

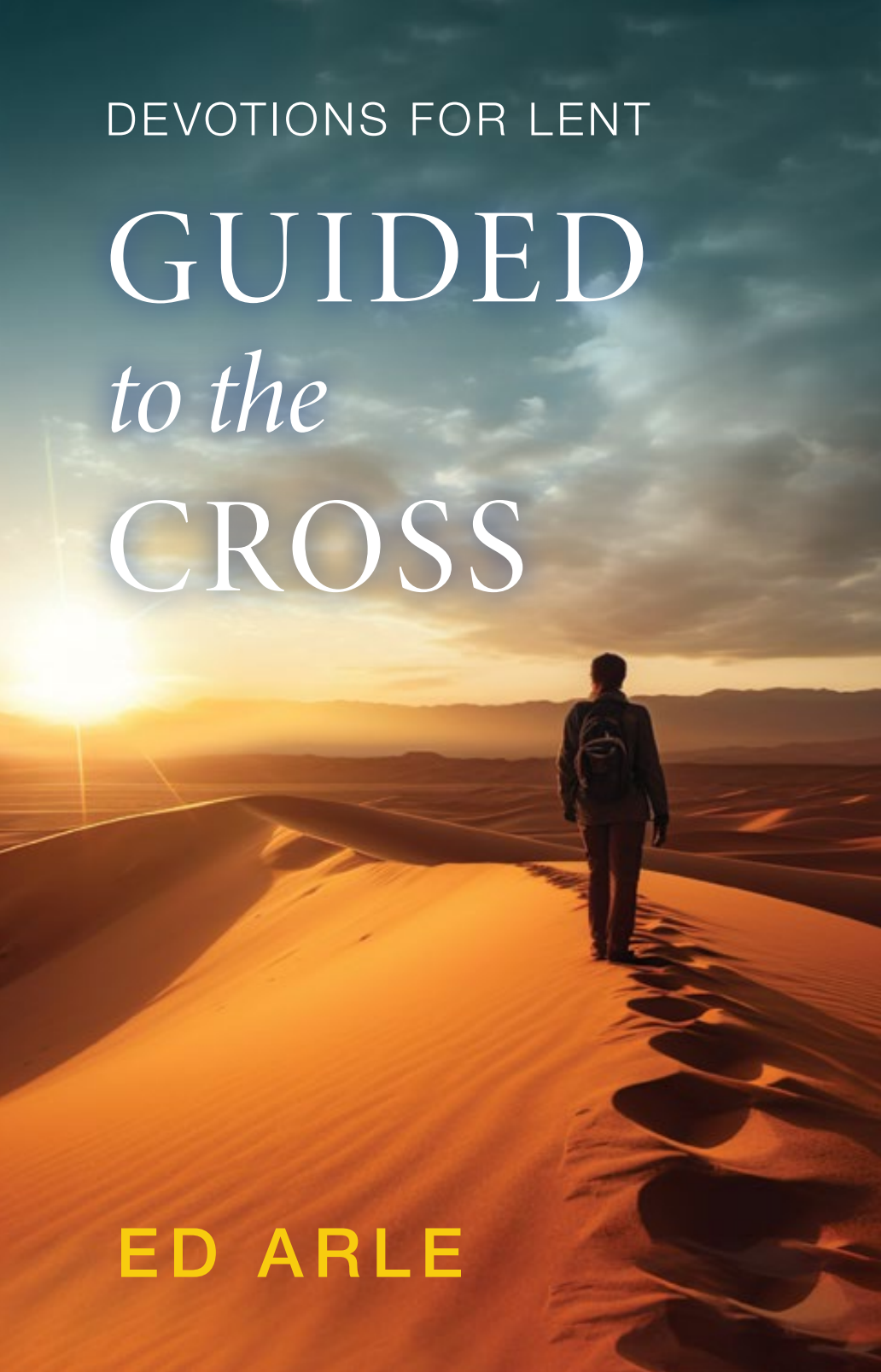
DEVOTIONS FOR LENT

GUIDED

to the

CROSS

ED ARLE



ASH WEDNESDAY EVER BEFORE ME

I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

PSALM 51:3

It's Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent. Early this morning, I saw evidence of this fact as I saw the foreheads of friends and strangers marked in black charcoal with the sign of the cross. This evening my turn will come. I'll gather with others for worship. We'll come to pray and hear again how that mark on the forehead means love, mercy and the forgiveness of God in the cross of his Son, Jesus.

I admit that the closer I come to that moment of the mark, I struggle inside. I struggle with shame, knowing I did not deserve, nor do I deserve, the mercy of God. And yet, the closer I come to the cross, I give thanks for the fact that I know Jesus is there.

The charcoal mark will be gone in the morning. But God's grace, love and forgiveness will remain. That's because my Jesus died for me and rose again.

Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY CHARCOAL CROSS

... the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 JOHN 1:7

This morning the charcoal is gone. It came off in the shower. But for a moment, when I saw the smudge on the wash rag, I remembered again what that black mark meant. My sins were in that mark, reminding me of how much I am in need of a Savior.

On and off today I thought about putting that charcoal cross back on my forehead. But then I remembered that what Jesus died to do was wash my sin away. Now it's time to see the cross and believe in the forgiveness that is there.

Ah, dearest Jesus, in your death and resurrection you have given me new life. Grant me the Spirit to live that life for you. Amen.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY CLOTHED

For by grace you have been saved through faith.

EPHESIANS 2:8

The Bible says that before the Fall, Adam and Eve were naked and without shame. I think those must have been the days of what some would call “outsight” or, as the Flamingos’ song goes, “I only have eyes for you.” Even though there were only two of them then, that must have been a beautiful time for humanity.

But then came the moment of “insight,” the moment they had to look inside and discover shame. That’s when a person tries to “cover up” and hide what was done and can’t be undone. In the case of our first parents, they “sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Genesis 3:7).

This story has always shown me that you can’t hide from God. But more than that, when I look at the cross and see forgiveness, I remember that “... the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

The Hebrew root word for *clothed* is the same for the word *grace*. We are clothed by the grace of Christ.

Lord, when I stand in the shadow of the cross, I stand forgiven in the love of Jesus. Amen.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY
TREE OF LIFE

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

GENESIS 2:9

Do you remember how, when God created the world, there were two trees of special significance in the Garden of Eden? One was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; the other was called the Tree of Life.

We all know what happened when Adam and Eve picked and ate fruit from the Tree of Knowledge: The world fell headlong into brokenness and sin. That's when they determined they wanted to be like God. What if they had looked that serpent in the eye and said, "God is God, and nothing's going to change that"?

Ever wonder what the world would be like if they had just left that tree alone? Do you think that one reason Jesus went to the cross was to bring us back to the Tree of Life? I wonder.

Dear God, when I look at the cross, I can't help but think that Jesus died for me there. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of the Tree of Life. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

BLESSED

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MATTHEW 5:3

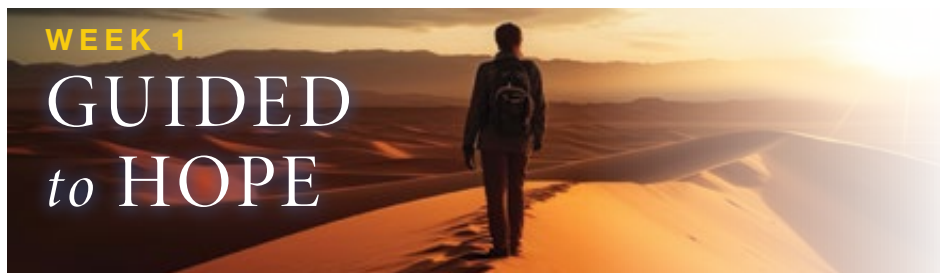
I saw these words on a church sign one day: “Hope is a five-letter word: J-E-S-U-S.” Those words remind us that hope is not just some abstract concept; hope is a concrete truth in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus comes to guide us to the cross where we see that “hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness,” as the hymn proclaims.

When Jesus drew people together that day on the mountain and began to speak what came to be called the Sermon on the Mount, he didn’t just move people with words; he moved them with a living, breathing spirit of hope.

“Blessed are poor in spirit ... Blessed are those who mourn ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...” (Matthew 5:3, 4, 6).

Now wherever we find ourselves in life, at the top of the world or in the dumps, we are blessed because Jesus is there.

Dear Lord, you know me all too well. You know me even when my heart cries out for hope in hard times. Thank you for giving me all that I need in Jesus. Amen.



MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT POURED OUT

... hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

ROMANS 5:5

I asked a young lady one time why she was willing to stand so long in line to purchase a lottery ticket. Her answer stunned me: "I buy these tickets because it gives me hope."

St. Paul points us to a more lasting source of hope. Hope for Paul comes from God's love that "has been *poured* into our hearts through the Holy Spirit *who has been given to us*" (emphasis mine). God doesn't just dribble love into our hearts; he *pours* it in.

Another thing: This is something God *has already done* through the Holy Spirit. And as we draw closer to the cross in faith, we give God the chance to fill us up even more as he speaks to us in and through his Word.

Dear God, your love has been poured into me through the blood of Jesus. Grant me your Spirit that your love may now flow through me to others. Amen.

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

BE-ATTITUDES

And [Jesus] opened his mouth and taught them, saying: “Blessed are the poor ...”

MATTHEW 5:2-3

Those words from Matthew’s Gospel signal the opening to the Sermon on the Mount. The first twelve verses of chapter 5 are often referred to as the Beatitudes. I looked that word up and found that it means: “supreme blessedness” or “supreme happiness.”

Some have taken the word *beatitude* and tweaked it a bit: they become *be-attitudes*. I like that. I like that because it helps describe the hope we have in Jesus. His first sermon on that mountain is an invitation to let every word of his, from that mountain moment on, guide us to the cross.

No matter what we may hunger and thirst for at any given moment, no matter what makes the heart ache or causes a person to fall into bed lost and feeling alone, Jesus speaks to all of it from the cross. That’s why God’s Spirit draws us there: to turn all hearts into lives of hope and joy. That’s when the Beatitudes become our be-attitudes.

Dear Father in heaven, fill me with your Spirit that I may truly think like Jesus. Amen.

The devotions in this booklet reveal that Lent is a season when we are guided to the cross. Throughout this holy season we are guided to the cross to live in forgiveness, hope, love, peace, trust, perseverance and grace. Each week reveals how Christ and his cross serve as examples for us of how to live our lives for and through our crucified Christ.



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