

A hand silhouette is shown in the center, reaching upwards. The background is a dark blue with out-of-focus bokeh lights in various shades of blue and purple. The text is overlaid on this background.

A 40 DAY DEVOTIONAL

Spiritual
STAYCATION

CREATING A SPIRITUAL ESCAPE
DURING THIS SEASON OF QUARANTINE

ENVISIONED & COMPILED BY
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Introduction & Day 1

A Spiritual Staycation

Rev. Zachary D. Mullens, Senior Pastor
Rebirth CME Church- Saint Louis, MO

Mark 6:31 “Jesus said, “Come off by yourselves; let’s take a break and get a little rest.” For there was constant coming and going. They didn’t even have time to eat.”

My wife & I both have very busy schedules. Between work, ministry, furthering our education and raising our children there isn’t much time for anything else. Often times when we’re able to score a babysitter we’d have something called “staycations”, where we create a 24-hour vacation right here in St. Louis. We might book a couple’s message, have a mini shopping spree or even book a nice downtown hotel for the night after dinner at our favorite restaurant. Whatever we decide to do, our goal is to create an escape from our reality with the hopes that these short moments might give us strength to endure the responsibilities of our lives.

Sometimes we are so busy being busy that we fail to take a time for rest, reflection and restoration. Jesus had wisdom in this area for we see him here in Mark 6 leading a pastoral care moment with some apostles. The text records that when they had come to Jesus to make their ministry reports, Jesus instead of sending them back out took them to the side, creating a place and a time of replenishing. Jesus doesn’t travel far but he simply creates a space. In other words, Jesus hosted a “staycation” for a few apostles who needed to “chill out” before continuing the work. Perhaps as you are home schooling, working remotely, housekeeping and fulfilling all the other in-home responsibilities you must juggle that God wants you to create space to communion with him.

It is in that vein that this Devotional book was compiled. To help give us short daily escapes from the current realities of this world. We know what’s going on; death, sickness, fear, worry and uncertainty but one thing remains true, **GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL & GOD’S WORD STILL HAS POWER!** So, for the next 40 days (you’ve got to stay at home anyway) take time to read and reflect on the life-changing word of God proclaimed by 40 preachers of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. May these moments of reflection serve as a “Spiritual Staycation” during this time of quarantine.

Prayer: Help us oh God to create space for you to replenish us! Amen.

Day 2

There's No Place Like Home

Rev. Leon F. Parker III, Senior Pastor
Saint Luke CME Church- Nashville, TN

Luke 15:17-18 ¹⁷ “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home, even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you...

As we have been quarantined these last several weeks, I've had an opportunity to binge-watch several classic movies, one being a 1978 personal favorite, *The Wiz* starring Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, Ted Ross, and Nipsy Russell. This film is a spin-off from the original *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* originally debuting in 1939. I can't share with you the whole movie, but the major lesson Dorothy learns from her journey through Oz is that THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

You may not have red sparkling shoes, you may not have a dog named Toto, but we all can all relate to Dorothy's experience. Just like her journey down that yellow brick road, our lives will have ups and downs, twists and turns, triumphs and failures, laughter and hardship, good times and bad, sickness and wellness, but thanks be to God that in light of all that we experience there is a God, to the prodigal son a father who is always waiting for you to come home. For those who have access to the house, we know that the Holy Spirit will always walk alongside us ready to remind us of how good it is to be in the home and safety of the almighty and to point us back in the direction of home when we've gone too far.

Prayer: God when we are feeling lost and hit rock bottom, remind us we can always come back because you give us an open invitation reminding us that There Is No Place Like Home. Amen.

Day 3

God's Shelter

Rev. Dr. Richard Shaw, Senior Pastor
Saint Matthew CME Church- Milwaukee, WI

Psalms 91:1 “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

We have been praying and hoping that things will begin to turn around concerning the COVID-19 Virus. Yet we continue to see the number of infected cases and deaths tolls rise. As a result of the pandemic, fellowships have been limited, quarantines are implemented, and in many situations ‘Shelter in place’ orders have been issued.

In Psalms 91 we hear the promise of God’s protection and care in the time of danger seen and unseen. The psalm is filled with metaphors describing God as one who protects us from the snare of the fowler, the pestilence that lurks in darkness, and He covers us with his feathers. It concludes with God’s promise to protect and care for God people out of God’s love.

In attempts to slow down the transmission of the COVID-19 Virus, “Stay at Home”, “Safer at Home”, and “Shelter At Home” orders are effective and reasonable ways to accomplish this. However, the psalmist declares in his or her praise that “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” (NIV) When we put our faith in God, we find peace in the shadow of God’s power. It is in God and God alone one finds total peace in-the-midst of trouble, It is my belief the peace does not come byway of the eternal, but through the internal and eternal. Your eternal attacks may never cease. Your enemies may never go away. Your haters may never stop hating, your sickness may never be cured. But peace takes place when the internal and external connect. It is when one’s faith (internal) trusts God (eternal), that all the noises on the outside are no longer distractions.

I paraphrase Asaph in Psalms 73, My feet slipped and I almost stumbled when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, but it wasn’t until I went into the presence of God that I understood. When we can faithfully internalize the power and love of the eternal and everlasting God we find peace that surpasses all understanding? We can stand on the promises of God. Psalm 91:8 “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.” NIV

Prayer: Gracious God, we petition your presence and power in the lives of your people. We thank you for your unconditional love and your gracious acts of power working in our lives. We ask that you cover those who are being impacted by the virus and other situations. We stand on your promises. Amen.

Day 4

It's Better Than It Looks

Rev. Renee T. Johnson, Senior Pastor

Murchison Tabernacle CME Church- Saint Louis, MO

2 Corinthians 5:7 "For we walk by faith and not by sight."

Many of us entered the near year full of expectation and excitement about 20/20 vision. We were going to see clearer than ever before in 2020. There was a spirit of hopefulness that this was the year that we would write the vision and make it plain. The plan was that the Lord was going to do a new thing in our homes, in our families and in our churches. A new year brings fresh ideas and new possibilities. We were off to a good start. To our surprise, the new year welcomed something we did not see. We didn't see COVID-19 coming. We didn't see unemployment, quarantines, social distancing, isolation, increased anxiety, restaurants and businesses closing, park restrictions, and church being closed until further notice. We didn't see the vast number of cancellations...weddings, flights, conferences, vacations, celebrations and graduations. We didn't see any of these things happening, but this is our present-day reality. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to believe in the resurrection. Death wasn't the end. Death did not have the victory. It was better than it looked.

My beloved in Christ, I share with you Paul's words, for there is hope in the resurrection. In this season of disappointment, despair, and death know that it is better than it looks in Christ Jesus. We walk by faith and not by sight. Good Friday was better than it looked. Just as Jesus was resurrected, so shall your life and livelihood be resurrected. Allow your spiritual acuity to inform you that God is working all things together for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. Trust God and rely on 20/20 vision to see God working out every detail in your life. Don't allow your natural sight to blur your spiritual vision. God will give you the victory.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to keep our eyes on you. You are the author and finisher of our faith. We know that you love us and regardless of what we are going through, it is better than it looks in Christ Jesus. For we walk by faith and not by sight. Amen

Day 5

Everything Will Be Alright

Rev. Dr. Lavonia Kess McIntyre, Professor
Interdenominational Theological Center

Isaiah 41:10 “do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”

We have never been in this place before. Some of us have faced the unknown, the uncertain before but this is not the same. It is not just me. Everywhere I look many people from many walks of life, all have the same thing in common, the fear of the unknown. The unknown is a situation that is unfamiliar or not understood. Life has presented us with the unknown, in the form of isolation, loneliness and perils of unmasked proportion. The question arises, “Where is God?” The answer comes through the voice of Isaiah with the assurance that comes from the Lord, “Do not fear; Do not be afraid.” Why? Because God is with us. “God will strengthen us and God will uphold us.” No matter what we are going through God will be with us. Even in the midst of the unknown, God is providing comfort.

Isaiah Templeton reinforces this assurance in the lyrics from this song, *Everything Will Be Alright*. “You are my refuge in trouble or in need. With you on my side I know everything will be alright. If not for you I never could have made it. In all my trials, you pulled me through. Though I've been down, I'm never forsaken. Everything will be alright.” Rest assured in knowing that with God everything will be alright.

Prayer: Sovereign God, help us not to fear nor be afraid during these unknown situations. Help us to have the assurance that God is with us, strengthen us and will help us. Amen.

Day 6

Honest Belief

Rev. Dr. Van Carl Williams, Senior Pastor
Cedar Crest Cathedral CME Church- Dallas, TX

Mark 9:24c “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

As Christians, we discover identity and encouragement in our beliefs. We recite the Apostles Creed—a statement of doctrinal beliefs. We call God Provider, Protector, Healer, Helper, Way-maker, and our Savior because of scriptural beliefs. We declare God to be “my friend” or “on my side” because of personal beliefs. Rarely, however, do we talk about our unbelief.

Hence the man in Mark 9:14-29 is unique. Although the man’s son is sick, and he needs a miracle from Jesus to make his son better, when Jesus asks, “do you believe,” the man answers “yes” and “no.” Jesus queried the man’s belief *or* unbelief. He confessed his belief *and* unbelief.

The language of the text suggests he is torn, and his actions bespeak his torn state. He has come to the place where Jesus was and waited for Jesus to descend the mountain where He had been praying—bespeaking belief. However, he has spent years seeking help for his son and the search has been futile. Even as he waits for Jesus to descend the mountain, he discovers Jesus’ disciples were good at debating the scribes but could do nothing to help his son—causing the man’s unbelief.

Many of us, in this man’s situation, would have only admitted our belief, thinking it to be the “right” answer. After all, we commonly believe that it is our faith that secures God’s favor. Jesus often told those coming to Him seeking healing “Your faith has made you whole.” However, the man in today’s scripture teaches us that honestly is as important as faith to secure God’s favor.

We need not be perfect practitioners of the Faith, or spiritual superheroes. The humility of honesty can suffice to secure help from the Holy One—not merely for others with obvious needs, but for ourselves. The man came seeking help for his son, he received help for his son and himself. By the end of the episode, it sounds like God had made a Believer out of him. If you are honest, God can do the same for you (and me) too!

Prayer: Dear God, Help my unbelief. Amen.

Day 7

Staying Calm in Turbulent Times

Rev. Matthew Freeman, Senior Pastor
Mount Nebo CME Church- Baldwin, MS

Psalm 124 “If the LORD had not been on our side—let Israel say—² if the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, ³ they would have swallowed us alive when their anger flared against us; ⁴ the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, ⁵ the raging waters would have swept us away. ⁶ Praise be to the LORD, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. ⁷ We have escaped like a bird from the fowler’s snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. ⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

For those of you who fly in airplanes often, perhaps you are used to turbulence. However, for those who do not usually fly, it can be startling when the plane runs into a pocket of rough air. Maybe you grab onto the armrests of your plane seat; perhaps you hold onto your drink instead of leaving it on the tray table. We go in expecting a smooth flight. We hope there will not be any severe turbulence, but sometimes a storm comes along. So, what do we do when turmoil happens?

Psalm 124 reminded the Israelites on their pilgrim journey; if the LORD had not been on our side, then the flood would have engulfed us. If the LORD had not been on our side, then the torrent would have swept over us. If the LORD had not been on our side, then the raging waters would have swept us away. You see, Psalm 124 reminds us that we still live in a world where floods come. It reminds us that there are still torrents. It reminds us that there are still raging waters. The word of God tells us our lives still exist in turbulence. But the word of God also reminds us that God is on your side. Jesus remains beside you. God’s love and grace never leave you.

Psalm 124 reminds us that life will sometimes still take a bite out of you, but those teeth will not tear you to pieces. Sometimes life trips you in a snare, but God will not leave you trapped forever. Turbulent times can shake us to our core, but when we remember God’s faithfulness, we find our fears calmed, and our confidence renewed.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank You for being true to Your word and Your character. Lord, give me grace so that anxiety and fear will not reside in my spirit. Lord, I trust You and believe that all things work together for Your Glory. I find refuge, rest, and calm in You. Amen

Day 8

Power of Peace

Rev. Denise Anders-Modest, Senior Pastor
Trinity CME Church- Memphis, TN

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

What is Peace?

Peace is harmony, serenity and tranquility all wrapped up in one. Too many people are living in utter hopelessness. NO PEACE. We are living in despair, depression, desperation and absolute bleakness. We are inundated with stories of violence, as we live continuously in fear. We have no peace in our homes, we have no peace in our hearts, we have no peace on our jobs, we have no peace with our children, and often we have no peace at our churches.

The ancient Jews had a word to describe better days: shalom or peace. It signified a coming day when all of creation would be restored and made whole. For the Jews, the hope of shalom was wrapped up in the coming of a Savior who would open the door to peace. Indeed, He is the Prince of Peace, who longs to come afresh into our lives working the miracle of His peace into our hearts.

As we solemnly reflect, pray, repent and seek peace during this Lenten season let us remember that God enters into our anxiety and tells us to share our concerns with Him because God cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Let us remember to go to God with our burdens, and God will give us rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Lastly, let us remember that God has provided us with perfect peace through a living hope (Philippians 4:6-7).

No matter the crisis, calamity or condition we find ourselves in, we can experience TODAY the power of peace by Christ, which he has made available for His people by the blood of His cross.

Prayer: Lord, we pray with hopeful anticipation for peace and justice. Amen

Day 9

Hoping Against Hope

Rev. Iris R. Hollister, Program Manager
Memphis Music Initiative

Romans 4:18 “Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.”

The social distancing brought about by the coronavirus pandemic has forced many to accept a new normal that weeks ago, might have been unimaginable. So much of what was once routine has now morphed into seemingly difficult ways of being: we’re suddenly homeschooling, or working from home, or even risking our own health as “essential” employees. This new normal has brought about its uncomfortable adjustments; and yet, imagine those who – during these unprecedented times – are also being forced to deal with unexpected trauma or tragedy evoked by the same circumstances. The Brooklyn Democracy Academy community, mourning the death of their leader, Dez-Ann Romain. The battered wife who can no longer depend on her work as an escape. The child whose coping with the sudden loss of his safe haven: his classrooms and loving teachers. Trauma and tragedy, and the hopelessness they conjure, are all around us, perhaps too, at unprecedented levels.

When I consider all of this, Romans 4:18 comes to mind. At first glance, to hope against hope may seem a bit senseless. How does one hope against hope? However, the Greek term translated as hope – elpis – has two fundamental meanings 1) the expectation of good or 2) the expectation of evil; fear. In other words, there’s the hope that expects the best and the hope that expects the worst. When facing unimaginable loss, it’s easy to give into despair: that hopeless hope, which expects the worst. Yet here, Paul is using Abraham’s story to illustrate how one’s determination to hope for the good already promised, even if not yet seen, is what it takes to not only contest any fear-filled expectation but to also manifest those very promises God has declared. The question is, which hope will we embrace in the midst of this pandemic? Will our hope be fueled by the fear and despair around us, or are we going to choose to hope in a fruitful future, yet to come?

Prayer: God, give us the strength to “hope against hope” even in the midst of uncertainty and tragedy; so that in expecting your goodness, we will see it once again unfold. Amen.

Day 10

Singing in a Strange Land

Bishop Teresa E. Jefferson-Snorton, Presiding Bishop
Fifth Episcopal District of the CME Church

Psalm 137: 1 -4 “¹ By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ² On the willows^[a] there we hung up our harps. ³ For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” ⁴ How could we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?”

The strange land of social distancing, isolation, shelter-in-place and quarantine has leapt upon us with short notice. While many of us understood the threat of the coronavirus, few of us envisioned how radically we would have to change our day-to-day habits in response to it. We have never been here before. This new and strange land demands much from us from a simple refraining from hugging and greeting with affection, to being locked out from visiting sick and shut in loved ones, to being unable to go to our normal jobs and work. How can we sing in such a strange land?

This was the dilemma of the Israelites who found themselves in exile in Babylon, far from their homes in Jerusalem. They lamented and their laments grew more intense when their captors asked them to sing, to go about life as if nothing were happening. Their faith, and displays of it through song, were regarded as entertainment and a mere tool of the establishment to reinforce its authority over them.

As we dwell in this strange land, where COVID-19 has become our captor, let us lament this destruction and devastation of human life and lives. But, let us also be aware that there will be those who ask us to pretend nothing is happening and attempt to use our faith to their benefits. However, let us not forget that there is still power in the Lord’s song. After raising the question, how can we sing, the Psalmist invokes memories of God’s everlasting presence.

Let us sing, not for show nor for the delight of others, but because we know the power of the songs of Zion. These songs remind us of the promise that God would never leave us nor forsake us. These songs remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. These songs remind us that the whole world is still in God’s hands.

Prayer: God of all time and space, bless us this day to not forget your songs. Enable us to sing from the depths of our hearts, no matter where we are, because we know you are with us, even in this strange land. Amen.

Day 11

Surely

Rev. Marvin Lue, Jr., Senior Pastor
Stewart Memorial CME Church- Mobile, AL

Psalm 23:6 “Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

One word summarizes 1 chapter that has stood the test of time. One word puts Affirmation at Attention and Confirmation on notice. One word places a shout in the Believer's spirit and strength in their hands. One word changes the dialogue from uncertainty to assurance. One word...SURELY!

SURELY, God is our Shepherd!

SURELY, God is our Provider!

SURELY, God is our Guide!

SURELY, God is our Protector!

SURELY, God is our Advocate!

So, it should come as no SURPRISE that since God is ALL THAT, there's no place I'd rather be or need to be! This is where JOY and PEACE greet you in the Driveway; FAVOR meets you at the Door; HOPE and HARMONY ushers you through the hallways, which leads you to whatever you stand in need of...because OUR GOD already knows what we need and is ready to bless us over and over again! SOMEBODY SHOUT "SURELY "!

Prayer: MAY OUR GOD, KEEP US FAITHFUL, CALM. & CONFIDENT. KEEP US GOD, BECAUSE WE ARE YOURS! AMEN!

Day 12

Faith for Dark Days

Rev. Courtney L. Adams, Senior Pastor

Israel Metropolitan CME Church- Greenville, SC

Habakkuk 3:17-18 “Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls, YET I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

During this unprecedented season of uncertainty, God has challenged us with a necessary faith test. During this season, the church must live out what it has preached and what it has taught. In this season of uncertainty as we deal with COVID-19, a pandemic that seemingly has no clear end in sight, more than ever, we must apply the principles of faith that we might be able to navigate these dark days ahead. If ever a time, the time for us to walk by faith is now! Without a doubt, during this season, our trust in what God has said must be more potent than our confidence in what we can see and prove (2 Cor 4:18 NRSV). Habakkuk amid a crisis of his own provides for us a glimpse of hope into how we might allow trust and joy to abide amid trouble.

Amid dark days God chooses to use Habakkuk, whose name means to embrace or to hold on, to show us what it looks like to have a positive disposition in the midst of unfavorable circumstances. Habakkuk shows us that the only way this will be accomplished is by making a conscious decision to take your attention off of the dark days and place your attention on the divine source of all that we need. Habakkuk reminds us through his declaration that even when the events surrounding our lives are not favorable, our attempt should always be to shift our focus, to walk by faith, and to rejoice always. By doing so, we will be able to see God's hand at work in ways that worry, and fear won't allow.

Prayer: Father in the name of Jesus the Christ, shift my perspective, build my faith for these dark days, to depend on You entirely for every need and not on the things of this world or my strength and abilities. Amen.

Day 13

Lessons We Learn from Moments of Crisis

Dr. Ericka Shawndricka Dunbar, Professor
Spelman College

Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 15:21-28

Physical/social distancing and sadly, anti-ethnic bias and violence is nothing new. So many of us have been reflecting on the circumstances we are living through, trying to make sense of it all. A consistent prayer has been for God to show us the way through this significant global crisis... to reveal to us how we can better care for Mother Earth and for each other.

Like so many others, I have turned to the Word for answers to the many questions that flood our hearts and minds each day. While thinking about all of life's uncertainties, I began reflecting on the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5). Much like many persons impacted (directly and indirectly) by COVID_19, this nameless and faceless woman was living through uncertainty. Her life was chaotic, she lost control of her bodily faculties, she lost finances, and the doctors didn't have an answer. She was living through times that many of us can relate to: feeling like we are losing control over our lives, suffering, wanting answers from doctors that can't provide them, just wanting to get close enough to the healer so we can be freed from suffering.

Then, I fondly remembered the Canaanite woman in Matthew's gospel. Another nameless woman only identified by her ethnic identity and status as a mother. In this story, however, there is a reference to physical/social distancing. After the woman, in desperate need of help, cries out to Jesus, his disciples suggest social distancing (v23). This is followed by Jesus' exchange with the woman which reflects ethnic bias (v24, 26) [I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; refers to woman/her people as "dogs"]. She then teaches Jesus that the Master's [God's] table is extended to all and her daughter is healed.

There are many lessons in these two stories that can help us in our moments of crisis. The woman that bled for 12 years could have become overwhelmed by the fear of not getting close enough to ask Jesus to heal her. She could have been overwhelmed by the fear that the crowd was too large for her to touch him, but she exercised her faith and said, "if I but touch the hem... I'll be made whole."

1. It's not until after she loses her power (control) that Jesus claims to lose power (healing). 2. Exercise faith over fear. 3. What you need isn't in the crowd or the gathering, but it is in the healer. 4. It is ok to lose control; it was never yours. When you feel that you've lost control, know that control belongs to God. 5. The way to "go in peace" and be free from our suffering (Jesus' response to the woman) is to lose control!!!

The second story teaches us that a spiritual and cultural shift is underway. 1. Social/physical distancing is often necessary to sustain the health of the whole community. 2. Ethnic bias/sentiments are to be transformed in this season of shift. 3. Just as the mother in the passage schooled Jesus, mothers are now at home schooling/teaching/leading their children and families. Mommas always take the lead in shifting culture! 4. Healing came only after everyone received access to the table.

Prayer: What is Mother Earth/Mother God teaching us in this season? What are/will be the reasons that we practice social/physical distancing before, during and after this crisis? What issues/people are we ignoring/marginalizing when we distance? Who are going to rise up and call us (individuals/community/nation) out on our stuff as we navigate these crises?

Day 14

Hope in the Darkness

Rev. Valencia Edner, Senior Pastor
Miles Chapel CME Church- Houston, TX

Psalm 27:13-14 ¹³ “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.
¹⁴ Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”

When life is filled with uncertainty, it is often difficult in the natural to maintain a firm unwavering grip on positivity...to see through a lens of spiritual optimism... and to hold fast to hope when so much is unstable. As we look, listen, institute new practices and do our best to be safe and keep our families safe, it is easy to get frustrated, and if we are truthful, fear rises in our minds and hearts. If we are not careful and intentional, concern will turn to worry, and worry will morph into paralyzing anxiety. Yet for those of us who proclaim a faith in Jesus, we must seek the holy place of refuge in troubled times... we must find light in the darkest of situations and hold on to our hope. The Psalmist in this text writes, I would have fainted, if I didn't believe that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! This is not a by and by, “great gettin up morning” eschatological hope...The Psalmist declares Hope as a constant in the present, despite the circumstances! We must remember that no matter how unsettling life presents itself, our hope is built on Jesus... the author and finisher of our faith! King David's expectation remained even as danger yet loomed! We must emulate this posture in times like these. Our faith walk requires a steadfast maintained hope... never forgetting that we walk by faith and not by sight. Come what may.... Hope reigns!

Prayer: Lord, as we face yet uncertain days and difficult circumstances, help us to never lose our hope! When darkness seems ominous and hangs over our lives, may we seek the light of hope in Christ Jesus. Help us to hold on to our faith, and to walk in it...come what may! In Jesus name Amen

Day 15

Are You Listening?

Rev. Dr. J C Thompson Sr., Senior Pastor
Oasis CME Church- Tuscaloosa, AL

Matthew 11:15 “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

You may be asking, how does God speak to me, and how should I hear him? Let me suggest some practical helps for hearing from the Lord and responding to his Word:

1. **Scripture reading.** The devotional practice of reading and absorbing the Scriptures, resulting in memorization; reading, reciting, and responding with the intention for the mind to remember and be renewed in spiritual growth (Psalm 19; Matthew 4:4; James 1:25).
2. **Meditation.** The practice of hearing God’s voice through Scripture, training the mind to apprehend, and the willingness to respond in obedience to the revelation given to the person through active memorization of the Word (Psalm 1:1-3; Joshua 1:8).
3. **Prayer.** The practice of coming before God, speaking, and having a conversation so that we, and others, may benefit from God’s divine provision and receive a measure of grace, in order that needs will be met and hearts awakened to God’s presence (2 Samuel 7:27; 1 Kings 8:29; Nehemiah 1:11; Ephesians 1:15-23).
4. **Journaling.** The practice of writing personal thoughts, remembrances, reflections, experiences, concerns, and meditative responses to God’s Word in the Spirit (Ps. 143:5).
5. **Fasting.** The practice of temporarily abstaining from certain appetites, such as food, entertainment, sexual intercourse, and medicines, for the purpose of sacrifice in order to concentrate fully on spiritual truths (2 Chronicles 20; 1 Samuel 7:6; Matthew 6:16).
6. **Sabbath Rest.** A period of resting from one’s labor or work as commanded in Scripture (Exodus 31:15) and using that time for worship, sleep, and reflection on God’s sovereign work in creation (Leviticus 23:32; Deuteronomy 5:14; John 7:23; Hebrews 4:3).
7. **Practicing his presence.** The practice of experiencing and recognizing God through his invisible presence and provision in all of life, and acknowledging his control over its every facet, as one endeavors to live and work on earth (Exodus 33:15-16; John 1:14; Romans 8:15-16; Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer: Father Help Us During These Difficult Times to Hear You Clearly. Open our ears that we may hear what you are saying to our hearts and minds. Unstop our ears spiritually that we may be able to hear You and You Alone. In Jesus Name Amen.

Day 16

Keep Walking, God is Here

Rev. Dale D. Dennis, II, Senior Pastor
Hoyt Memorial CME Church- Wilmington, DE

Psalms 23:4 “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.”

This has been, perhaps, one of the most difficult seasons you have ever faced. According to the NRSV we’re walking through the “darkest valley.” Our valley experiences force us to face several truths. First, valleys are inevitable. Saved or unsaved, we all have to deal with difficulties in life. With little rhyme or reason life just happens. However, we must be reminded that though valleys are an inevitable part of life they are not permanent. You will not be stuck here forever. If you but keep walking, you will soon discover that you are passing through. Keep walking, because this valley is temporary.

Finally, we should be encouraged that though we must endure valley experiences, the good news is we have an abundant resource present with us in the valley. God is here. Even when it would appear that hope has faded, and strength has perished - God is here. When it would seem that defeat is sure - God is here. I am reminded of the Davidic testimony, “...I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” Psalm 37:25.

Keep walking, my friend. You will soon find yourself on the other side of through with the strength of God’s presence guiding you every step of the way.

Prayer: Gracious God, grant us the strength to keep walking through. Remind us that though the valley may be dark, you are forever the Light of the World. Be with us, be for us. In Christ’s name, Amen!

Day 17

No More Business as Usual
Rev. Diana Casteel, Presiding Elder
Greenville-Texarkana District

Exodus 24:7 “Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.”

The world is in a crisis! We are in a world pandemic and many people are in a panic. Businesses are closing, schools are closing indefinitely, proms and graduations are being cancelled, professional sports have cancelled games indefinitely, the 2020 Olympics has been postponed until 2021, unemployment rates are at record breaking numbers, and places of worship are being forced to close to the public leaving pastors to find other means of reaching the parishioners with the Word of God. Many lives have been turned upside down by this world pandemic. Many families are trying to adjust to the new normal. COVID-19 has claimed the lives of so many in this world and many are still hospitalized or self-quarantined at their homes or other designated places. Yes, the world is in a crisis! We cannot continue with business as usual.

Before COVID-19 we were so busy that families met each other in passing. Many had forgotten or lost family values. Before the pandemic, we were so busy that we did not have time to stop and breathe. Many woke up in a hurry and laid down in a hurry! This pandemic has caught all of our attention. In fact, we are all in the same situation. It does not matter the color of your skin, how much money you have in the bank, if you are famous or not, we are all in this thing together. We are all confined to our homes unless we are working, going for food, medicine, or to the doctor. I clearly understand the cliché that God has a sense of humor! God knows how to get our attention and I believe God has the attention of most in this world. Now the question before us is what are we going to do? Are we going to continue with business as usual? I certainly hope not. We cannot go back to the old way of living or thinking.

In Exodus 24:7 NRSV we see that Moses takes the book of the covenant and reads it in the hearing of the children of Israel, and upon hearing the word of the Lord, through Moses, they all agreed that everything the Lord spoke they would do. They took it a step further by saying we will be obedient. My question today is: When the Lord brings us through COVID-19 what will your response be? We cannot go back to business as usual. God is calling us to do His will and to be obedient. In fact, He says in 2 Chronicles 7:14, “if my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” God is waiting on us to fully trust and obey Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, the world is in a panic, but we know you are a sovereign God who can do all things. So, I come crying out asking you to heal the land.

Day 18

Level Ground

Rev. Lavisha S. Williams

Senior Pastor, Saint James- Columbus, GA

Presiding Elder, McRae, Moultrie-Brunswick District

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

As we all sit in quarantine through and by necessary mandate, it has called me to consider the following: we are positioned now more than ever before to make a collaborative effort of concentrating more on our similarities than our differences. Having conversation with ourselves and others about the necessity of identifying the ‘imago dei’ in each of us.

As Paul takes pen to parchment, he records an impassioned yet compassionate letter to the believers of Galatia as an attempt to save Christianity from becoming something it wasn’t supposed to be. False teachers who infiltrated the church after Paul’s departure, taught Salvation was to be ‘mixed’ with faith in Jesus Christ PLUS the Law! A mixture of Confessing Christ and Circumcision – Jesus and Moses – Grace and the Law; but as believers, we know that it was in Jesus and Jesus alone which put us all on Level Ground. There were no distinctions!

As a country we have been guilty of making distinctions according to anything from Gender to Race to Sexual Orientation to religious beliefs – but look at us now! This invisible enemy which haunts the halls of our hospitals and has invaded every aspect of our lives, has put us all on Level Ground! If this virus has done nothing else for us, it has caused us to prayerfully consider similarities and not differences, to recognize that we are all made in the image of God!

We are all on Level Ground!

Prayer: Lord, it is of your mercies that we are not consumed because your compassions fail not. Your mercies are new every morning and great is your Faithfulness towards us. We pray today that your Faithfulness continues and your Mercies remain. In Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

Day 19

Forgiveness as a Place

Rev. Dr. Perrico Robinson Sr., Senior Pastor
St. Luke C.M.E. Church- Champaign, IL

Ephesians 4:32 "and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Forgiveness is not merely a concept but a place that all of us have the challenge of visiting at some point in our lives. Have you ever been in a situation that would permit you to be on the receiving end of forgiveness? If you have not, then chances are, you may find it difficult to forgive. Of course, most of us are aware of the picture of forgiveness but many of us have not experienced the power of being forgiven. Have you been touched by forgiveness? If so, do you understand the ramifications of the touch?

One reason it's difficult for some of us to forgive is because we have not allowed the touch of forgiveness to penetrate our hearts. When we thoroughly understand the forgiveness that God has extended to us and allow it to affect our lives, then we will be in a better position to forgive. Perhaps forgiveness should be a process, rather than an event. People are often forced to forgive immediately, but I believe that to be redundant. How can forgiveness be truly immediate if hurt takes time to process?

When we force and push people to forgive immediately, we devalue their pain, and we have no right to tell people that their pain is not important. As a matter of fact, forgiveness should happen in the heart before it takes place verbally. Truthfully, for some people, it's not a matter of whether they are willing to forgive, but a matter of processing what happened to them and why.

Let's keep in mind that forgiveness is a place called Calvary, as Jesus hang on a cross with our sin on His shoulders.

Prayer: Father God, soften our hearts to give and receive forgiveness. Grant us the strength to posture our lives after Christ Jesus, who forgave and forgives liberally and without reservation. We recognize our brokenness, pain and hurt, but we also acknowledge your power to restore our lives. May we open our hearts to enjoy your residential presence that we may feel the impact of forgiving and being forgiven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 20

Thinking and Thanking
Bishop Sylvester Williams Sr., Presiding Prelate
Third Episcopal District of the CME Church

Philippians 4:8 Finally, Beloved, ...if there is anything worthy of praise, Think about these things.

At the beginning of spring I had resolved to have my lawn mower serviced in preparation for the summer yard maintenance season. Although I had the lawn mower for years, shamefully I had never had the oil changed, nor had it tuned and lubricated. When I called a company regarding getting it serviced, I was told that because of the COVID-19 virus, they were completing work already in the shop, but they would call me in four to five weeks when they were able to service my mower. Furthermore, if I accepted their terms, I'd need to secure my place in line with a \$100 deposit. After thinking for a very short minute, and not being impressed by what I was hearing, I declined their service. Considering other options, I went online where I heard instructions and saw demonstrations that showed me how to service the exact mower I owned. I then call the company back, ordered the parts needed for \$87 and proceeded to service the mower myself. Not only was I proud of myself for accomplishing the task, but I'm convinced I saved quite a few dollars in the process. What I initially viewed as a problem turned out to be a blessing.

In life, we often find ourselves bombarded by issues that are bleak and sometimes causes us to despair. Over the past weeks, the COVID-19 virus has alarmed the nation. Consequently, schools are closed, jobs are diminishing, stocks are down, hospitals are full, supplies are in short supply, and we are quarantined at home. Though things may look bleak, let us be encouraged to look for the positives during this time. Rather than only focusing on rising numbers of affected persons, deaths, and associated issues, let us think about blessings and opportunities we have like spending quality time with God/family, catching up on chores and needed rest, etc. Can we see God's blessings during days of difficulties?

Prayer: Dear God, allow me to always be mindful of blessings and give you praise. Amen

Day 21

Shifting from The World's Worry to The Kingdom's Work

Rev. Ramon D. Stripling, Senior Pastor
Lewis Memorial CME Church- San Jose, CA

Matthew 6: 25-34 ²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[a]? ²⁸“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.’

While you spend time at home, have you thought about how God can use you to expand his kingdom amid this unique experience? Have you thought about how the gospel can be shared with the loved ones you are isolated with or the neighborhood volunteer God just keeps putting in your path? Have you been so focused on the panic that you've failed to see a place for God's kingdom to expand? These are uncertain times, but you serve a God who remains faithful. In today's passage Jesus encourages his listeners not to worry about their everyday necessities because the father was aware of their needs. Rest in the fact that the Father knows your name! He knows where you shelter in place even now. Instead of wading in our worry, Jesus challenges us to steep our lives in the initiatives of the Kingdom of which we remain ambassadors. You have been instructed to physically stay home. Is your witness sheltering in place too? Be committed to allowing God to breakthrough to the world through you in innovative, fresh ways. If not now, when? If not you, who? Declare today that worrying is not on your agenda but being a Kingdom worker has made its debut. Let God change the world through you.

Prayer: God, who supplies all of our needs, give us a faith that will not shrink, although often it may be pressed by many fears. I release my fears about what tomorrow may hold and make myself available for your work this day. Help me be sensitive to the people and spaces I encounter. Despite the paralysis of this pandemic, release your power through me. Amen.

Day 22

I Will Trust in The Lord!

Rev. Lesha Agnew, Senior Pastor
Chandlers Temple CME Church- Verona, MS

Genesis 22:7-8 ⁷”Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?” “Yes, my son?” Abraham replied. “The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.”

The story of Abraham taking his only son Isaac to the mountain is a story about Abraham’s obedience and God’s faithfulness. There were no miracles, signs, or wonders performed that caused Abraham to see anything other than what he saw as a result of what he had been charged to do. Nevertheless, Abraham in obedience to God, takes his only son with wood and rope to carry out the task that God had given him. I am sure that Abraham, like most of us would be, was filled with many emotions, but yet he did not hesitate in carrying out the task given to him. So I ask the question, what would make a man or woman, take their son in the mountains and prepare to kill them?

Well, my brothers and my sisters, what seemed like a doom and gloom situation becomes one of the most intriguing stories of God and humankind. Abraham did not ask God any questions. Abraham did not try to reason with God. But instead, Abraham simply trusted in the God who had been with him since the time he left his home and his relatives. Abraham knew that the same God who had brought him this far surely was not going to leave him now. Because of God’s track record Abraham knew that the Lord would provide and that the Lord would make a way. In these perilous times in our world, you and I should hold on to what we know about the God that we serve. We know that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us. We know that God is a very present help in the time of trouble. We serve a God who is still able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think according to the power that is at work within us. Let us go forth then in this uncharted territory and our new normal trusting in the Lord.

Prayer: God in these times of anxiety, confusion, uneasiness, and unrest, we ask that you give us peace. God, we thank you for the victories that you have won. And Lord, we know without a doubt that this too shall pass. Amen.

Day 23

An Answered Cry

Rev. Dr. Faith A. Allen, Senior Pastor
Jamison Memorial Temple CME Church- Kansas City, MO

Mark 15:33-34 “at noon the sky became extremely dark. The darkness lasted three hours. At three o’clock. Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” Which means, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

The coronavirus, COVID-19, is pandemic and is increasing anxiety across the nation. Fear and uncertainty about the future is taking a toll on us all.

Stay at home orders are being put into effect in an attempt to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. The order requires residents to stay at home for up to 30 days, leaving only for essential activities, such as obtaining groceries and medicine.

Social distancing and stay at home orders are causing persons to feel abandoned and even though we have our social media, without the ability of touching, and being able to fellowship and see family one can still feel alone and as if we are in this all by ourselves.

On the cross Jesus after hanging there for hours, feeling separated from God, we hear him groaning out of the depths crying out to God, asking Him “why have you abandoned me?” It is an appeal for divine help. But even in the separated state from God, we know, Jesus’ cry is answered, because he knows God is still with Him.

Likewise, even in our separated state, from family, friends, community and church family we seemingly have a lack of intimacy with our Father. But in the midst of our feelings of abandonment, our cries are being answered. As we cry out to God, to heal our land we know He is true to His promise to never leave us nor forsake us.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, hear our cry. Please help us to draw nearer to you in these times of uncertainty and fear. We trust in you and know you will answer. Amen

Day 24

Reconnecting with God

Rev. Antoine Shyne, Senior Pastor
St. Peter CME Church- Kansas City, KS

Joel 12:2” Even now, declares the Lord return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning”.

In ancient Israel, Joel looked around and saw a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. Locusts were covering the land like blackness spread upon the mountains. These devouring insects were like a great and powerful army and Joel predicted that something like this had never been seen before. In ancient Israel, the Day of the Lord was preceded by locusts, but the specific nature of the plague was not what mattered. The national disaster could have been caused by frogs, gnats, flies, boils or hail whatever would get the attention of the people. Today, we might be hit hard by a flood, a drought, a power outage, a coronavirus and an economic crash. What mattered to Joel was that the people respond with repentance and prayer.

I believe the very same is true today. The power of the Day of the Lord is that it grabs our attention and offers us the possibility of transformation. As we continue in the season of Lent, let's shift our focus from the outside to the inside and focus on what really matters in the sight of God .We can do this by following the guidance of Joel, who predicts that our lives will be transformed when we make the choice to repent, fast and pray.

Prayer: Father God we first pause to give You the honor, glory and praise that You rightly deserve. Next, we humbly ask that You would forgive us of all sins that have been committed that have violated Your law. Finally, we pray for restoration and a right relationship with you. Amen.

Day 25

The Stakes are High

Rev. James L. Dunbar

Senior Pastor, Greater Cleaves CME Church- Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Presiding Elder, Oklahoma City District

Mark 8:34-38 ³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ³⁸If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

Blaise Pascal, a well-celebrated mathematician and theologian, had a concept that many people say is problematic, but I actually like the principle of his thought. A brilliant man during his day; before he reached the age of 20, he invented the first digital calculator. He was very instrumental in the development of many math equations and solutions that are widely used today. He dedicated himself to a life of philosophy, math, and theology. The story goes that he engaged in dialogue using the idea of gambling. I am not sure if he had a past with gambling himself; but he challenged his audience to look at gambling with a spiritual outlook.

He proposed if you bet that there is no God and you live life recklessly without any spiritual reflection and, upon dying you discover there is a God, then great is your loss; but on the other hand, if you take a risk on believing that there is a God and live a life worthy of heaven’s reward and, upon that great day when the heavens reveal God’s glory, you realize it is real, then great is your reward.

Pascal says you should live life so that if you are going to bet on anything, place your bet on God. If you are going to ‘gamble’, make your wage by living a life that is pleasing unto the Lord. You will live (again) after this life, but the real question is “where will you live”.

If you believe there is a God and you find out that there is no God, you won’t lose much at all because you still lived a good life, but if you are gambling on this side of secularism – chasing after material things, trying to hang on to ungodly relationships, engaging yourself in ungodly activities – and trying to wash it all down with a glass of Sunday morning worship, you must know that you are in danger of losing everything.

Martin Luther said these words: “I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess”.

What profit will you have in gaining all the possessions and ways of this world if you have to lift your eyes up in hell? The stakes are high and the time for placing your ‘bet’ is drawing near.

Prayer: God, help me to place my full confidence and trust in You. Holy Spirit, in the midst of all the things this world dangles before my eyes, help me to keep my focus on Kingdom things. Produce within me Your power to ‘seek first the Kingdom of God’ so that I might receive the blessings that come from placing my wager on Jesus. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen.

Day 26

Pain Has a Ministry

Rev. Dr. Essie D. Clark-George, Retired
Michigan-Indiana Region of the Third Episcopal District

Isaiah 54:17 “No weapon formed against you is going to flourish.”

Remember, no weapon formed against you is going to flourish. That doesn't mean that there will not be opposition in your life, but even your opponents cannot ultimately hurt you. Your future is vital to God. You must look for strength even in painful situations.

Doctor Howard Thurman had this to say about pain in his book entitled Meditations of The Heart, (1953, pg. 65) “Pain has a Ministry.” “But what about pain, what about the hardships, the things that make for misery? It is perhaps a daring notion to say that pain has a ministry which adds to the sum total of life's meaning and, more importantly, to its fulfillment.”

And yet, through all the ages of humankind, this idea has kept pace with the growth of the mind. There is a ministry of pain. Dr. Thurman suggests indirectly that its ministry is the making of the souls of all humankind. But in this idea lies a very certain danger: namely, that specific pain is sent into the life to perform a ministry in the life of persons who aren't rich, marginalized or socially excluded for any purpose.

This idea is a current among those who say in the presence of tragedy, we bow humbly before the will of God's grace and mercy.

Prayer: Lord you are our support at all times. Help us to remember that pain and discomfort will come into our lives, but You will guide us through painful situations that will not flourish upon us. Amen.

Day 27

The Power of Soft Words

Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Havis

Senior Pastor, Saint Matthew CME Church- Wichita, KS

Presiding Elder, Missouri District

Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

At the end of conversations or quick exchanges, others seemed put off. I did not know why. It was never my intention to offend others bringing distance between us. Harsh words from early childhood was my norm that carried forward into adult conversations.

A caring friend helped me recognize the harshness of my words. I was in denial at first. I asked God to shape my respectful intentions and words into meekness, like Jesus. I wanted others to see the Jesus in me. My words and intentions became synchronized. Others enjoyed conversations and even sought me out. However, I still sometimes slip, causing me to revisit my original prayer. While I make my words count and I get my point across, it is done more gently.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to lead and speak with gentleness as I am confronted with harsh situations.

Day 28

What shall we say to these things?

Rev. Reginald D. Walton, Senior Pastor
Phillips Memorial CME Church- Phoenix, AZ

Romans 8:28 “ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[a] have been called according to his purpose.”

What shall we say to the things we have seen over the last few weeks? What do we say in the face of a virus which has swept around the world, causing panic and death? What do we say when churches are not meeting in person and restaurants are closing? What do we say when even the government doesn't know what to do to deal with this disease?

I have three things to say about it.

1. Some things we don't have words for! Some things we can't describe. We may be going through but in the midst of it, we have a blessed assurance!
2. God is for us! This is the reminder we need in times of trouble! God is for us! It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done! If we are believers, then God is for us! We are reminded in scripture that God will never leave us or forsake us! God is for us and God is with us!
3. Nothing can be against us! It doesn't matter what is going on! We have the peace in knowing that the bible says no weapon formed against us shall prosper! We may even see the weapon, but we don't have to worry! Nothing can win against God's children!

Prayer: Eternal and gracious God, in the midst of our circumstances remind us of what we can say to these things! Remind us that we are your children and you have everything in control. Give us peace, power and prosperity in Jesus Name we pray. Amen.

Day 29

We're Not in This Alone!

Rev. Kalif Crutcher, Senior Pastor
New Hope CME Church- Evanston, IL

Isaiah 43:1-2 “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

Breathe. Take a moment and breathe. We have found ourselves in an unprecedented time and moment in life. Shelves have been cleared. Malls are closed. The church house has been locked down for some time. If we're not too careful we can find ourselves drowning in the seas of sadness as the world we know seemingly falls apart. As Christian believers, we can experience the emotions that accompany our current circumstances, but we have a faith that provides for us a hope for a better tomorrow.

The prophet Isaiah can relate to our situation. He and the Israelites are in exile roaming through the lands of Babylon. They are waiting for a better tomorrow. These individuals have been exiled from their land and look to return to a sense of normalcy and stability. I can imagine the Israelites feeling depressed, frustrated, and maybe even sad. Nevertheless, the prophet shows up and declares the message from the Lord.

The prophet's message is one of protection and restoration. The first verse is a reminder to the people that they have been created by Godself. As believers we are reminded that God has formed us. God has shaped us. And we are made in the *Imago Dei*, or image of God.

I submit to us that if we have been formed by God, then Godself will protect and care for us. It is this divine protection that carries us through our sadness, depression, anxiety, and even the uncertainties of life. We have been called by God, and we belong to the Triune God.

The beauty of belonging to God, is the blessed assurance in knowing that even during difficulties, God is with us. Friends, when we pass through the waters of uncharted territory, the same God that brought the Israelites through the dangers of the Red Sea, will be the same God that brings us through this global pandemic. When the rivers of life appear to be overwhelming, rest assured that God will provide a peace that surpasses all understanding. And when the fires of life seem to be inextinguishable, remember that we shall not be consumed.

God is with us. We are not in this alone. It will be well. Breathe. Just breathe.

Prayer: Most gracious and eternal God, we ask that you surround us with your divine protection and restoration. As we journey through these uncertain times, we ask that you allow us to not be overwhelmed by our circumstances. Stand with us God, allow us to remember that you never leave us nor forsake us. And that we are not in this alone. Amen.

Day 30

An Unshakeable Faith for Uncertain Times
Bishop Thomas L. Brown, Sr., Presiding Prelate
Sixth Episcopal District of the CME Church

Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

The Coronavirus is a mysterious force that is creating a tsunami like crisis around the world. While this virus is a mystery, it is not a myth. Our reactions to this virus vary involving anxiety, panic and fear. Furthermore, it is ironic that in this season of Lent, when we are called to a period of spiritual self-quarantining, that all across this world citizens are engaging in periods of mandated self-quarantining in hope of mitigating the rampant spread of this virus. Times like these demand that we are anchored in an unshakeable faith.

Facing his/her own crises, the writer of Psalm 46 makes the bold declaration that God can anchor us with an unshakeable faith. In the throes of double jeopardy situations, the psalmist exclaims - **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”** (v. 1). Given the testimony of this psalmist, coupled with the plethora of witnesses across the ages, we can face this virus with an unshakeable faith in God because: 1) **God is yet “faithful” to God’s creation**, 2) **God is ever-present (“The Lord of hosts is with us”)**, and 3) **God is able to bring us through because God is sovereign (enough) to be our present help** even when all around us nations are tottering, economies are reeling, medical care is critically strained, people are contracting the virus and too many are unfortunately dying from it. Despite all of this, God has given us lasting victory in our Savior, Jesus the Christ, whose blood covers us even with this pandemic.

Prayer: O God, COVID-19 has all of us deeply concerned and cautious for our welfare. We pray for all who are victims of this virus, the pain and strain being experienced by families, and the struggle for survival of many households and businesses. Given all we are faced with, we declare that in times like these we can anchor ourselves in you - “our refuge and strength”, an ever-present help. Amen.

Day 31

BE STILL

Rev. Patricia Degrafenreid, Senior Pastor
Mount Pisgah CME Church- Baltimore, MD

Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.” The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress”.

As children in my grandmother’s house we were not allowed to play or carry on as usual during a thunderstorm. In fact, whatever we were doing at the time we were to stop and hit the pause button. Why? Because it was out of respect and reverence for God. Because when it thundered and the lightning lit up the sky that was believed to be the sound of God moving, God working and God speaking to all of creation.

COVID-19 is unlike any storm we have ever experienced in our lifetimes. While I do not believe that COVID-19 was sent by God, I do believe that there is evidence to support that in the midst of it God is moving across the earth, that God’s hand is at work and that God’s voice is present. During this Lenten season this storm has forced us to hit pause, withdraw from community by taking shelter within our homes, to stop what we were doing, to sit down and to quietly wait it out. COVID19 has forced us to adopt and adapt to new patterns of living, working, studying and carrying on with the busyness of life. It has transformed our prayers and introduced us to worshipping differently, virtually. Reaching out and touching in the absence of human contact. It challenges us on every front and has revealed that during our storms we need to be quiet and still out of respect and reverence for God. The psalmist in Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”. We have been challenged to look beyond our present circumstances, the storm that is in our midst and acknowledge the overwhelming evidence that God is moving, that God is working, and that God is speaking. Acknowledge that God is still in control and God is still worthy to be praised.

Prayer: Lord help us to remember that you, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will always be our fortress and our shelter in times of storm. Amen

Day 32

Sheltering in Place

Rev. Dr. Alandra Washington, First Lady
Dozier Memorial CME Church- Flint, MI
Detroit & Mid-Michigan Districts

Psalm 91:1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

We are in a Global Shut In. God has hit the pause button on the world. Millions of people, men, women, boys, and girls across the world are sheltering in place. To go into our homes and stay there until the pandemic curve is flattened. However, sheltering in place is more than just shutting up in homes until someone tells you it is safe to come out. If you think this is what it is all about, you are going to miss the prophetic purpose God has for your life, even in such a time as this.

The concept of sheltering is a spiritual one. We realize that God has always been calling us to shelter in place, in His secret place. As a matter of fact, God is the dwelling place. Psalms 91 shows us that God has already provided us a divine plan for sheltering in place. In this time of trouble, in this time of distress, in this time of pandemonium our homes are not the ultimate dwelling place, but our ultimate place of rest, safety and security is in God.

Beloved, God has created a dwelling place for His children under his wing of love, comfort and care. The I am who they say I am, the Alpha and Omega, The All Powerful, All Knowing and All Wise God. The one who is the same on yesterday, today and tomorrow. He is the God who supplies all of our needs, the God who fights every one of our battles, the God who strengthens us when we are weak, The God who protects us in our time of trouble; the God who sustains us in every circumstance.

If we want to truly understand what it means to shelter in place, we must turn our hearts to God; He welcomes us into His secret dwelling place.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to create shelter within your secret place. Amen.

Day 33

Confidence in the Creator

Rev. David Isom, Senior Pastor
St. Stephen CME Church- Fairfield, California

Psalm 46:11 “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge”.

Unless one is on a remote island, disconnected from the world, from civilization, or from the many forms of social media we have, you know that we are experiencing a very difficult and challenging time. The fact that you are reading this devotion is clear evidence of what we are facing.

But God, the Creator of this world, sovereign and all powerful, God is our refuge and strength and is ever present with us. No matter what’s going on around us, we have this steadfast sense of security.

We are people of faith and must operate as such. We must now, more than ever before trust that God is our refuge and strength.

You may be wondering how you’re going to make ends meet, how the Church will continue to operate, if you will have a job when this is all over. Wondering if the leadership of our nation will step out the way of scientists.

Just remember, we have the ever-present God Who will be an abundant help in trouble. Many of you can testify to this from your own experience. The Lord has brought you through some difficult times.

As the Church, we believe that God is with us and will provide all we need. Even though the doors to the church buildings are locked, the doors to the church will always be open.

Just remember the gospel writers record of Jesus’ words concerning the Church; “...upon this rock I will build my church; and the **gates of hell shall not prevail against it**”. **Matthew 14b,c – KJV**)

The term, shall not prevail is a declarative phrase, announcing something, which cannot be reversed. In other words, there isn’t any way the Church can lose. Now Christ didn’t say that we wouldn’t suffer any set-backs, set-ups, or knock downs, but He said that when the fight was over, after the last bell had been sounded, it is Christ and His church who will be raising our hands in triumph while we sing-

“All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name...”

Prayer: God of grace and glory, help us to remember that You are always with us. You promised that You would never leave us, nor forsake us. At this time of unprecedented uncertainty, allow your peace, which surpasses all understanding to guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen

Day 34

“It’s Working in Your Favor”

Rev. Dr. Phillip D. Washington

Senior Pastor, Dozier Memorial- Flint, MI

Presiding Elder, Detroit & Mid-Michigan Districts

Romans 8:28 “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

The enemy thought he outsmarted God.

The enemy in past years has done all that he could to keep us apart, to separate us.

Divide and conqueror has always been the plan of the enemy.

During the time of slavery, they separated families and tribes to weaken them.

In order to keep them from getting together to stop them from overthrowing the system of slavery.

Satan, the enemy’s plan is to get you alone, to isolate you in order to deceive you concerning God’s plan for your life, because he knows that God’s plan is to prosper you.

It is important to remember that no matter how hard the enemy tries to deceive you; the word reveals that no weapon formed against us shall prosper. Therefore, we must stand on the word of God, when it tells us, “All things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

Isolation is not a time of defeat, but it is a time of empowerment.

They crucified Jesus and placed him in a borrowed tomb. The enemy thought that by isolating Jesus that he would be able to conquer Jesus. The enemy thought that by isolating Jesus, Jesus would lose contact with His father, that the Holy spirit would not be able to reach Jesus, that Jesus would lose his divinity, He thought that death and the grave could hold him down.

But on the third day, Jesus arose with all power.

So, get ready, pray, stand on the promises of God, and become one with Christ.

When you emerge out of this, you will be stronger and endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit. When you emerge out of this you will be prepared for the journey ahead.

God is preparing you for a great VICTORY!!!!

Prayer: God let us receive VICTORY, in Jesus Name! Amen.

Day 35

Stop, Redirect Your Mind and Slowly Begin Again!

Rev. Dr. Karen Walker-McClure

Senior Pastor, Murchison-Isom & Jubilee Temple CME Churches- Chicago, IL

Presiding Elder, Chicago District

Isaiah 26:3 “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”
(NKJV)

A couple of years ago, my husband had hip replacement surgery. When he was released from the hospital he received physical therapy in our home. After working with the therapist for a couple of weeks, I noticed that sometimes without the aid of his walker or cane, he walked normally; other times he would limp. After watching him go back and forth, I mentioned it to his physical therapist. The therapist gave us a very interesting explanation. He asked my husband, “Are you still in pain?” My husband replied, “No, very little.” The therapist asked, “How long did you suffer with the pain in your hip before you had the surgery?” My husband responded, “Several years.” The therapist explained, “Well, what is happening is your mind has to catch up with your healing. Your body knows you are no longer in pain, but your mind thinks you are still hurting. Your mind has to realize that you don’t have to limp anymore to compensate for the pain. When it happens: stop, redirect your mind, and slowly begin again.” Doing this enabled my husband to change his way of thinking so his mind could catch up with his healing.

While we are currently experiencing major catastrophes, it is very easy for us to be stressed. People all over the world are ill. Businesses are closing. Large numbers of people are losing their jobs. We are mandated by the government to remain inside our homes. Some will lament, “We can’t even go to church.” We have never seen anything like this before! As difficult as life may seem, the only way we can stay encouraged is to “redirect our minds” and try to keep our minds stayed on God. The saints in Isaiah Chapter 6, sang these words, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” When we become depressed by focusing on all that is going on around us, remember the instructions of my husband’s physical therapist: “Stop, redirect your mind, and slowly begin again!”

Prayer: Dear God, please help us to refocus so you can keep us in perfect peace. We know that we can become bogged down with the cares of this world and so easily forget about all that you have done for us. Lord, we know that everything belongs to you, the creator of the universe, and that you are still in control. In the name of Jesus, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Day 36

Walking in Victory

Rev. Dr Curlee L. Adams

Senior Pastor, Saint Paul CME Church- Chicago, IL

Presiding Elder, Gary District

1 Peter 5:6-11 “6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

I remember many years ago watching an interview of Mike Tyson several years after he retired. The sports reporter asked Mike Tyson what was the secret to his invincibility during the early part of his career. Mike Tyson politely responded that for many years people saw him as some out of control, easily provoked wild man, who would fight at the drop of a hat. According to Mike Tyson, this was all an act on his part to psych out his opponent. He knew that if he could intimidate them before entering the ring, he could intimidate in the ring. Once he got them outside, he knew he would have no problem inside the ring.

From his perspective, he always tried to talk, walk, think and live in victory. He used the tactics of the street to intimidate his opponents and for many years it worked. Now, some of you will probably say that his tactics ended when he fought Buster Douglass and Evander Holyfield. However, I would argue that Mike’s tactics stop working when he stops doing what was necessary to make him so intimidating. Mike forgot to train properly. As a result of his failure to train properly, live correctly and surround himself with the right people, he ultimately set himself up for failure. Mike Tyson gives us a wonderful illustration on the pros and cons of walking in victory.

In our chosen text, Peter shares with us the importance of living in a way that helps us walk in victory when we find ourselves in situations and attacks that have the potential of destroying our way of life. The duties of a Christian Believer is to always walk in victory whether the battle is just beginning or being fought. Victory is not just in the battles you face, but also how you prepare and live before the battles even take place. Sometimes, just by the way you live, you overcome issues before they crop up in your life. Walking in victory is understanding that the battle is not yours it’s the Lord’s. All I need to know is that I am a child of the most high God and I live for Him every day and the victory is in His Hands. To God be the Glory!!!

Prayer: It is my prayer to God for you that the Lord bless you and keep you; That the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; That the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace, both now and forever more.

Day 37

Approved

Reginald G. Barnes, Sr., Senior Pastor
Brown Memorial CME Church- Louisville, KY

2 Timothy 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by God, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.”

Paul wrote these words to Timothy during a time when false teachers and false doctrines were at their zenith. It was Paul’s ultimate desire that Timothy would remain attentive, industrious, and dedicated in his study of God’s Word, to make sure that his teachings were not in error and that he gave a proper word to those listening. By doing so, Timothy would stand approved by God. Much like then, today, we have those who distort, mishandle and do not rightly explain the “*Word of truth*,” at all.

The challenge today is that we must make sure that we too, much like the way Paul encourages Timothy, are seeking honorable achievement in our endeavors to rightly understand the Word of God as we provide spiritual nurture to God’s people. Today a spiritual battle is taking place, particularly as we practice social distancing. People are home and many are turning to social media for guidance. Oftentimes they are getting false doctrines. If we are slack in desiring to know what God’s Word is saying, we run the risk of leading and being led astray. To win the battle it will take us knowing the *Word of truth* and in doing so we can be approved by God. We will not need to be ashamed.

Prayer: Lord, I lift up those who seek to teach your Word and know your Word in our church and community. May everyone who holds the position of pastor, Sunday school teacher, vacation bible school teachers, small group leader, and even as member of the church—rightly divide Your word of truth. Let them admonish and teach with wisdom. Reveal the mysteries of Your Word to them and encourage them to speak those mysteries courageously and fearlessly. Let them teach with a spirit of faith that springs from their relationship with You and in doing so, be approved by Thee. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Day 38

What's Going On?

Rev. WJG McLin, Retired

Southeast-Missouri, Illinois & Wisconsin Region

Psalm 37: 1-2 “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.”

We are in an extraordinary moment in history. If the biblical record is properly translated and interpreted, we KNOW that our God will guide and direct our understanding through the Holy Spirit. There are two primary focuses of our devotion for today. First of all there exists a heretofore unknown “PANDEMIC”, which has so far sickened a growing number of infected persons throughout the United States and other Nations. At the time of the unexpected and previously unexperienced event, there have been at least two responses: A) A myopic and misguided President of the United States who simply INSISTED that everyone “Get Back to Work!” (This is expected to improve his political record) B) and most important is the physical and illegitimate opportunity “To Get Back to Work.”

Unfortunately, this problem cannot be solved by President Edict. People who are out of work are NOT experiencing this by choice. It has become obvious that MAJOR medical expertise must be activated AND leadership must follow the medical advice.

As urgent as medical intervention is required, This Crisis requires DIVINE INTERVENTION!!

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life No one comes unto the father, but by me. So therefore, our obligation is to shorten the night of weeping and hasten the joy of the morning.

Prayer: Heavenly father we petition your divine intervention in the midst of our current condition. Father we ask you to set in order the nation and provide healing and restoration in the name of Jesus.

Day 39

Express how You Feel
Rev. Omar Dykes, Senior Pastor
Greenwood CME Church- Memphis, TN

Matthew 27:46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli lemasabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

The world that we live in is experiencing a pandemic, a virus COVID – 19, that has caught us by surprise. The rising number of people testing positive and having to self-quarantine, while others practice social distancing. The world has become a place having to find other ways of being in communion with one another. Along with the different ways of interaction with each other's feelings of anxiety, and fear; we question God’s involvement and await God's response.

During the month of April, we will celebrate the Passion Week of Jesus. That week we will gather in different ways to celebrate his life, death, burial, and resurrection. We celebrate God’s work through Jesus, while at the same time our nation is shut down. The question of where is God in all of this still will linger in the back of our minds. Good Friday, the Friday during Passion Week we will reflect how Jesus nailed to the cross, expressed himself by sharing his feelings of God forsaking him. For in Matthew’s gospel Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us in human form, yet he feels forsaken. We do not hear God’s answer, but Jesus does express how he feels. The words that he uses to express his feelings are the lyrics from Psalm 22:1. Not only does Jesus express how he feels but uses words from the Hebrew songbook.

During this time, I encourage you to express to God how you feel. God is present and able to receive and handle our feelings during this season. Even if it feels that God has forsaken us, God wants to know how we feel.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for listening and caring for our feelings. Please continue to watch over our world and heal the land. To you God be glory. Amen

Day 40

After These Things

Bishop Marvin F. Thomas Sr., Presiding Prelate
Second Episcopal District of the CME Church

Genesis 15:1 “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” (NRSV)

There is much happening in our world today, which causes us to wonder how are we to make sense of these things? Unless one is on another planet, the list of these things begins with the Coronavirus or its other name, COVID-19. This virus has drastically disrupted life as we have come to know it. As a result of it and its social distancing directives, academic communities, restaurants, entertainment venues, and non-essential businesses have been forced to reinvent themselves or simply close their doors. News outlets report more than 560,000 confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 25,000 deaths worldwide. In addition, religious communities are dealing with the effects of it on the way they do ministry. These and other effects of the virus lead us to wonder what to make of these things. In addition to these matters, we are still having to deal with the rise in evil - actions, and deeds of hate groups being done to others because of their religion, race, and gender identity. How do we keep hope alive in the mornings afterwards?

Genesis 15:1 offers us hope and encouragement: “After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Don’t be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward is great.’” After these things, you fill in the blank, we have the charge and command not to be afraid for God is our shield. In the interest of time, let me mention for Abram, these things were the things he did in rescuing neighbors (see Genesis chapter 14), After these things, God visits Abram. God comes to tell him he has better things in store for him. After these things, the future was brighter for Abram than before. Don’t be discouraged by the difficulties and challenges of these things, for after them and beyond them, lies a better day and a brighter future. After these things, a Coronavirus pandemic and all that comes with it, after these things, weak and out of touch leadership after these things, dwindling resources, after these things, job losses, after things, God makes an appearance to remind us that our better is yet to be. After these things, God shows up in local and state leadership putting the interests of people over dollars and cents. After these things, churches and religious communities have found new and powerful ways to lift every voice and sign.

My friends, I realize I don’t really have to remind us of the fact that it was an after these things that salvation through Jesus became a reality. After these things, the manager, being falsely accused, denied three times by one of his closest associates, deserted by the other members of his team, crucified on a cross, and laid in a borrowed tomb, it was after these things that he got up so we can get up. It was after these things that we can face the after these things in our lives as individuals and as a people with hope, love, power, and determination. After these things, we can still face the future with confidence. After these things, we are still in the business of being. After these things, we keep pressing on. After these things, all is well and that which is not well is on the way to being well because of who is our God. “God is refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.” God is our keeper, and shield. Whatever, these things maybe, just know, there is still hope.

Prayer: Gracious God, we give you thanks and praise for being our very present help in the midst of these things, which we are facing. Grant us your grace to move beyond these things, with the assurance of your power, presence, love, and strength. Amen.