



March 8-14, 2020

Sunday, March 8

Scripture: Psalm 139 (New International Version)

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, *Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me*, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand – when I awake, I am still with you. If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Devotional:

This Psalm tries to describe God's encompassing vastness and his closeness to human beings. There is no place in this world, whether in the sky or below, in distance or in darkness, that God is not there. God created us and knows who we really are.

In my life, it has always been comforting to know God is always there, even though it is so hard to comprehend. When I find that I am in trying situations, God is there. When I am questioning why things are such a struggle, God is there. When I saw my parents struggle in their last days, I knew God was there and wasn't quite finished with their journey.

The Psalm also calls out to God to keep evil away from us and lead us. I don't know why, I may not always take the best road, but I do know his love and grace are always there. With all my imperfections, God has given me everything I need to be a loving and caring person....my challenge is for me to grow inside and use all the many gifts God has given me.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for knowing my heart and my every move. Let me be ever mindful of others and show them the grace that you have shown me. Please keep me close when I have my doubting moments and guide me through this journey of life. In your name I pray. Amen.

Submitted by: Brad Boone

Monday, March 9

Scripture: Isaiah 64:8

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Devotional:

The first time I read this scripture what popped into my head was this is a verse that is paraphrased and used in religious décor featuring a pair of hands at a potter's wheel often seen at roadside pop-up vendors. My second thought was I love pottery. One of the nice things about living in Stanly County is that Seagrove is a short drive up the road.

When you visit Seagrove, you can usually talk with the creator of the pottery in the shop. Better than talking with the artisan is watching the potter at work and witnessing the process of a clump of clay evolving into something. What that something is lives in the mind of the man or lady at the wheel. Their vision becomes something special. Hands on molding and shaping brings out the best of that clump of clay. Pitchers, bowls, lamps, mugs, and dishes are all works of art. No two are exactly alike. Even when these pieces are thrown by the same potter, none of the items are identical. But the potter is not through, yet. More steps follow to color, polish and strengthen the pottery so a shopper can carry home a beautiful and unique piece. The pottery will last for years with the proper TLC.

It is easy to grasp why Isaiah described the relationship between God and his children like that of a potter and clay. We are distinct creations...each of us a special work of art in God's world, no two exactly alike although designed by one God. God's word is the hand that molds and shapes us to become what we should be and can be as individuals. Scripture nurtures our spirit, and a healthy spirit fuels a desire for healthy minds and bodies. Collectively, as congregations and communities of faith, we can provide the *TLC* to polish and strengthen each other. Compassion, patience, kindness and support are pillars that will help fulfill God's vision for beautiful lives and a beautiful world.

There is an old Ray Stevens song titled, *Everything is Beautiful*. The song begins with a children's choir singing *Jesus Loves the Little Children*. It is a heartwarming way to start a song. You cannot help but feel happy when you hear it. Part of the lyrics is, *Everyone is beautiful in their own way. Under God's heaven the world is gonna find a way*. I would offer a bit different lyric: *Everyone is beautiful in their own way, Created by our Father like a potter molding clay*.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to remember we are your creations, and we need to seek your guidance to be the best we can be in mind, body and spirit to do your work in your world. If we will ask, you will answer. Help us hear your answer. Amen.

Submitted by: Kim & Jeff Robertson

Tuesday, March 10

Scripture: I Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.

Devotional:

When I read this passage, I instinctively thought of the need to maintain a healthy physical body in order to honor God and to allow the Holy Spirit to abide in me. But this isn't Paul's message. As we know, temples are places of worship, and he is confronting us with this passage.

Our bodies are often hit with disease, broken bones, broken hearts, despair, and the ravages of aging, but they can also be used as physical weapons to cause injury to others. This is not what we expect from places of worship. They are there to provide peace, rest, rejuvenation, companionship, and love.

Many of us do our best to live a healthy lifestyle and maintain a healthy spiritual self, but when we sin in thought, word, or deed, we are disrupting the place God wants the Holy Spirit to flourish. Our bodies belong to God, not to ourselves.

God paid a high price for us; remember his broken, injured, physical self dying on the cross, and the gift we received from that suffering and death. Let us journey this Lenten season to discover a way to make ourselves a healthier, holier temple, and to glorify God.

Prayer:

Father, help us to give the Holy Spirit a place to flourish inside of us, so we may be the temple that glorifies our Lord.
Amen.

Submitted by: Connie Wallace

Wednesday, March 11

Scripture: Luke 10:25-28

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. *Teacher, he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? What do you read there? He answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.*

Devotional:

At our youth lock-in recently, we had a newcomer join us. A quiet kid with little sports interest, he seemed content to stand and watch the others play dodgeball. I didn't want to leave him alone or try to talk him into playing (even though it was DODGEBALL), so I stood there and kept him company.

We talked for a couple minutes as the game went on. That kid was smart and so fun to talk to* that I almost forgot about the game. The others, however, were not going to let him stand idle, so they kept gently encouraging him to join the game. And, he did. To see them do that was beautiful. You know, treating neighbor as yourself. Plus, we all got to play DODGEBALL.

*All those kids are smart and fun to talk to.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us. Amen.

Submitted by: Jim Hesley

Thursday, March 12

Scripture: Genesis 1:27

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Devotional:

Week 3 of our Lenten Devotions invites us to look at ourselves (and others) as people made in the image of God and to reflect on how we may best care for ourselves and others in the light of God's gift of life. In the hectic and harried world we live in, we frequently come across talk about the importance of self-care. We are told, that in order to function properly, we need to set aside time to take care of ourselves. However, it is the nature of a good Christian to think that serving others is more important and taking time for ourselves is taking time away from more important work.

As Christians, we are filled with the idea of self-sacrifice – we are mission oriented and we want to follow Christ's example and lay down our lives for our friends and the less fortunate. It does not occur to us to step back and focus on our own bodies, minds, and souls. But, if we look close at the scripture – it seems that God has something different in mind for us.

Essentially, self-care is all about being good stewards of our bodies, minds, and souls in order to become the best version of ourselves. *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.* We are God's handiwork, and He wants us to flourish and thrive in beauty and love, not be tossed aside or neglected, however noble our motivations. God is commanding us to take care of all creation, and that includes us.

We've all heard that we can't give what we don't have, and this is also true of taking care of others. There are so many demands on our time and attention – family, work, children, friends, volunteer work – and if we don't take time to tend to ourselves, our well will dry up very quickly. We will have nothing left to give. When it comes to the things that we care deeply about like our family and our work, none of us wants to ever give only the very last leftover bits of ourselves. Instead, we want to give the very best of ourselves. So when we take care of ourselves, we are filled up, renewed, and restored so we can offer the Lord and the people around us the very best of who we are.

As so often happens, things are much more easily said, than actually put into action. This is especially true of women – because we are born with maternal instincts, we are quick to set our own needs aside to meet the needs of others. Thankfully, there are a few fairly simple ways to be intentional about caring for ourselves.

- (1) Make *alone time* non-negotiable every day. Block out a period of uninterrupted time to recharge. It is crucial for your mental health.
- (2) Eat a good balance of protein, complex carbs, fiber, and healthy fats at each meal. You will feel better, have more energy, and that is an investment in your service to God.
- (3) Move your body in some way on a daily basis, even if it is just walking a few blocks or taking the stairs.
- (4) Spending time in daily prayer and Bible study. It goes without saying that this is a balm for any tired and wounded spirit and renews us as much as any other self-care.
- (5) Spend time with friends who encourage you, lift you up, and make you smile. Happiness fulfills so many of our needs, physical and mental.

The Lord loves us so much and desires only our good, and this means stewarding our whole health.

Prayer:

Loving God, as we ponder the wonderful creation that is us, lead us to know that caring for ourselves is not selfish. Give us inspiration and encouragement when we fall short of who You created us to be. Thank you for the comfort and healing that we always have when we allow ourselves to follow Your way. We ask these things as we pray in Your gracious name. Amen.

Submitted by: Kim Marshall

Friday, March 13

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship.

Devotional:

Romans 12:1, tells us what we must do to experience true and proper worship and to be truly at peace with God. The rest of chapter 12 tells us how to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Paul is asking us to focus on God's amazing mercy. We can never offer our bodies as a living sacrifice by our own will. We first have to prayerfully ask for and receive His help. Without God's mercy, we are hopeless. We can only be holy and pleasing to God when we renew and transform our minds and bring God's healing to our minds. Paul says we must not conform to this age. By reading the Bible, praying, meditating on his word, being in a church community, and not being caught up in the drama of our society, we can heal and renew our minds. We have to recognize that Jesus is the only way to God and eternity; not just one of many ways our society preaches. Paul says each of us have special gifts we can receive to help other people offer their bodies as a holy sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Only after we achieve true and proper worship can we fulfill God's Great Commission to bring other people to Christ. Reading the Bible, especially completely from cover to cover may seem daunting; however, I have found it to be a great way to renew my mind. Becoming familiar with the Bible gives me a framework and perspective to see the world differently. The more I hear God's word from the pulpit and hear Christian music, the more my mind is healed and the less I focus on the worries of this world.

When we can offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, we are better prepared to share God's grace and mercy with non-believers. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter states, *In your heart honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect.* This is an amazing gift to give anyone.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for your word, grace, and mercy. Accept my body as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to You. Heal my mind and lead me in the path of righteousness so others will ask me for a reason for the hope that is in me. Amen.

Submitted by: Mark Donham

Saturday, March 14

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1-4a

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. When 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. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.

Devotional:

As we age, we think about and talk about our health more and more. We realize that this wonderful gift from God called *Life* is getting shorter. We exercise and try to eat better (and maybe less). We sometimes think about risky things we did in our youth and thank God for having protected us from harm. We promise to do better.

It's hard to imagine how difficult it would be to face these physical and mental challenges of advancing age without the strong support of a faith family and the assurance of an everlasting life. It is an incredible blessing to have caring ministers and a congregation of fellow believers standing behind us in sickness and in health. How can we be afraid when we know God is looking out for us?

During this Lenten season, we can think about Jesus dying for our sins and thank God for our precious lives. God is our redeemer and protector. We serve him by respecting our physical and mental health through caring for our bodies and minds and helping others do the same. Whether our health can be restored or not, there is no reason to fear. God created us and redeemed us and is always with us. We are his.

Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for claiming us as your own, and through grace, promising us eternal life. Amen.

Submitted by: Sandy & Art Rogers