

DEVOTIONS *for* LENT

*in view of*

GOD'S  
MERCY



David Boyd

## ASH WEDNESDAY

# Distress Signal

*... rend your hearts ... return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful ...* JOEL 2:13

Orange smoke in the jungle lands of Vietnam, red flares on an open sea, three rapid gunshots in the forest, “dits” then “dats” (SOS) in Morse code, a foghorn blaring—all recognized distress signals. When you see or hear them, you know someone’s in trouble. “Is anybody out there to help?” these signals plead.

On Ash Wednesday, when the ashes are placed on our foreheads, we send out a distress signal: someone’s in trouble (me) and someone’s got to help me. But am I really in trouble? Who told me? The apostle Paul tells us, “The thing I want to do, I recoil from doing it. The thing I know I shouldn’t go near, I rush to it. Who will rescue me from this body of death?” The answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:15, 24-25, paraphrased).

Ashes upon my forehead? They are a distress signal, but in the form a certain shape—the shape of a cross that says, “You were going down slow. But Jesus was lifted high upon the cross in order to lift you out of every trouble!”

**Jesus, I am often distressed. Remind me I’m still in your grip. Amen.**

---

## THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

# The Deterrent

*Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful ...* JOEL 2:13

The Romans discovered the most effective deterrent to crime: Affix the guilty one onto two pieces of rough-hewn lumber and stand that cross upright in a public place. The message to the passersby was “Don’t break the law!”

How like our God to turn this instrument of horror into the greatest symbol of comfort the world will ever know. There’s comfort because every time I look at it, I know it was not I, the law breaker, who hung there but the sinless Son of God—in my place. The cross has become

the greatest deterrent of all time, for it deters a shattered human being from despair, deters those who cry out, “Is there any hope?” from hopelessness, and deters the wounded from bitterness and the arrogant from soul-killing pride.

Lord Jesus, I’ve passed your cross so many times;  
unto my dying day, let it be my confidence. Amen.

---

**FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY**

## Impressing Who?

*... but when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ...* MATTHEW 6:17

We say, “But wait, Jesus. If I do that, they won’t see my strong faith, they won’t understand how tight we are, how pleased you are with me!” We do things, say things designed to get the attention of other Christians. It’s a phase we go through, but it never leaves us completely.

Is there a cure for this Christian version of “virtue signaling”—a life that seeks to draw others to myself? Ponder this: “But [Jesus] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). A servant doesn’t draw attention to himself, but stands by the table, silently making certain that everyone has enough to eat, then clears the dishes.

That’s the antidote—simple and profound: “I don’t need to impress Jesus or his people. I can live a quiet and peaceable life, humbly serving others and getting out of the way.”

Jesus, you made yourself as a servant so that I might have  
everything that matters. Help me to matter less in my  
own eyes, that others matter more. Amen.

---

**SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY**

## Hurt

*And when you fast ...* MATTHEW 6:16

It’s easy to get our attention these days. One little beep on our devices, a slight vibration of our phones and we’re like the frog catching a fly: He

hears a buzz and—wham!—he catches it. We're told to keep up and we're desperate to do that—through the news feeds, the tweets, the pings for an email. It's exhausting and we're losing. We can't keep up—we weren't designed to know and care about everything.

Most of us have never fasted, except to shed a few pounds, but one thing we know about it is that it hurts. So, why would Jesus talk about it? Because fasting does several important things for a distracted human being: It gets our attention, reminding us that we can't generate our own food and that our Heavenly Father supplies it, which generates thanksgiving.

Because fasting hurts, it draws us closer to Jesus, who hurt in every way possible. When we read the Passion accounts in a few weeks, all we see is hurt. Our Lord hurt, but not for his sake—for ours. It's called mercy. And God's mercy always supplies our every need.

**Lord Jesus, I've messed up so many times, I can't keep up. Thank you for hurting for all of it. Amen.**

---

#### FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## Five-Minute Rule

*[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer ... and be killed, and after three days rise again.* **MARK 8:31**

A professor gives a lecture. One student hears something he doesn't like. He confronts the professor. The professor says, "Yes, but later I clarified what I'd said. Next time, give it five minutes, so you can listen again."

Things were going so well: Jesus was healing, teaching and confounding the experts; thousands were coming out to hear the Teacher. Peter, this nobody, seemed to be chosen for the inner ring. Then Jesus went dark, said he was going to suffer and die. The disciples didn't like that, so they shut down and didn't hear the good part: "... and after three days rise again."

The disciples didn't grasp it, though it was right there in Isaiah 53, that God's mercy wouldn't go active until the Son of Man died upon the cross. "Out of his anguish he shall see light," Isaiah said (Isaiah 53:11, NRSV). They shut down, yes, but they held on because, as Peter said later, "Hard words, Jesus. But where are we supposed to go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68, paraphrased).

Jesus, help me listen even when you speak hard words.  
Only you have the words of mercy and life eternal. Amen.

---

**MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT**

## The Generator

*If we say ...* 1 JOHN 1:8

If we can't generate our own water or food or air or DNA, then how is it we'll often think we can generate our own forgiveness? That's like talking to ourselves in a monologue. We hear something like "Well, you just have to learn how to forgive yourself." Think that would have worked for Peter? Nope! Peter needed to hear that life-saving message from outside of himself. He was desperate to hear it from the only one who had the authority to offer it: Jesus.

When we hear a word of forgiveness from our own anxious hearts, it'll last maybe 20 minutes. That's one reason the Church has, for 2,000 years, insisted that we hear that announcement from outside of ourselves. When the pastor on Sunday morning announces the forgiveness of sins, the pastor's lips move, but it's God speaking: "Though our sins are as scarlet, they are now white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Now we can breathe with shoulders back and head up—now we are living a life worth living.

**Jesus, I'm only certain that I'm forgiven  
when you say so. Speak it often, O Lord. Amen.**

---

**TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT**

## The Heart of Listening

*I love the LORD ... he ... heard my voice, he [listened to] my pleas for mercy.*

PSALM 116:1

Want to build relationships? There's lots of help out there. Some will mention "active listening" as key. Even then, they never land on the real thing—that it takes a heart to truly listen. Listening—like praying and dying—is hard work. Hard because it's an emptying of self for the sake of the other. The heart of listening is empathy—striving to understand what the person is going through.

Empathetic listening builds trust. Without trust, there is no relationship. If we stop listening, relationships wither and die. Jesus spoke, but he also listened. Bartimaeus called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus heard him. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked. “Rabbi, I want to see!” Bartimaeus responded. “Okay,” Jesus said. Bartimaeus received his sight. Simple as that. Today I say, “Lord Jesus, I seem to be coming apart!” Jesus says, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Help me!” I say. Jesus responds, “I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you’” (Isaiah 41:13). And he does. Simple as that, yet so powerful.

**Jesus, you really listen to me. Help me listen when you speak. Amen.**

---

**WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT**

## Dissolve My Heart

*I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart;*

*I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. PSALM 9:1*

Every time we offer a gift, we offer a little bit of our love along with it. That’s why ingratitude is such a serious offense. It’s not just the gift that’s been rejected. Ingratitude not only wounds the gift giver, but affects the one who’s received the gift, blinding them to the presence of others, which is dangerous territory. If you can’t see others, soon enough you’ll not see Jesus either.

We don’t often think of being thankful during Lent. But thanksgiving during Lent makes perfect sense. Why? Because each Lenten day, the cross upon which our Savior died looms ever larger. Each day in Lent brings me closer to the day when Jesus unleashed life upon the world. Jesus sent a whole lot of his love with the gift. We stand in awe of that kind of fierce, determined love and realize the Lord is dissolving our sometimes hard hearts to a thankfulness that looks quite a lot like tears.

**Jesus, dissolve my heart in thankfulness and  
bring tears of gratitude to my eyes. Amen.**

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Wrestling

*I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was spared.* GENESIS 32:30

The testing of our faith in Jesus comes in all shapes and sizes. That testing isn't arbitrary. God's not picking on us. He's protecting our most precious commodity—faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. If we don't have faith in Jesus as our risen Lord, our faith is useless (1 Corinthians 15:14). So it must be tested like gold in the fire (1 Peter 1:7).

In the Old Testament, the Lord tested Jacob's trust through an all-night wrestling match. Would Jacob hold on or would he simply let go and give up? Through the testing, he became a stronger man. Wrestling is another word for struggling. Struggling comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes our struggles are rooted in the usual cast of characters: weakness, fear, anger, guilt, envy and pride. Other times we struggle to keep our eyes fastened upon Jesus, when it would be easier to follow all the other "stuff" of this world. Seeing Jesus on the cross, up close and personal, we become wiser and stronger than we were before.

**Lord, I wrestle with my sins. Is there any hope for me?  
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ my Lord, there is! Amen.**

---

FRIDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

## Ponder This!

*Come away by yourselves ... and rest.* MARK 6:31

Once "Like a Rolling Stone" was released in 1965, Bob Dylan said what most frustrated him was that there wasn't time to think. We're living in a "Hey, catch up!" world. We're supposed to know everything, care about everyone. And we try to catch up, but we never do and never will. We can't know everything, care about everyone. But we're not supposed to.

Jesus' disciples came back to him after he'd sent them out for the first time. He knew what they needed most then: time to think. So, he called them away from the busyness, lest it become a way of life. Think of Lent that way, 46 days of the year when Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves and get some rest—some time to think." It begs the question "Think about

**IN THESE DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR LENT**, we take a look at our lives in view of God's mercy toward us through the sacrifice of his Son for us on the cross. Jesus helps us to see and experience the richness of God's mercy in his life, death and resurrection. We, in turn, are called by God to be living sacrifices for him, displaying our commitment to him in word and deed. These devotions help us to set our sights on what is meaningful and holy in our faith walk with God.



This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#).

By David Boyd. Design by Jeff McCall. Cover image: Shutterstock. © 2022 Creative Communications for the Parish, a division of Bayard, Inc., 1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026. 800-325-9414. [www.creativecommunications.com](http://www.creativecommunications.com). All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

**GM2**