

Prayerful Reflections for Lent 2026



Week 1

Prayerful Reflections for Lent 2026: Week 1

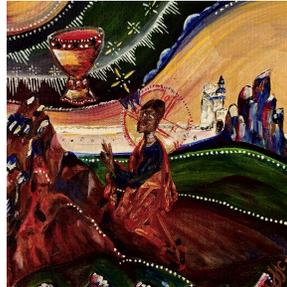
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Cover art by Julie Jane Capel

“Take This Cup From Me”

2025/2026

Acrylic on Canvas



About the Artist



As an internationally selling modern impressionist painter, Julie Jane Capel explores the everyday world and human emotions by capturing the passage of time. Specifically, the ever-changing movement of beauty, justice, and faith. Art then becomes a window into her life motto: Love God. Love others. Laugh and paint the colors. Lament and change the injustices.

@JJCPAINTINGS is a collection created to be accessible – art that can easily be hung in your kitchen or living room. Art that may provoke comfort and/or conviction.

Julie has been painting since she was 14. Over these past two and a half decades, her style and subject matter have evolved with her lived experiences as a pastor, trauma chaplain, community organizer, census worker, field director for a national congressional campaign, and global traveler.

In 2009, she received her BFA, and in 2013, her MDiv (Master of Divinity) from North Park University and Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL. Since then, she has had a coast-to-coast traveling exhibit of 40 paintings on Isaiah 58. She has also been in numerous group and solo shows, selling commissioned and pre-created paintings for almost 20 years.

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For Week 2: Look in your email on February 28th or download at PrayerfulReflections.com

Welcome to Prayerful Reflections

Prayerful Reflections is a daily resource for connecting with God and the broader Christian community during the season of Lent, the 45 days leading up to Easter. Christians around the world practice Lent as a way to meditate/reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how Jesus influences our lives today.

Inspired by the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, each daily reflection will be an opportunity to **Read** the Bible, **Reflect** on the message, **Respond** to what we have heard, **and Rest** in the love of God through prayer. This devotional could be read independently or with a community. If you would like to connect virtually, the reflections are posted daily at www.prayerfulreflections.com. Unlike past volumes, this Lent's *Prayerful Reflections* will be published each week as separate editions, emailed to subscribers and found online at www.prayerfulreflections.com.

I publish Prayerful Reflections to share my thoughts about God and uplift female theologians. This devotional features women who are pastors, authors, teachers, and community leaders from diverse backgrounds across North America and Europe. What unites us is our devotion to Jesus and our call to share God's insights through scripture. Though written by women, this devotional is meant for everyone. I extend my gratitude to all the women whose contributions made this collection possible.

I hope you enjoy the devotional.

-Rev. Julia L. Styles

Making Repentance Real

A Reflection for Ash Wednesday by Rev. Jessie Lowry

Lectionary reading for 2/17/2026: [Joel 2:1-2, 12-17](#) or [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Psalm 51:1-17](#), [2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10](#), [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 51:1-17

Read

Psalm 51: 1-17 New Revised Standard Version

Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

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

4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass
judgement.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;[a]
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret
heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be
clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed
rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right[b] spirit within
me.

11 Do not cast me away from your
presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing[c] spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your
ways,
and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
If I were to offer a burnt offering, you
would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God[d] is a
broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you
will not despise.

Reflect

Psalm 51 is one of Scripture's most profound expressions of repentance — but what does that “churchy” word really mean? The psalmist's cry isn't for mere outward ritual or superficial

apology, but for a transformed heart. It is not about fulfilling religious obligation, but about acknowledging brokenness and letting that honesty before God lead to transformative action.

What makes Psalm 51 so bracing for turbulent times is that it refuses two temptations we cling to when everything feels chaotic:

First, it refuses denial.

“Against you, you alone, have I sinned... I know my transgressions.”

This quote is not the language of excuse, spin, or self-justification. In moments of social fracture—violence, injustice, polarization, fear—we are often tempted to rush past confession straight to solutions or slogans. Psalm 51 insists that truth-telling comes first. Not vague regret, but honest naming: this is not how it should be, and we are not innocent bystanders.

Second, it refuses despair.

For all its rawness, Psalm 51 is not a psalm of self-loathing. It is a prayer addressed to mercy. “According to your steadfast love... according to your abundant mercy.”

The psalm begins with the stubborn conviction that God’s mercy is greater than what has gone wrong. That conviction matters when the news cycle trains us to believe nothing can change.

In turbulent times, Psalm 51 widens repentance beyond private morality. The psalmist longs not just to be forgiven, but to be re-created.

And then there is the quiet but radical turn near the end of the psalm:

“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”

Repentance does not end in silence. Those who have been broken open by truth become agents of healing. In other words, repentance is not withdrawal from the world; it is preparation for faithful engagement.

Finally, Psalm 51 speaks powerfully to this moment because it redefines what faithfulness looks like when trust in institutions, leaders, and even religious language is frayed:

“You do not delight in sacrifice... the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit.”

When familiar rituals, policies, or traditions feel hollow or compromised, Psalm 51 reminds us that God is not waiting for us to get the performance right. God is looking for honesty, humility, and the courage to be changed—and then to live differently.

Psalm 51 is not an easy psalm—but it is a necessary one. And perhaps that’s why it keeps returning, generation after generation, whenever the world feels like it’s coming apart, God’s people dare to believe that repentance might still be a doorway to renewal.

Respond

Where do you feel most tempted right now to rush past confession and straight into fixing—or blaming?

What would it look like to pray Psalm 51 without defending ourselves?

How do you distinguish between feeling sorry and being genuinely open to change?

What habits, assumptions, or comforts might need to be unlearned for repentance to be real?

What does it mean to say “we have sinned” in a culture that prioritizes individual innocence?

If God were truly creating something new in us, what might have to change in how we live, spend, speak, or lead?

Rest

Gracious God,

Create in us clean hearts, and renew steadfast spirits within us.

Give us courage to confess where we have fallen short, and strength to repair what has been broken.

May our repentance lead to healing and justice, and may our hearts reflect Your mercy and love.

Amen.

About the Author



Jessie has served as the sole pastor at Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church in Annapolis, MD, for the past 10 years. She is also a Board Certified Chaplain with a particular interest in issues of pastoral care. She attended Princeton Seminary for her M.Div. and serves on the Dismantling Racism Team of the Baltimore Presbytery. She is proud to have co-chaired the working group that created a successful proposal for the trailblazing Reparative Justice Fund. [You can read more about that fund here.](#) She is embarking on her first-ever clergy sabbatical this Spring and will love having more time with her husband, two young children, and her larger extended family.

A Call to Urgent Compassion: Reflecting on God's Mercy During Lent

A Reflection for Thursday, February 19 by Rev Elizabeth McColl

Lectionary reading for 02/19/2026: [Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7](#);

Selected passage for reflection: Jonah 3:1-10

Read

Jonah 3:1-10 NIV

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion, turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Reflect

Jonah 3:1-10 reads like a one-page summary for a much longer document; few details and lots of facts. We don't need any more detail than we have: "call urgently on God, and God may relent". As I watch the news and witness the violence and wanton disrespect for human rights occurring across the US and around the world, I feel the need to urgently call out to God for mercy. If there was ever a moment for us to call on God urgently - this is it. Perhaps it's always the time.

I have wondered for a while now, do people who do not know God still pray? I believe they do. And does God hear them? I believe the answer is yes. Lent is a sacred time when we can

practice repentance and return to God, believing that God acts with compassion toward all people, believers and nonbelievers alike. Lent is a perfect opportunity to call urgently to God. It is also an opportune time to make an outward sign that we are doing so. Maybe not sackcloth, but something to acknowledge that Lent is a time to call on the Most High God more urgently than we did yesterday - or last week - or indeed, for some time, if at all. For some, that outward sign was ashes on the forehead, for others it might be a bracelet or a symbol to remind them that God is compassionate.

For me, this Lenten time reminds me that God moves with compassion. With that in mind, I searched for the word "Compassion," and one definition describes it as "the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering." That's what the King of Nineveh hoped God would do, and indeed, that is what happened. In the midst of their evil and violent ways, the people of Nineveh were shown compassion, and God did not bring the destruction he had threatened. Studies have shown that when we act with more compassion towards ourselves, we find it easier to extend that to others, even to someone we may consider an enemy. Lent is a time to practice compassion on ourselves and others.

Respond

Next time you see or read about someone who invokes a negative response, take a moment to stop and reflect: Is there a way I could respond with compassion?

Rest

Lord, in the regular rhythm of a day, put someone in my mind who needs to see that whatever they may have done, they are still worthy of my kindness and thought. Especially when I am struggling with another human, help me to take a few breaths and remember they are made in your image, too. Amen.

About the Author



After a few years in the USA for graduate school and pastoring, Elizabeth has lived most of her life in her hometown of Edinburgh, Scotland, where she currently resides. When not teaching music vocationally, she enjoys being outside hiking in the hills, drinking water, wine and coffee with friends, and watching fictional political thrillers from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and immersing herself in the written word - also mostly fiction.

Let's be toddlers again?

A Reflection for February 20, 2026, by Pastor Joy Fishler

Lectionary reading for 02/20/2026: [Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Matthew 18:1-5

Read

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Reflect

One day, you are driving your toddler around, navigating traffic and handing out snacks to the seat behind you so they can sit in the passenger seat, somewhat horrified that you get to teach your teenager to drive. Now, I love a good-spirited, sassy teenager, but I don't love teaching them to drive all that much. How does this sweet toddler go from singing in that sweet baby voice in the car to telling you, "I KNOW, MOM! YOU ARE STRESSING ME OUT," after they almost kill you while driving? Just like that, they know everything.

Guess what. We are the same. We learn some things, grow, change, make mistakes, grow some more, and stake our claim on what we know we are right about. Curiosity vanishes, replaced by certainty. We do this in our everyday lives. We pick our political party and declare everyone else as evil. We read our Bibles without proper study and context, and we become self-righteous about every hot topic. Somewhere, we go from trusting toddlers to self-righteous teenagers. I know, that sounds a bit harsh, and this isn't meant to be a blanket statement over all people, but stick with me.

Greatness in the kingdom is upside-down. You don't climb into the Kingdom, you enter it low. "Become like little children" isn't about childishness. It's about dependence, trust, curiosity, humility, and a lack of all self-righteousness. We won't enter the kingdom of God by our status or our long list of things we got right. In the ancient world, children had no status. So His words here are significant. We've become very good at having answers. We've become very good at defending our side. We've even become really good at quoting verses. But toddlers don't defend their position. They depend on their parents. And Jesus says the Kingdom belongs to people like that. Not the loudest. Not the most informed. Not the most certain. The most humble. It's okay to know things, but remember not to lose that precious sense of curiosity, because being curious is being humble.

Respond

It's so easy to point to people in our lives and think, "you just described my _____ (fill in the blank). Today's verse isn't about other people, it's about us. It's about me. It's about you. If you have any sense of conviction, step 1 is go to Jesus with it. Repent. Sit in His presence and be transformed by the Spirit of the living God. Make room for correction and connection with Jesus. We can't be transformed if we don't stay and camp out in His presence.

Rest

Jesus, we need you. We need you in our lives. We need you in our church communities, in our families, and in our nation. I confess that I don't have all the answers, but you do. I confess that I sometimes respond and behave as if I do have all the answers, and I bring that before you now. Please forgive me. Help me to be curious, humble, and a light in this world. Thank you for choosing us. Thank you for choosing to give up your life and dying upon that cross for us. Thank you that you rose again and offer us a new life, a new way to live, and a new way to love. Help us be childlike in all ways. In Jesus Name, amen.

About the Author



Joy Fishler is an Ordained Minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church. She currently resides with her family in the Sacramento Area and is the Pastor of Adult Ministry at Life Community Church. She loves Jesus, loves people, and absolutely loves raising her teenage girls. She is passionate about preaching and leading people to the heart of the Father. She truly believes that there is nothing better than Jesus, and following Him is the only life worth living. @joyfullyunfilteredandstuff

What does God See?

A Reflection for Saturday, February 21 by Sandy De Jesus

Lectionary reading for 02/21/2026: [Psalm 51](#); [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Matthew 18:1-7](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 58:1-12

Read

Isaiah 58:1-12, *Christian Standard Bible*

1 “Cry out loudly, don’t hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins.

2 They seek me day after day and delight to know my ways, like a nation that does what is right and does not abandon the justice of their God. They ask me for righteous judgements; they delight in the nearness of God.”

3 ‘Why have we fasted, but you have not seen? We have denied ourselves, but you haven’t noticed!’

“Look, you do as you please on the day of your fast, and oppress all your workers.

4 You fast with contention and strife to strike viciously with your fist. You cannot fast as you do today, hoping to make your voice heard on high.

5 Will the fast I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord?

6 Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will appear like the dawn, and your recovery will come quickly. Your righteousness will go before you, and the Lord’s glory will be your rear guard.

9 At that time, when you call, the Lord will answer; when you cry out, he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you get rid of the yoke among you, the finger-pointing and malicious speaking,

10 and if you offer yourselves to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted one, then your light will shine in the darkness, and your night will be like noonday.

11 The Lord will always lead you, satisfy you in a parched land, and strengthen your bones. You will be like a watered garden and like a spring whose water never runs dry.

12 Some of you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore the foundations laid long ago; you will be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets where people live.”

Reflect

In this passage, the people of Judah were frustrated because it seemed that God was not answering their prayers. They had followed the religious requirements, they had fasted and prayed, but it felt like God didn't see them.

Isaiah's message to them was that God 'had' seen them, and they had fallen short.

In verse 2, God says that they had the 'appearance of a nation that does what is right.' Israel had a reputation as an obedient people, but God could see past the image they projected. Their outward actions and practices were insufficient when God could see their true motives. They could fast, beat their chests, and cry out, but it was an empty ritual because their hearts were unchanged.

Even in their fasting, they continued to quarrel and fight with each other. They oppressed their workers and did as they pleased. They could set their own times for worship and sacrifice, but it did not change their disdain for outsiders or their unfair treatment of the poor.

God could see.

Before they could claim any moral authority, they needed to repent of their own evil. They needed to be truly righteous, which inherently meant acting with justice toward everyone, not just the privileged or the 'insiders.'

In verse 6, Isaiah states that true righteousness – doing right – begins by addressing how they treat others. Certainly, it means to work toward right relationships with those close to them – family, friends, and those under their care.

But it doesn't stop there. The command is not just to stop behaving wickedly toward others. The call is to actively and intentionally work for the flourishing of others. To seek justice for people beyond their inner circle to the oppressed, the poor, the homeless. (v. 7)

During his earthly ministry, Jesus had the same rebuke for the religious leaders. He called them out for loading down the people with religious rules but said they "neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy, and faithfulness." (Matt. 23:23) He compared them to whitewashed tombs, "which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity." (v. 27)

Lent is a time of prayer and sacrifice as we reflect on the life and death of Jesus. I think the message of Isaiah is the same for us: When God sees my acts of worship, what does that look like? Am I a person who follows the tradition of religious expression, with no change in my heart? Is my practice of righteousness a matter of following the rules, or of working actively toward the flourishing of others? As I practice my theology, where am I in relation to the outcast, the poor, the brokenhearted?

What does my 'sacrifice' to God actually cost me?

Respond

This season of Lent, may we be a people who follow Jesus to the margins, whatever the cost. Let that be our expression of worship and our legacy of faith.

Rest

Creator and God, guide us to be true worshipers who live and lead in righteousness, justice, and mercy. Amen.

About the Author



Sandy De Jesus is a chaplain with the Fellowship of Christian Ministries. She serves as a chaplain in a Level I trauma center in Phoenix, Arizona.

Welcoming Discomfort & Hearing from the Holy Spirit

A Reflection for the first Sunday of Lent by Rev. Julia L. Styles

Lectionary reading for 2/22/2026: [Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 4:1-11

Read

Matthew 4:1-11 *New International Version*

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Reflect

After Jesus' baptism, and before the start of his public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. I believe God sent Jesus into the wilderness to spend time in God's presence without distraction. I believe the wilderness is always a place where God chooses to meet with God's beloveds. In this situation, God wants Jesus to know that he can rely on his Holy Parent for everything he needs. After 40 days of solitude in the desert, Jesus may have felt connected to the Spirit, but he was also hungry. The devil uses this situation to tempt Jesus to change his circumstances.

Have you been in situations where you wished the circumstances were different? Every single day, I wish life were easier or more pleasant: I wish my children obeyed me, I wish people were less selfish, I wish traffic weren't so bad, and I wish the weather were more cooperative. I wish I never had to experience suffering or pain.

In the midst of Jesus' suffering, the devil tempts Jesus with the desires of the heart:

You are hungry—*say the word, and you will be fed.*

You are vulnerable—*dare to be invincible, and it will be so.*

You are lonely and afraid—*the whole world will bow at your feet.*

The devil is saying, *Where is God in your suffering? Turn to me instead.*

Jesus is aware of his hunger and exhaustion in the wilderness, yet, over and over again, Jesus turns from temptation and towards God.

"I let go of my desire for security and survival." *God's got me.*

"I let go of my desire for power and control." *God's in control.*

"I let go of my desire for esteem and affection." *I am God's beloved.*

"I embrace this moment as it is." *God is here.*

Most days, the desire for control, security, and affection, or the desire to change our current circumstances, will tempt us to turn our attention away from God and take a situation into our own hands. In Matthew 4, we see Jesus do the opposite: instead of turning away from God and relying on himself, he leans on God's character to see him through his temptation. And what happens? God sends angels to tend to him.

Lent is a time in the liturgical calendar when Christians symbolically enter the wilderness and fast for 40 days. Just as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, the Spirit leads us to let go of distractions and false comforts, so that we can face the things that tempt us, and experience the God who tends to us when we are vulnerable.

Respond

For a few years now I have "entered the wilderness" by listening to my body and emotions rather than drowning them out with distractions. I find that when I welcome my emotions, especially negative ones, they lose their hold on me, and I can recognize the temptations behind them. I do this through a practice called the Welcoming Prayer. The Welcoming Prayer is a method of consenting to God's presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God by consenting to the ordinary activities of our day.

The process of the welcoming prayer looks like this:

1. Feel and sink into what you are experiencing in your body right now.
2. Welcome what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.
3. Let go by saying, "I let go of my desire for security, affection, control, and embrace this moment as it is."

This week, practice *The Welcoming Prayer* in small moments of frustration, for instance, when you are stuck in traffic or find yourself irritated with a coworker or family member. As you

practice feeling negative emotions in small situations, you will become better at accepting them in bigger moments.

To learn more about The Welcoming Prayer, visit [Contemplative Outreach](#).

Rest

In this moment, take a moment to check in with your body and your emotions.

Take a few deep breaths and recognize how you are feeling.

Welcome what you are feeling with the following prayer:

“Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for survival and security.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person, or myself.

I am open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. Amen.”

-The Welcome Prayer as written by Father Thomas Keating

About the Author



Rev. Julia L. Styles is a Spiritual Director and ordained minister. She is passionate about women in ministry and believes the church needs to hear their voices—in the pulpit, on the page, in the classroom, and in positions of leadership both within and outside the church.

To contact Julia for a free spiritual direction session, visit www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com.

Julia resides in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband Derek and two little ones, Jakob and Zoe.

“It’s too much!”

A Reflection for Monday, February 23 by Rev. Kelly Johnston

Lectionary reading for 2/23/2025: [Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Read

1 Kings 19:1-8 NIV

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, 4 while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” 5 Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” 6 He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

7 The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” 8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

Reflect

A mighty man of God, who has clashed with the evil powers in his community and comes out proving the power of God, collapses in despair under the one spot of shade he can find in the desert beyond the battlefield. Only a day earlier, this zealous prophet on a mission from God had called down fire from heaven. Just one day prior, Elijah had prayed confidently: *“O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.”* (1 Kings 18:36-37, NLT) He shouted his gutsy prayer before a huge audience. God answered boldly, and everyone was amazed.

One day later, his prayer had changed. He no longer lifts his arms with confidence. There is no strength left in his body, the audience is gone, and his prayer is simply: *“I have had enough, Lord.” I’m done. I don’t have anything left. God, it’s too much. Too much. Too much.*

The Clark Sisters' classic song comes to mind - the one that asks, "*is my living in vain?*" Whether it is health challenges, the struggles of ministry, the overwhelm of current events, or something else, many of us come to a point where we have little left to pray except: *It's too much, God. What is the point? I've given so much, and yet "the days are evil"* (Eph. 5:16).

Elijah's prayer is still a prayer. It is still a cry to the God who has called him, the God who has fed him in the wilderness and is about to do it again. A cry of desperation is still heard by God as a summons, and God shows up.

For Elijah, God shows up by sending an angel, who literally wakes him up to provide food and water. After another stretch of sleep, the angel (now clarified in the text as *from the Lord*) feeds Elijah again, but also has words for this weary servant. The angel's words actually echo Elijah's: "It is too much." And these words of validation are again accompanied by the sustenance needed for what comes next.

Whatever God has called us to, it will involve moments of glory and triumph, but alongside those moments, sometimes within a matter of hours, we will also experience desperation, exhaustion, and anxiety. The story of this mighty man of God reminds us that being a zealous and powerful servant of the Lord sometimes looks like this: running away, flopping down in the shade, and praying an honest prayer of lament to God. And, in the midst of that desperate surrender, we must be on the lookout for angels who come and attend us (see Matt. 4:11 and Psalm 91:11-12).

It's okay to pray, "I've had enough". It's okay to lay down in weary desperation. That just might be the best place for us to meet God and receive divine validation, sustenance, and guidance.

Respond

Depending on how this story hits you today, here are a few ways you might respond:

- Go outside (maybe bring a blanket?) and lie down. Let yourself "rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1) and pray an honest prayer to El Roi, the God who sees you (Gen. 16:13). It may be as simple as Elijah's prayer, "I've had enough, Lord."
- Journal about the highs and lows for you right now. Have you been fighting hard? Where has it become too much? Where has God shown up to provide? Name it and hold it before God in prayer.
- Listen to The Clark Sisters' "Is My Living in Vain?" and sing the answer out loud: "No! Of course not! Up the road is eternal gain!"

Rest

God who sees, in my weariness and wilderness, I lay myself down in the shade you provide. I rest in your shadow and abide in your presence. Send me an angel, Lord, to help me on my way, because this journey is just too much sometimes. Help me get up and walk with the strength you provide. Amen.

About the Author



Kelly Johnston is a Covenant pastor currently living and serving in the western suburbs of Chicago. She loves to cook, read, create, and spend time outside - either exploring with her kids, working in the garden, or, if she's really lucky, on a backpacking trip with her husband. She is a cancer survivor, thankful to God for every moment of life.

Sin is Lying at the Door

A Reflection for Tuesday, February 24 by Sara Simonds

Lectionary reading for 02/24/2026: [Psalm 32](#); [Genesis 4:1-16](#); [Hebrews 4:14-5:10](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Genesis 4:1-16

Read

Genesis 4:1-16 KJV

1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. **2** And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. **3** And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. **4** And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: **5** But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. **6** And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? **7** If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. **9** And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? **10** And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. **11** And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; **12** When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. **13** And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. **15** And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. **16** And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

Reflect

The story of Cain and Abel is one I have heard my whole life, and as a mother, it stands out in the raising of two children. As a child, I surely did not read or fully understand the words that are written in the Bible or the full weight of the sin that Cain committed- killing his own brother and then lying to God. As a mother, now when I read verse 10, "And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." I can feel the anguish in God's voice, and I also wonder about the stories in the Bible where God speaks directly to individuals.

How many times in our lives have we looked up to the heavens and said, “What now, God?” “Why me, God?” What would it be like to get a message directly from God? In the case of Cain, it would be a scary message, a feeling that you will be haunted the rest of your days because of the sin that you have committed, and what God is showing even when Cain brings his offering, is that this sin has been lying in wait for Cain, lying at his door waiting for him. It feels like sin is at our door so many times in our lives, waiting for us. This story reminds us that there is evil in the world, and the overall story of Genesis reminds us that there always has been.

How can we have a pure heart and not sin against God when you read about Adam and Eve and then Cain and Abel, and then on and on? The warning God gave to Cain was a chance to correct his attitude before committing the greater sin of murder, and the underlying message is that it is not always your actions that truly matter, but your thoughts and your purpose in those actions. The importance of our inner attitude feels at once freeing and alarming to me, and I am reflecting on it during these first 100 days of 2026. How do I truly make the time and space for God in my heart? How do I show that I am not too busy or too important to listen when God speaks? I do not expect a burning bush or a message directly from God as Cain received, but in this time in our world, I am hopeful that we can all recognize the need to slow down and listen for God where we can.

Respond

Take the time to listen to God in your daily life. Identify areas where you are rushed, and sin is crouching at your door or lying at your door waiting for you, and pray for strength during those times to pray and listen to God.

Rest

Lord, during this time of Lent help us to make the time to rest and to think about the lessons around us every day. From Cain's original sin in Genesis to the sins we see in the world today, there are many ways we can learn, grow, and empathize with others. Help us to use this time to reflect and reset as we pray throughout Lent and remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Amen.

About the Author



Sara Simonds is a mother and wife in the Atlanta area who is an active member at Shallowford Presbyterian Church. She is a recovering corporate working mom and is using this time to read the bible, reflect on the impact of religion in her life, and enjoy a slower pace as much as she can with two small children.

The Shepherd and the Lost Sheep: A Lesson in Grace

A Reflection for Wednesday, February 25 by Rev. Bronwyn Murphy

Lectionary reading for 02/25/2026: [Psalm 32](#); [Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28](#); [Matthew 18:10-14](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Matthew 18:10-14

Read

Matthew 18:10-14 (NIV)

¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹¹”

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way, your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Reflect

When my children were a bit younger, they loved building with Legos. In our dining room, we still have a table that memorializes some of their larger, complex creations. These days, completed creations still get added, but at a slower pace than before. Legos have brought so much joy to our household. And they've also brought a lot of drama. On more than one occasion, one of my children will be working on a build with hundreds and hundreds of pieces when everything suddenly goes catastrophically wrong. It doesn't look like a crisis from the outside because the near-completed build looks fantastic.

All goes awry when it is discovered that one Lego piece is missing. Of the hundreds and hundreds of pieces, one is lost and must be found to complete the build. Through tears and frantic searches under the couch, in trash cans, in the deep grooves of the carpet, and in the vacuum canister, the piece is found. Relief. Celebration. The build can go on; all is well. It is similar to the parable of the wandering sheep in Matthew 18:10-14. There are 100 and one goes astray. 99 remain. A 99% retention rate of the flock is impressive. It's near perfect. Yet, the shepherd goes after the lost sheep, because all by itself, it's in grave danger.

By itself, the sheep remains exposed, unprotected, and vulnerable to predators. A single sheep is ill-equipped to survive without a shepherd, without a flock. So the shepherd searches for the one. Every sheep matters to the shepherd. Because of the love and care the shepherd shows to his sheep, none are expendable. There is not one he could live without. When a sheep goes astray, the shepherd does not beat it with a staff when it is found. The shepherd doesn't berate

the sheep for separating from the flock. Instead, the shepherd celebrates when the lost sheep is found.

This is grace: that the lost sheep is sought out by the shepherd. This is grace: that we are sought out by the Shepherd, who yearns to restore what is lost. The truth is, we get lost sometimes. We are all following someone or something. Maybe we are following a person, a status, or an ideology that has taken us away from following God, the Good Shepherd. In God's good grace, He seeks us out, even when we forge ahead on our own path.

Just like searching for the teeniest, tiniest Lego piece, it is important for the creator to find what was lost and rejoice when what was lost has been found.

Respond

Where do you wander? Why do you wander? What dangers may lie in wait when you stray away from the Good Shepherd? Wandering may not be calculated or intentional, perhaps a series of actions and decisions that, over time, put distance between you and God. Open yourself to being found and celebrated by the shepherd.

Rest

God, thank you that you care deeply for us. You are the Good Shepherd. Thank you for your grace and mercy when we stray from the flock—that you seek us out because even one sheep missing is one too many. Thank you for your persevering love for us, your flock. Amen

About the Author



Rev. Bronwyn Murphy serves in children and youth roles in two Covenant churches near Sacramento, CA. She also serves as a Chaplain Resident at a regional hospital in Northern California. Bronwyn has been married to Jarrod for over 20 years. They have three children, all of whom join Bronwyn and Jarrod in cheering for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Prayers that Transcend Generations

A Reflection for Thursday, February 26 by Rebekah Bolin

Lectionary reading for 02/26/2026: [Psalm 121](#); [Isaiah 51:1-3](#); [2 Timothy 1:3-7](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Read

2 Timothy 1:3-7, NIV

³ I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷ For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

Reflect

The journey of faith is larger than we could ever imagine. It goes beyond ourselves. Yes, our faith is personal, but it is also profoundly communal. The ways God acts in our lives is often the result of many prayers—including many prayers from people we would never even know about. I sometimes wonder if God is answering prayers in my life that my ancestors prayed several generations before I was even born.

There are glimpses of this idea in these verses. First, Paul is writing to his mentee, Timothy, and revealing how much he prays for him. Yes, Timothy knows some of these prayers (as referenced in the verses), but not all. I have to believe God is acting in Timothy's life in some way due to Paul's prayers and the prayers of his mother, grandmother, and others in his life. Prayers that Timothy would never even know about.

In the midst of Paul's prayers for Timothy, he writes to encourage him to live out the God-given gifts within him. Gifts that Paul prayed over him. And with this knowledge, to live his life with the power, love, and self-discipline of the Holy Spirit.

In dark times of the world and in personal struggles of isolation and loneliness, it is important to remember that we are part of something larger. Our faith and the prayers for us can be traced back through generations. The same Spirit which breathed into Adam and Eve, Abraham and David, the twelve apostles, Paul and Timothy, is the same Spirit breathing into us. This is the same Spirit that gives us the strength to live in God's power, love, and self-discipline. There are people, some of whom you may or may not know, who have prayed this over you. You and I are a result of generations of prayers. And as we pray for our family, friends, communities, and the

world, may you take solace in knowing your prayers are powerful and effective. Through you, God's Spirit has the power to transform lives for generations to come.

Respond

1. Meditate on how people have prayed for you.
2. Take a moment to thank God for all the prayers lifted up on your behalf.
3. Ask God to reveal who to pray for at this moment. And take some genuine time to pray for that person and/or people. Pray a blessing over them. Pray they would have a deeper understanding of living in God's power, love, and self-discipline. Pray for comfort, joy, and peace that transcends all understanding over their life/lives.

Rest

Lord, thank you for the prayers over my life, many of which I am unaware of. Bless those who have prayed over me and my life. Lord, may I continue to lift up prayers for others. May I have a clear understanding of our connectedness through you? As I pray with your power, love, and self-discipline, may my prayers for others have a generational impact. I love you, amen.

About the Author



After growing up in Wisconsin, Rebekah graduated from Fuller Seminary and has lived in Los Angeles since 2006 (minus a year and a half of living on the Big Island of Hawaii). In 2018, she started and pastored a church in Downtown LA. The church has been on hold since COVID, but the vision remains strong, and she hopes to eventually resume operations. Until then, she is traveling while working for a major U.S. airline. In her free time, she loves to travel, hike, assemble jigsaw puzzles, try new foods, play soccer, laugh around the dinner table with family and friends, and enjoy the adventures of life the Lord leads her on.

The Saving Grace of Easter

A Reflection for Friday, February 27 by Jessica deLinde Dyckman

Lectionary reading for 2/27/2026: [Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Romans 3:21-31

Read

Romans 3:21-27(NLT)

21 *“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses[a] and the prophets long ago.*

22 *We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.*

23 *For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. **24** Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. **25** For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, **26** for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.*

27 *Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. **28** So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.”*

Reflect

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.” Romans 3:22

Praise the Lord that we can say ‘Yes and Amen’ to this beautiful truth! This Bible verse helps unlock the entire Gospel and the saving grace of Easter. This is why we observe Lent, why we believe in Jesus Christ as the Sacrificial Lamb, and how we can be made right with our Creator.

Through faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the prophesied Savior, God made a way for all people to come to Him to find hope and salvation in eternal life.

Then the passage goes on to say, *“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. 24 Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:23-24*

Everyone has sinned, and our sin separated us from a perfect God. A God who is Holy of Holies, who Was and Is, and Is to Come, and who is Magnificent, Unimaginable, Glory of Glory, Awesome, and Mighty. One whose presence cannot bear sin.

As humans, we were made for a perfect relationship with God, as He created us in His image (Imago Dei) and for His communion and glory (Genesis 1-3). Our sin separates us from that perfect harmony of community with our Creator.

In order to be near God, sin requires a blood sacrifice. In the Ancient Days, sin was atoned (made right) by the blood of animals. But the blood of animals would only cover so much sin, and only last so long before another sacrifice needed to be made.

The Lord longed for humankind to be in community with Him like it once was in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3). The only way to forever restore our relationship with God was through an eternal, perfect sacrifice: Jesus Christ.

The only One to fulfill that role was God himself, through the holy trinity, in the flesh as God the Son, Jesus Christ. Fully God and fully human, Jesus lived a perfect life on earth without any sin.

He did not deserve death on the cross, but willingly gave up His life. His death was a sacrifice to God to cover the sins of all mankind once and for all, making a way for humans to restore and have a right relationship with God the Father (John 3:16-18). Jesus Christ was (and is!) the sacrificial, perfect lamb for us.

Three days after His death on the cross, Jesus came back to life! Christ’s resurrection gives us hope and life after death and truly reconciles us to God. He defeated sin, death, shame, and eternal separation forever!

After Jesus rose from the grave, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father, where He waits for His second coming to earth. Where then He will reign as the true Messiah and King of Kings (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) forever and ever.

This is the Easter story, and this is our hope!

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” Romans 10:9-10 NIV

Respond

The Lenten and Easter seasons are a beautiful rhythm to our Christian faith. If you haven't put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Messiah and Savior, would you consider what you have just read?

If you are already a Christ follower, who would you consider someone who needs to hear the hope of Easter? Would you consider inviting them to church on Easter Sunday?

Rest

Heavenly Father, thank you for your faithfulness! Thank you for devising a rescue plan for our reconciliation. We praise you for the hope of Jesus Christ in this Easter season. We love you, and trust in your faithfulness for the future! Amen.

About the Author



Jessica lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and their two children and is deeply involved in her faith community. Grounded in faith and family, she is an author and speaker who loves teaching, engaging with the community, and celebrating life with intention.

I Lift Up My Eyes to the Hills

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, February 28 By Rev. Oron K. Trickey

Lectionary Reading for 2/28/2026: [Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 121

Read

Psalm 121 - *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?	the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.	6 The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.
3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.	7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.	8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.
5 The Lord is your keeper;	

Reflect

For many of us, Lent is a season of inward focus and reflection, taking inventory of our souls, our discipleship, and our lives. In a perfect world, setting aside one of our usual daily pleasures would help us be less distracted and better focus on how we are really doing at our core. This is a valuable process that creates opportunities for healing and transformation.

But it can also lead to our being a little too self-absorbed. Yes, in one sense, this is all about our plunging into the shadows of Lent in preparation for the light of Easter. Of owning our stuff, coming clean to ourselves and to God. Of opening up in new ways to who we can be as followers of Jesus.

At the same time, a sense of spiritual balance is needed.

Psalm 121 offers a helpful perspective on our Lenten experience. As we look inward, we also look upward. We lift up our eyes and see all that God is and all that God does for us. To allow the Lord to keep us in the midst of our Lenten experience. (Note that the word “keep” is used six times in this short Psalm.)

Lent is not just about us being alone in dealing with our stuff; it’s about walking with our God and partnering together towards transformation.

Respond

Read through Psalm 121 three times, slowly, section by section.

Pause between each section and invite God to show you how God is keeping you today and in this season of Lent.

Rest

Keeper God, please give me the faith and trust that you are indeed with me, keeping me as I seek to bring my darkest failings and frailties into Your light. Help me to rest in your power to stay with me and see me through this season, to help me, heal me, grow me, and lead me toward Resurrection. Amen.



About the Author

A longtime Chicago resident, Oreon is a seasoned urban ministry practitioner, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, and Enneagram consultant. She plays a mean blues guitar, loves to laugh deeply, and appreciates a serious cup of coffee. @oreont