

## SECTION 4 (DAYS 34–40)

# APPROACHING EASTER

## When Every Prayer Is Answered



## Day 34: Approaching Easter: Bethany (Chapter 12) (Saturday in the fifth week of Lent)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 27: 4, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“one thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* As we enter the final week of this devotional, the countdown to Jesus' death has begun:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12: 1-3)

*Book passage:* I hope you have a place like Bethany where you can go when you're wrestling with unanswered prayer. It could be a place or a book or a piece of music that reminds you of all the good things God has done in the past. It could be a person like Lazarus whose very being makes the presence and power of God real to you even when life is at its worst...Bethany's the kind of community or the kind of family or the kind of place where you can sometimes still smell the perfume of God's presence. (p.186)

### ASK

*Ask myself:* Where is my Bethany? Who is the person in my life that reminds me of God's goodness? When did I last spend time in that place or with that person?

*Ask the Lord:* Jesus, I invite You to fill my home with Your fragrance today. Let my whole life testify to the goodness of Your presence.

### YIELD

A prayer of joyful surrender by Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

*Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that my life may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel your presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus.*

Amen.

## Day 35: Approaching Easter (Chapter 13) (Monday in Holy Week)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 88: 1-3, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“Lord, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. I am overwhelmed with troubles.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* In the final days before His death, Jesus speaks again and again about eternal life. Over the next three days, we are going to do the same, starting with a reading from John 12: 23-25:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

*Book passage:* When Sammy and I were facing the stark possibility that she would die at the age of thirty, I was dismayed to discover that...my imagination was bereft of any imagery or vocabulary that could grant genuine comfort and joy at the prospect of resurrection from the grave...The contemporary Western church at large seems to me to have little belief in the afterlife. We are so temporal and comfortable. We can perpetuate the delusions of our own immortality for longer than any previous generation, but ultimately, unless our death comes instantaneously in early life, we must think about such things. We will be the poorer if we do not. And so I have begun a solemn pilgrimage that some might deem a little morose. My aim ? To get excited about spending eternity with Jesus. (p.211)

### ASK

*Ask myself:* Take a little time now to let your imagination run wild, visualizing the new earth in which “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

*Ask the Lord:* You alone, Lord, know the number of my days. May my life and even my death bring glory to You, both now in this world and also in the life to come.

### YIELD

The hymn, “It is Well with My Soul,” by Horatio Spafford:

*And Lord haste the day, when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descent,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

Amen.

## Day 36: Approaching Easter: Unfinished Glory (Chapter 14) (Tuesday in Holy Week)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 130: 5, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* As we approach Good Friday, we continue today to ask for an eternal perspective on our current sufferings. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 8: 19-19:

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.”

*Book passage:* I describe the magnificent *Basilica de la Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona, Spain. Designed by the architect Gaudi, under construction since 1882, it:

will eventually incorporate three facades, each articulating a different aspect of Christ’s life. Gaudi, in his generation, created the Facade of the Nativity, ornately exploring and celebrating the birth and life of Jesus. In our generation, the second facade has almost been completed: that of the Passion of the Christ...Work is just beginning on the final structure, the Glory Facade ...The messages of Christmas and Easter tower over us like the first two facades of Gaudi’s basilica. But we await the completion of the story when Christ’s glory will fully be revealed and His temple will be complete. (p.209)

### ASK

*Ask myself:* How does it make me feel that this little life of mine is being built into something so much bigger and more beautiful than me? Am I looking through the wrong end of the telescope; focusing in on my own little world here and now, instead of the universe of new possibilities to come?

*Ask the Lord:* Heavenly Father, thank You that my “present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory” to come. That everything I’m going through in this life will be massively outweighed by blessings that You are preparing for me in the next.

### YIELD

The Hymn, “When I Survey,” by Charles Wesley:

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God.  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an off’ring far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Amen.

## Day 37: Approaching Easter: Eternal Prayers (Chapter 14) (Wednesday in Holy Week)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 61: 1-2, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. They sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy.” (Rev. 5: 8-9)

*Book passage:* It’s awesome to imagine that our unanswered prayers – all the frustrations, the tears, the dashed hopes – are being stored up by God in those golden bowls and may, eventually, become our most powerful contribution to the world. Let me say it again: our unanswered prayers may be the real ministry of our lives. As Tim Chester writes in *The Message of Prayer*: “Prayers we think of as directed to the present are in fact being stored up to be answered on the final day.”\* (p. 208)

\* Tim Chester, *The Message of Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 243.

### ASK

*Ask myself:* The prospect of my pain contributing to some other miracle at some other time for someone else may not be very comforting right now, but isn’t it reassuring to know that my prayers are not wasted? That they are accumulating credit in heaven? That every single one is remembered, cherished, and ultimately deployed by God?

*Ask the Lord:*

Take a little time to pray “the same old prayer” you’ve prayed a thousand times before, but this time picture it rising like incense from one of those great golden bowls before the Lord.

### YIELD

The hymn, “It is Well with My Soul,” by Horatio Spafford:

*And Lord haste the day, when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descent,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

Amen.

## Day 38: Maundy Thursday: Gethsemane (Chapters 2-6) (Thursday in Holy Week)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 86: 1-4, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“Hear me, Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I call you all day long. Bring joy to your servant, Lord, for I put my trust in you.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* On Maundy Thursday, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, as described in Mark 14: 22-26:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

*Comment and book passage:* These words must have haunted the disciples the following day as Jesus' body was literally broken and His blood shed on the cross, and then again on the Saturday with His body barely cold in the tomb:

Lunch on that Sabbath, straight after synagogue, would have begun as it always did with a blessing spoken out – are you ready for this? – over the bread and wine that were to be served with the meal. If any of the eleven remaining disciples were capable of eating that day, the grace spoken before lunch on Holy Saturday would have stabbed their hearts with remembrance of that Last Supper shared with Jesus... When God is silent and our prayers are unanswered – when the Word of God is flavorless in our mouths – there can sometimes still be faint flickers of hope and meaning expressed to us and for us in Scripture, in fellowship, and in the bread and wine. (p 182)

### ASK

*Ask myself:* I take a little time now to examine my life. In what ways am I broken physically, emotionally, or mentally?

*Ask the Lord:* I acknowledge this brokenness before the Lord, thanking Him for the promise of wholeness that rises from His broken body, and the forgiveness that flows from the blood that He shed on the cross.

### YIELD

A prayer of surrender from the Anglican Service of Communion:

*Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Through him we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.*

Amen.

## Day 39: Good Friday: Golgotha (Chapters 7-10) (Friday in Holy Week)

### PAUSE

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

(pause)

*I pray Psalm 31: 2 and 5, speaking slowly, several times:*

“Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me...Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.”

### REFLECT

*Bible:* My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest. (Ps. 22: 1-2)

*Comment:* This psalm, quoted by Jesus on the cross, articulates for all of us the despair of God's silence and the terror of feeling abandoned in our hour of gravest need. It reassures us that we are not alone in our suffering, that it's okay to be honest in our questioning, and that Jesus understands our pain. But there's something else here: when Jesus quoted this psalm, He knew that it opens with a cry of despair but concludes with a cry of victory: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord...They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!” (vv.27, 31); The similarity between these last four words, “He has done it!: and Christ's last three words, “It is finished,” are striking. Perhaps even here, in the agony of the cross, Jesus knew that something new was being born.

### ASK

*Ask myself:* Christ's cry, “It is finished,” is both desperate and triumphant. It tells me that suffering will come to an end, that my prayers will not always remain unanswered, that Holy Saturday will eventually, inevitable give way to Easter Day. Where are the hidden hints of such a hope, the promises of God's purpose, within the darkness of my current situation?

*Ask the Lord:* I take time now to thank the Father that through Jesus' abandonment on the cross, I need never be abandoned, and that through His death, I can have eternal life.

### YIELD

The Agnus Dei (John 1:29):

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.*

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.*

*Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace.*

Amen.

## **Day 40: Holy Saturday: The Garden Tomb (Chapters 11-12) (The last day of Lent)**

### **PAUSE**

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

*(pause)*

*I pray Psalm 40: 1, repeating the words slowly, several times:*

“I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.”

### **REFLECT**

*Bible:* Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying...She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” (John 20: 11, 14-16)

*Book passage:* The first words of the new covenant are a question. Not an announcement, not an answer, but a quietly considerate question addressed to a weeping woman: “Why,” Jesus wants to know, “are you weeping?” And for anyone like Mary, anyone like you and me, who has journeyed through the darkness of Maundy Thursday and the despair of Good Friday to reach this garden tomb, it’s a stupid question. But it’s also a profound question and, with hindsight, even a funny one too. Jesus, the God you may confuse with a gardener, simply speaks Mary’s name. Easter dawns with a question and a name. (p.199)

### **ASK**

*Ask myself:* As Jesus approaches, what question do I hear Him asking me? And what expression do I see on His face as He speaks my name?

*Ask the Lord:* Thank you, Lord, that you know my name, see my tears, and care about my story. Please open my eyes to see You today in the people I meet. And teach me to ask the kind of questions that unlock their hearts.

### **YIELD**

A prayer on the eve of Easter:

*Like Mary at the tomb, I'm here to worship through tears.*

*Like Mary, I hardly dare to hope that I might ever see You, Hear You, touch You again.*

*Living Lord Jesus, let me hear You speaking my name.*

*Amen.*