." There was some argument at the time about what the sign should actually say. Perhaps there still is.

If you were asked to compose a sign to be nailed over the head of the crucified Christ for all the world to read,

What would your sign say?

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Jesus, I will ponder now
On your holy Passion;

With your Spirit me endow
For such meditation.

Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish

Of your suffering, pain, and death
That I may not perish.

MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

Luke 9:23-26 † Mark 15:20-22

A nail is an awkward thing to carry around all the time or even to have in the middle of your table.

Perhaps you have noticed that. You find yourself confronting it when you had forgotten it was there.

The nail is supposed to make you think about something each time you confront it (like a string tied around a finger), but there may be times when that is inconvenient; you really intended to have something else in mind. Perhaps you put off your meditating right then, with a promise that you would get to it later.

A nail is an awkward thing to confront ... and so is a cross! Awkward as it was, Jesus carried his Cross for us. And awkward as it is, he calls us to carry our cross for him.

Suppose that instead of a nail you had been asked to carry a cross during Lent—not a miniature model, but the real thing.

TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

BLOOD

Matthew 27:24-31 † Revelation 1:4-8

A nail can be an uncomfortable thing to confront. If you are not careful about how you handle it, it might cut or scratch you, or puncture your skin. You reach into your pocket or purse to grab your keys, and your hand closes instead around the nail.

And then there would be blood on your hands ... as there was blood on your Lord's hands ... as the result of a nail.

“His blood be on us and on our children,” the crowds shouted at Pontius Pilate.

And so it is. Cut by the nail or not, there is blood on your hands ... his blood.

But there was also blood on his hands ... his blood ... not yours, but his!

Today, whenever you confront your nail, think about blood ... the blood on your hands ... and on his.

WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK
WHAT HAVE I GOT TO LOSE?

Matthew 16:24-27 † Luke 17:26-33

A nail can be a dangerous thing to carry around in your pocket. Unprotected, it could cut a hole in the cloth. And a hole in your pocket is always a dangerous thing—it means you could lose something.

People talk about “giving something up for Lent” ... but what about losing something? What have you got to lose? Is there anything you have, anything about yourself, that you would like to lose this Lent?

A popular Lenten hymn uses just that picture:

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK
LOCKJAW

Job 40:1-5 † Romans 3:19-28

A nail can be a dangerous thing. If you scratch yourself or puncture your skin with one, it could lead to tetanus. That is the medical name for it. The popular name is “lockjaw”—and the results can be exactly what the name describes: an inability to speak.

Lockjaw can be fatal. It was in the case of the Savior, who fulfilled the ancient prophecy:

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

That silence led to death for our Lord, but that death led to life for the whole world.

There are times in life when it is necessary to speak out. But are there also times in your life when it might be better to keep quiet? ... even if it hurts? In one Christian hymn we pray for the wisdom to know the difference:

Help me speak what's right and good
And keep silence on occasion;
Help me pray, Lord, as I should,
Help me bear my tribulation.

FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

Acts 26:9-20 | 2 Chronicles 30:6-9

A nail can interfere with one's plans. Carelessly dropped on the street or in the garage, a nail can cause a flat tire. And a flat tire can keep you from getting where you want to go. Normally that would be a bad thing ... unless that nail kept you from going some place where you shouldn't have gone anyway.

You are probably anticipating the thought-starter questions before they can be asked: Where were you going before Christ intervened? How did a nail (and the Cross behind it) prevent you from going there?

The Hebrew word usually translated “repent” literally means “to turn, to change directions.” How can your nail (and the Cross behind it) make that happen? Since it has happened, thanks to Jesus Christ,

Now where are you going?

SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK

WHAT GOOD IS IT?

Genesis 50:15-20 † Romans 8:28-30

All this week you have been considering some of the negative aspects of nails, how if not used carefully they can be awkward, uncomfortable, and dangerous.

But the fact that there are so many nails around indicates that, bad as they may be at times, they still must be good for something. Witness the fact that we continue to refer to the day on which Jesus was nailed to the Cross for us as “Good Friday.”

Next week we intend to use some of the positive attributes of nails to help us better appreciate the meaning of Christ’s death for our lives, to help us see what the Cross of Christ is good for. But rather than read ahead, do your own thinking today.

How did God make the bad events of Good Friday turn out good for you?

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Make me see your great distress,
Anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness
And your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod,
Spear and nails, did wound you,
How you died for those, O God,
Who with thorns had crowned you.

YOUR NAIL

I look, this Lent, to a nail—the simplest piece of hardware used to construct the earth’s most elaborate bit of carpentry: To secure my Savior to the cross, and to fasten, fast, the convicting notice of my sin above his head. This is no symbol, no simple sign, but the very machine of God’s great love, created of cross and Christ and crudest nails, to churn out eternity for me.

—Peter J. Mead

Arden Mead’s beloved devotional booklet that launched Creative Communications nearly forty years ago returns to speak to today’s generations of Christians as powerfully and poetically as it did then. Colossians 2:13-14—“Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, by nailing it over his own head on the cross”—stands as the cornerstone of each reflection, and readers are encouraged each day to use a real nail as a hands-on reminder of the meaning of Christ’s suffering and death for their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arden W. Mead (1936-2006) served as a parish pastor, author and designer of worship for forty-five years while at congregations in Mentor, OH, and St. Louis, MO. He wrote “Your Nail,” the very first publication issued by Creative Communications, in 1976 and in the thirty years that followed he wrote hundreds of devotional and worship materials published by Creative Communications that continue to be read, used and cherished by millions of Christians around the world today.

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