



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Devotional Journey

Rome United Methodist Churches 2021



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17TH, 2021**

**READ: GALATIANS 5: 22-23**

**"Fruit" - Written by Rev. Nanci Hicks, Trinity UMC**

She confessed: The unintentional consequence of her choices and habits was loss of purpose and loss of health.

She chose Lent to begin her journey toward health. She learned new habits, set new goals, and sometimes stumbled along the way. Key to progress was intentionality, community, and compassion. She practiced daily time with God in Scripture and prayer. Eventually a door to a healthy future and purpose opened before her.

The 40 day Lenten journey is a season for discerning and living into a spiritually healthy future toward which God is calling. It's a time to invite the spirit to fill our lives with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This journey may require changing thoughts, attitudes, and habits or allowing God to fill dark spaces in our lives, or developing practices for healthy living.

Frederick Buechner reminds us, "during Lent, Christians are supposed to ask one way or another what it means to be themselves."

Reflection: Who is God calling you to be now? What habits can God help you change that will open the door to God's future for you to grow and to serve?

Prayer: Lord, you call me to journey with you and with others. I turn to you to unlock the doors of my future. Help me to hear your call. Help me to live a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Amen.



## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18TH, 2021

**READ: MARK 12: 30-31**

**"Precious" - Written by Rev. Robert Brown, Rome 1st UMC**

It was the night of Valentine's Day a little over twenty years ago. Our nightly family ritual, when our girls were small included: sharing one thing for which we were thankful, saying our prayers, and then saying "I Love You & Good Night." One night one of the girls asked, "Why Do you Love US?"

Denise and I looked at one another and we both said at the same time, "Because You are a precious gift from God." Hearing that response, they both asked, "Is everybody a precious Gift from God?" "Yes", we answered. Then the girls asked, "Does everybody know they are Precious?" With some thoughtful reflection and some additional conversation, we "landed" the discussion saying, "Because We are Loved by God and Precious in God's sight, we have the opportunity to remind everyone They are precious in God's sight and treat everyone as a Precious Gift from God."

Satisfied with that "challenge", we finished our prayers and one of the girls in her prayer offered this thought - "God, help all your precious children know they are precious in your sight, especially the precious children who live at Murphy-Harpst."

(For seven years I was appointed to serve as Executive-Vice President of Development at Murphy-Harpst, and the girls were well aware of the realities of the challenges and difficulties that brought the boys and girls to Murphy-Harpst).

We all finished our prayer and said, "I Love You and good night". As Denise and I were preparing to get the girls tucked into their beds, one of them said, "P.S. - God can you make sure all your precious children have somebody to tell them they are precious? AMEN".

Denise and I walked out of their rooms, smiled, and held hands as we walked to finish our household chores in preparation for the next day. As we finished straightening up the Den, Denise began to sing. "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Every child in every land, Jesus holds them in His hand, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

What if, as followers of Jesus -We "lived into" the commandment and lived it out with ALL God's Precious Children?

Prayer: P.S. - God can you make sure all your precious children have somebody to tell them they are precious? Amen.





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**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH, 2021**

**READ: JEREMIAH 31: 13**

**"Find God and Find Joy" - Written by Rev. Dr. Millie L. Kim, 2nd Avenue UMC**

It is hard to find joy when you find yourself with abusive parent(s), addicted spouse, estranged child(ren), mean people, a never-ending pandemic, chronic illnesses, or a society which worships youthfulness, beauty, wealth, sports, a particular race, gender, sexuality, and marital status.

It seems like wherever we turn in life, we can find reasons why life is marred, miserable, and mournful. When I was growing up, my life was full of misfortunes and misery with all the things I listed above and more. That is a part of my life history that I do not ever want to revisit. Then God showed up one day. I know He was there all along but I just sighted and experienced God that day!

God said, "I love YOU and YOU belong to me!" None of my circumstances changed but my heart was changed. When I invited Jesus into my heart, my circumstances too changed one by one. God did turn my mourning into joy. One by one!

Because God has turned my mourning into joy, I can experience my children's childhood with joy and laughter. Because God has comforted me and given me gladness, I can enjoy fidelity and goodness in my spouse with trust and intimacy. I can't tell you how it happened but I can tell you who made it happen.

We, as Christians, if we do not have joy in our hearts, truly need to re-examine our lives and seek God more urgently and more desperately. When we seek God, we do find God. That is in the Bible, y'all! ... then, comes joy!

Prayer: Lord, Jesus! Open our eyes, open our ears, open our mouths, and open our hearts, so that we may seek YOU, find YOU, and live in YOUR JOY! Amen.





## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH, 2021

READ: 2 PETER 1: 5-7

"Patience" - Written by Rev. Norv Havens, South Broad UMC

Patience is one of those attributes that you cannot attain by reading about. It is a quality that can only be acquired by persistent practice. It is a drill that I must do daily.

The original Webster's dictionary offers this definition of patience: "the suffering of afflictions, pain, toil, calamity, provocation or other evil, with a calm, unruffled temperament; endurance without murmuring or fretfulness, from a kind of heroic pride, or from a Christian submission to the divine will."

Two things strike me. First, "endurance without murmuring." I get so frustrated when something interrupts me when I am trying to get somewhere in a hurry, a train for instance. Forced to just sit there and count the cars, wasting precious minutes when I have somewhere to be.

Yet, what an opportunity for me to choose to quench the inner fumes, and use the delay to work on my patience. Maybe, pray about patience?

The second thing to strike me was, "a Christian submission to the divine will." How many times are we forced to deal with an impossible situation or person? These circumstances are always opportunities to grow in patience, to learn to submit to God's providential will, and often, to minister in some special way.

Is your patience being tested today? Great!! Remember, love is first of all patient (1 Cor. 13:4). The Lord is training you toward godliness, and godliness is moving toward perfect love. He really wants to work this quality into your character. In perfect love we can transform the world around us for His glory.

Prayer: Patient Father, thank you for being patient with me, even when I am not patient. Give me your strength to love in your patient way. Amen.



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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST, 2021

READ: ROMANS 10: 8B-13

REFLECTION DAY - Is the Word in my mouth AND in my heart?



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.





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## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND, 2021

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 4: 13-5:1

"Never Lose Heart in Extending Kindness to Others" - Written by Rev. Shari Rates, Metropolitan UMC

Recently, it has been amazingly easy to lose heart based on the things occurring in the world. Yet we are told in verse 18 of today's scripture, "**So we don't look** at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone. But the things we cannot see will last forever."

Are we to only keep our eyes dimly lit on things now; and clearly focused on things we cannot see, but hope for in the ever after? John Ashcroft in, *Letters from a Father to His Son* once shared, "Dad prayed that our hearts would be ignited and inspired to do things of eternal consequence. ... To turn our eyes from the temporal, the physical, and the menial. ... He prayed, toward the eternal, the spiritual, and the noble."

Yet there is one thing we can do in the meantime as we walk towards eternity. We can be extenders of kindness with one another. I was once told by a child with bright eyes that, "Love is something you give away; and it comes right back to you! ... It's like a shiny penny, hold it tight and you won't get any!" Well, the same applies with kindness. It doesn't take much to perform random acts of kindness during the Lenten season and beyond. Maybe pay it forward in the Starbucks line, or smile at a stranger in the car next to you; the opportunities are limitless!



Prayer: Lord, may we be more inclined to share kindness with others who may simply need a tender touch of care. And may we seek less to be heard; but to hear the cries of those around us and respond with the heart of You. Amen.



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23RD, 2021

READ: HEBREWS 13: 16

"Good on the Inside" - Written by Rev. Joseph Palmer, Trinity UMC

People who know me, love to point out what a geek I am. I love Star Wars, comic books (and their awesome movie counterparts), fantasy novels, etc.

I have long pondered why these are the stories that most attract me to read, watch, and think about. As I examined the "why," I realized that the answer is pretty simple. I love these "geek" stories because at their heart, they are all stories of the epic battle between **GOOD** and **EVIL**.

The listing of goodness as a fruit has also made me ponder often. Why list being good? Isn't that just too obvious? Many people try to teach us right from wrong, good from evil, and we hear that good always triumphs in the end. We're told that most people are good by nature.

So why include this no-brainer of goodness in the fruit of the Spirit?

In the original Greek, we find that this word for goodness is not used anywhere outside of the Bible. There's something unique about this word beyond our usual good/evil dichotomy. The scholars say this goodness means, "properly, intrinsic goodness, ... the goodness that comes from God and shows itself in spiritual, moral excellence."

This isn't just a generic good. This is God's goodness found in us. God's goodness that has been given to us. And as the author of Hebrews shares, we can't keep what God has given to us, to ourselves. It needs to be shared. We take the goodness of God found inside of us, and direct outward in spiritual and moral excellence. What a task we have before us. May we all be up to the challenge.

Prayer: God, let us recognize that you have put your unique goodness in each of us. May we not keep what you have given to ourselves, but share it in our spiritual and moral excellence in our daily lives. Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

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## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH, 2021

READ: GALATIANS 5:22-23

### "Fruit" - Written by Joe Tarpley, Trinity UMC

While Lent is a time for us to look forward to what God has in store for each of us, it is also a time of reflection. At my age, I assure you, there are a lot of reflections!

One of my cherished reflections is remembering our three children growing up at Trinity and especially their time in Sunday School. All three of them, Joe, Susan, and Chris, attended the same Sunday School classes and had the same Sunday School teachers over a 24-year period. In these Sunday School classes, the example of the Fruit of the Spirit were never more exemplified. Where could you possibly find the Spirit of Love more than through "Miss Sara" McCreary; or the Spirit of Kindness than in the teachings of "Miss Hilda" Candler? When it came to the Spirit of Faithfulness and Gentleness, no one could outshine Jeanne Holt, whether it was to young children, youth or adults!

After our children reached MYF age, the Fruit of the Spirit continued to shower them each Sunday morning. In junior high class, the Spirit of Joy was happily given to them by Paul Camp and in senior high, the Spirit of Patience was demonstrated by Brady Drummond.

How do you know when times like these and people like these have made an impression and an impact on the lives of children? Well, I tell you, when your children are grown and all in their 50's and you sit around the dinner table at Easter, Thanksgiving or Christmas with 15 or 20 family members and your children bring up these special times and these influential people. It happens every time we are together!

One of the greatest places for a child to be on Sunday morning is in Sunday School and all of us need to follow the example of people who have loved and nourished us in the past.

Prayer : Jesus, you taught us to love one another.  
Let us also love others as we have been loved. Amen.



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## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25TH, 2021

READ: MATTHEW 11: 28-30

"Gentleness" - Written by Kristen Vardy, Trinity UMC

As I started reading through the suggested verses for my theme, Gentleness, I did not get far before I picked this one. The main reason is that this verse was highlighted and underlined in my Bible with a handwritten note to myself to lean on God in all things. I have apparently been drawn to this specific verse on more than one occasion, and what an awesome reminder for all of us today - especially during this time with so much uncertainty spinning around us every day. This passage is one we can write down and always carry with us in our back pockets. I think all our souls could use a little rest these days.

As you read through this verse, God not only asks us to come to him, but he asks us to learn from him. In this passage I feel comforted by God knowing that he is willing to let me hand over my burdens to him so that I can find rest. I also feel that he is asking me to get to know him better, to truly learn from him while leaning on him. A reminder to open my Bible more often and soak in his words and build a deeper relationship with him. The more we do this, the more we will find rest for our souls.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to get to know you better, to find time in our busy lives to sit still and read your word. To find time to truly learn from you. Thank you for not only allowing us to hand over our burdens to you but asking us to so that we can find rest in you. Amen.





## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26TH, 2021

READ: JOHN 13 31:31-38

"Waiting" - Written by Mason Daniel, Trinity UMC

The night before his death, Jesus said this to his disciples. They had followed him through many things, but they could not follow him to the grave or to his coming glory in the ascension—at least not yet.

Peter raised an objection, but he didn't understand what Jesus had to do. As Peter's actions show later (John 18:15-18, 25-27), our impatience can often lead us away from our Lord. But Jesus promises a strength that sustains us as we wait. He has loved us. He has given his life for us. The love of Jesus informs the way we live now, as we wait until the day when we will journey beyond death to live with him in the glory of God's presence forever.

After the resurrection and ascension, Jesus' followers remembered his words. Jesus did not tell us how long it would be till he returns, but he did tell us how to wait. With love, we can share his grace with fellow sinners. We can give to help bring life and joy to people who are poor and marginalized. As an old song puts it, "They'll know we are Christians by our love."

The ascension shows us that we do not yet follow Jesus to glory, though we will someday. But it also reminds us to love one another as we wait.

Prayer: As we spend this time of Lent waiting, let us be patient, let us be self-controlled and let us be found waiting by loving others. Amen.



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## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27TH, 2021

READ: 1 JOHN 4: 7-21

"Love" - Written by Tatjana Christ-Stevens, Trinity UMC

Not being born or raised in the South, I use to get very offended when someone would use the word love casually.

I was taught early on two words not to use lightly. The word love was special in my life and was not used loosely. Neither was the opposite hate.

I believed both words conveyed such deep emotion they were only to be used sparingly. When I was questioning my faith and trying to learn more about what God represented, I needed something black and white to move forward in my faith. I spoke with one of the favorite men in my life. No, not my husband. This was my Father in Law, he gave me 6 simple words which he stated guided him through his life, "God is Love and Love is God." He told me, "If you understand how much Love God had for you, that would be a great start on your walk with the Lord."

I watched all my life the devotion and affection he had for people; through Joe's actions I saw God at work through him. That was 30 years ago, and this great man is no longer with us, but his words still live within me.

Those words helped me move forward, my hope is they may help you also. I am still learning about God's Love for us and what that sacrifice truly means. He gave his only begotten son for our salvation. Wow, just think about that for a minute. "Beloved, If God so loved us, we ought to Love one another (11)." I no longer have a problem with someone saying they love me as we need all the love we can get.

Prayer: Dear God, In a world so divided, I pray we all choose the word love.  
Let our actions show the Love of God. Amen.



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**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28TH, 2021**

**READ: PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1**

**REFLECTION DAY - Where is my citizenship?**



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.



**MONDAY, MARCH 1ST, 2021**

**READ: JOHN 1: 12**

**"Adoption Joy" - Written by Mickey and Tucker Moring, Trinity UMC**

Nine years ago I received a call from the Department of Family and Children's services wanting to know if I would be interested in adopting a little boy who was 3 years old. I laughed and almost fell out of my chair because as a single man, about to turn 50, carrying a diaper just did not appeal to me.

His Case worker played a trick on me by sending me a picture of this beautiful little boy. I talked with my family and we began to pray about the adoption. I was told he was adorable and a really smart little boy. After a long conversation with my mom and two sisters I felt that God was leading and opening doors for me to adopt this little boy.

As a family we began talking about our lives with a little child: buying supplies, toys, getting my house ready to meet this little boy. Every day I became more excited, and Matt, my older son, grew in excitement as well. Then the unbelievable happened.

The little boy's foster parents decided that they wanted to adopt the 3 year old. In the state of Georgia, the foster family that the child lives with for over a year, has first chance at adopting. The case worker called me while I was driving and began to tell me the news. I felt like my world had stopped. She was so sorry and told me that they had brought him to the office 5 times asking that he be moved. The foster family had agreed to keep him until they found an adopted home for him. Now, they said they had a change of heart and wanted the little boy.

The case worker told me that I could hire an attorney and allow a judge to make the decision. So I did, and the court date was set. Now please remember, I had never met the child but I knew God had opened so many doors already; I knew whatever happened, I would trust Him. It's a lot easier saying that now, but to be honest, it was the longest and most painful couple of weeks.

(continued)



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## MONDAY, MARCH 1ST, 2021 CONTINUED

"Adoption Joy" - Written by Mickey and Tucker Moring, Trinity UMC

Court day came and God was faithful. The foster family did not show up and the Judge looked at me and said, "Mr. Moring you have a little boy." The following weekend the Moring's met our newest member. I got to have Tuck for a visit on that Saturday and Sunday. It was like Christmas! We bought so many toys, and stuffed animals, and one very special stuffed animal called Mr. Lion. I told Tuck that Mr. Lion belonged to him, just as Tuck was my little boy.

Sunday night, Tuck went back to the foster family because I had our summer youth camp leaving for Dayton in the morning. It was the longest week of my life. We pulled back into town around 5:00 and I picked Tuck up around 6:15. That day, life began with Mickey having a 3 year old.

I was baptized as a dad by Tuck that first evening. Tuck taught me that when he needed to go to the bathroom, We needed to make our way right then, not after a few minutes. As I carried him to the restroom, I learned a very important lesson. Listen to him when he tells he has to go to the bathroom, or carry extra shirts for myself.

How does this relate to Lent and our relationship with God? In John 1:12, John tells us that we have the right to be called a child of God. With all of my boys I explain this verse in this way. When we put our faith in God, we become adopted by God. Because this adoption is a right, no one can take us away from God. God loves us, and shows what real love is when he died on the cross. The celebration follows on Easter Sunday, when Jesus comes out of the grave and fulfills our adoption.

Prayer: Dear God, we pray for all adopted children and families and children waiting to be adopted. May we all know the true love of Jesus and his forgiveness, as we prepare for his coming on Easter Sunday. Oh what a day that will be. Amen.



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## TUESDAY, MARCH 2ND, 2021

READ: GALATIANS 5: 19-23

"Gentleness" - Written by Michael Howell, Trinity UMC

We all have that story of preparing for a big event: Birthday, anniversary, or a major accomplishment. We have experienced the exhilaration of that day and the crash from physical exhaustion later in the afternoon. The moment where you lock the door to your house, put your sweat pants on, and curl up on the couch for as long as humanly possible. There is probably a high-five after the last guest leaves. There may be a close friend that hangs around to help clean up, but they are like family - thus the high-five. We've all been there.

But we all know the best ones. It's the one we did not have to prepare for. We just showed up and enjoyed it. For some, you wish you could have stayed longer and you probably still reminisce about. However, seldom is it life changing.

Jesus' death is the event of events. Only it's not - he arose from the dead and is ALIVE!! We celebrate that on Easter in euphoria.

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul distinguishes between a life in the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) and a life in the Spirit. On Easter, and every day, we have a life changing experience to consider. We have something to reminisce to the world about. Jesus loves you. All you have to do is accept his invitation, show up, and stay forever. You can even bring a friend.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your death and resurrection.  
Give me the strength to pursue the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.





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**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3RD, 2021**

**READ: PSALM 27:14**

**"Wait on the Lord" - Written by Nina Wheeler, 2nd Avenue UMC**

Years ago, a lady in Sunday School spoke of her frustration with living in her parents' basement though she had enough money to purchase a house. At that very moment, I wanted to shout, "WAIT on the Lord!" I was startled at how passionate I felt. Was it because my husband had just died from cancer and we had waited for the Lord to heal him? Don't get me wrong; the Lord did heal him in His way and in His timing. So, perhaps at that moment I understood that sometimes God asks us to wait.

You know about waiting: red lights, I-75 traffic, graduation, marriage, parenthood, retirement. Perhaps you are generally a patient person who has navigated life with ease. For many, though, patience is primarily developed over time.

Maybe you have waited long, even years, for something to happen, and you feel anxious, frustrated, and discouraged. Caution! Satan will try to set up shop and get you to move ahead of God, and deal with the situation yourself (the wrong way). If God isn't in it, there will be consequences for your actions. Now, don't expect Satan to sympathize—he will be celebrating. Worst yet, you'll miss out on God's better plan. We have only to look at the regret of Sarah and Abraham who used Hagar as a surrogate or at Moses who struck the rock twice to get water. (continued)



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## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3RD, 2021 (CONTINUED)

Focusing on our frustration distances us from the power and protection of our God. We fail to keep our focus on Him who has been patient, longsuffering, slow to anger, and merciful to us. During the 40 days of fasting in the wilderness when Satan foolishly hoped to tempt Jesus, He was steadfast in prayer and preparation for the task laid before Him. When we trust in God's promises and have confidence that He understands more than we can ever think or know, He will work things out and at the right time. We can possess patience only through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift, a fruit of the Spirit that is placed within the hearts of those who love the Lord and believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

So, when we make the right choice to be patient, how are we to wait? Read and think on His Word every day-- you will never be sorry. Actively do what is right in His sight, assume your responsibilities, and refrain from wrongdoing and wrong thinking. Seek the Lord...; Call upon Him...; Be still, and know that He is God.

PRAYER: All powerful, knowing, and loving God, faithful even in our unfaithfulness, forgive us and set our feet firmly on the path you would have us to go. Open our ears and our hearts to know when to go, when to proceed with caution, and when to stop and wait. We trust in your timing, your provision. Our hope is in You, and we thank you for this Lenten time to reflect on your compassion toward us, your patience, and we wait, committed, and expectantly looking for Your glorious return. Amen.



## THURSDAY, MARCH 4TH, 2021

**READ: ZECHARIAH 7: 9-12**

**"God's Expectation, Our Response?" - Written by Mrs. Lynda Boggs Climer, 2nd Avenue UMC**

In The Upper Room I read, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and God saw the light, that it was good." In my heart I heard, "Let there be kindness. Be kind. And I saw that it was good."

Mother's kindness was keeping the house. Daddy's was providing for us by buying and selling cattle. The kindest words I recall from Mother comforted me when my rabbit died. She said, "Snowball has gone where all good rabbits go." I learned kindness because I felt it.

Mrs. Turner gave Annette and me the kindest gift by saying "Sure" when asked if we could dig a 6' x 6' fallout shelter in her unused orchard. We had learned on a Girl Scout trip to Ranger Camp Wahsega that after Russia's 1957 Sputnik flight, we needed protection.

We dug all morning in the hard red clay and made a 6-inch deep square, but then we hit solid rock. Sitting there, we prayed that God would prevent nuclear war. In God's kindness, He has.

Jesus has called us as his disciples, and just as the first twelve, we are chosen and appointed to be fruit-bearers (John 15:16). Paul identifies this fruit, which includes kindness (Galatians 5:22-23). God works in us to get it done (Philippians 2:13). Undoubtedly it will mean plowing the clods (Hosea 11:12) of shyness, fear, selfishness, blindness, and pride. However, because God has demonstrated the ultimate kindness in giving Christ for us, our grateful response is to be kind.

Prayer : Lord Jesus, even when the world around us is mean and unpleasant, thank you for being our example to lean on. Today we humbly and boldly ask that your kindness transform all the ways we treat others. In Jesus' name, Amen!



**FRIDAY, MARCH 5TH, 2021**

**READ: PSALM 31:19**

**"God's Goodness" - Written by Jane Franssen, 2nd Avenue UMC**

When Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to live within us and guide us. If we allow the Spirit to enter our hearts, it will bring the fruits of the Spirit, the very character of Christ. One of those fruits is goodness. The dictionary describes goodness as kind, excellent, appropriate, and morally right.

We are given the gift of God's amazing goodness we don't earn it.

What do we do with this wonderful fruit? We share it!

When we have goodness within us, it shows and when we share it with others they see Christ through us. Goodness will always win against Evil. Praise God and share His goodness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I pray that the Holy Spirit will come into my heart and fill it with your goodness. Please give me the power to share Your goodness with those in need. Amen



## SATURDAY, MARCH 6TH, 2021

READ: LUKE 6: 43-49

"Faithfulness" - Written by Dennis Urquhart, 2nd Avenue UMC

As a Forester I have always enjoyed walking through a forest of mature healthy trees. These trees are usually very productive in terms of growth and fruit production (acorns, nuts, cones). They also have a very strong root system (foundation).

Just as these trees bear fruit and have a strong foundation, we as Christians also bear fruit, as we base our foundation on Christ. One such fruit is faithfulness to God, which can be a difficult journey.

So how do we strive to be faithful? We can grow in faithfulness by studying God's word with the help of the Holy Spirit. We can pray and ask for God's guidance and His will. Most important of all, we need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and continue growing as we obey His commands.

Think about how faithful you are to God. Think about what areas of your life you have not given control of to God. Finally ask God to help you understand His will and to help you in your faithfulness.

Prayer: Lord we ask that you help us submit our wills to yours and we ask for your guidance in becoming more faithful. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.



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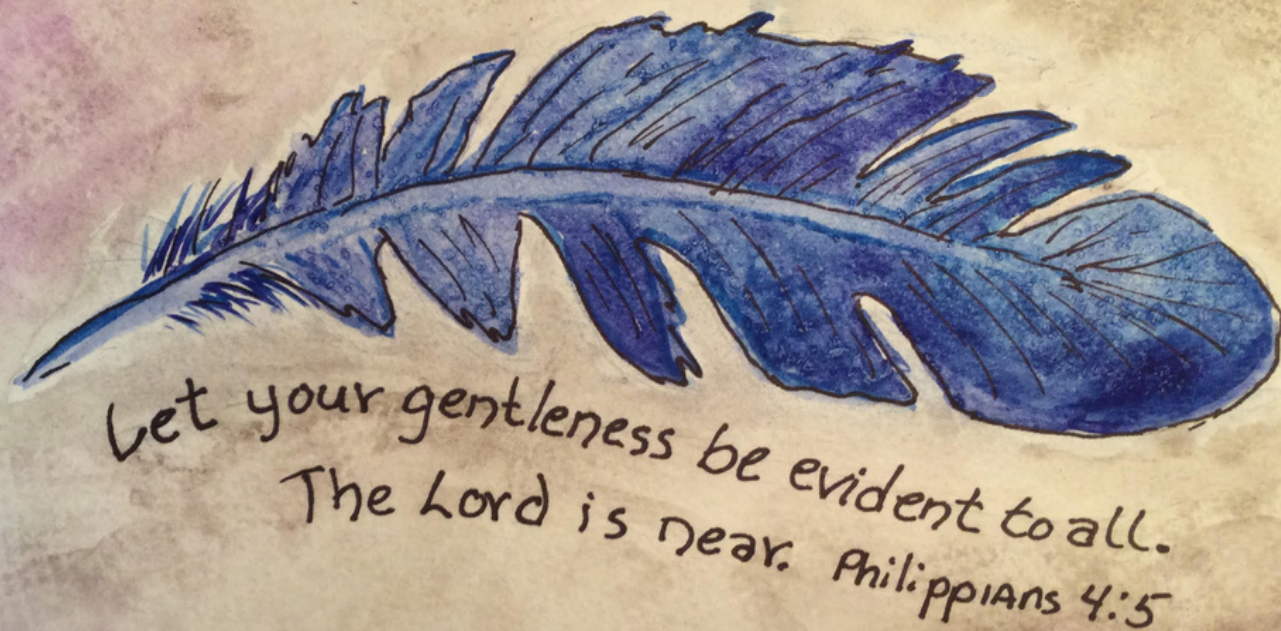
A Lenten Journey



**SUNDAY, MARCH 7TH, 2021**

**READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:5**

**REFLECTION DAY - Original Artwork by Vicki Embree, 2nd Avenue UMC**



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.





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**MONDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2021**

**READ: MATTHEW 6:26**

**"Joy" - Written by Beverly Woodward, 2nd Avenue UMC**

Whether my husband and I are at home or at the cabin on the mountain, we enjoy observing and listening to the birds. Len feeds them first thing when we arrive, before seeing to any other chores. On the porch he spends time doing various projects with wood, sometimes making a new birdhouse or feeder, or just repairing ones ravaged by some larger creature such as a squirrel or raccoon or even the crows! Before finishing up, he removes his work boots, turning them upside down to prevent wrens or phoebes from building nests in them and wasting their precious creative energy.

Recently, at a ZOOM Bible study, someone mentioned finding her greatest joy in nature, seeing the birds from her deck. In this time of Covid such activities have become quite universal! Everyone seems to be walking trails and looking for ways to be out of doors. We feel safer knowing the air is purer than indoors where poisonous droplets might be floating.

Not only this, but there is joy in physical movement such as simply walking! Our daughters in distant states taking their daily walks are hearing courting owls calling at dusk. We rejoice when they phone us to report such experiences and sightings!

This week while I sat reading, the loud bang of a bird hitting the glass door brought me to my feet! I saw a downy woodpecker, smallest of its species, lying still on the steps. (Decals help, but not always). It was a male, its scarlet head patch glinting in the sun. As in several times past, I reached down and cradled his small body and lovely black and white wings between my hands, hoping to feel a heartbeat. It wasn't obvious, his eyes were drooping, and I feared he was dying. I walked about, keeping him warm and stroking his tiny head with a finger, softly begging him to live. Momentarily his round eyes opened.

His body became tense with a flutter of his wings! I moved to a nearby bush, inviting him to perch, released my hands and he instantly flew to a tree! JOY!

(continued)

## MONDAY, MARCH 8TH, 2021 CONTINUED

So, what brings us joy? Yes, such a moment as that, as well as reaching out to our hurting fellow human beings! We all have experiences and feel the pleasure of giving and helping others. Such joys are blessings from above and mirror the teachings of Jesus we find throughout the New Testament. We marvel at His Miracles! But in our quiet and human way, we “do the small stuff” and receive the blessings of joy in return.

Years ago a New England Poet, Emily Dickinson, wrote, “Hope is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul,” another nod to our avian fellow creatures, and the thought makes me smile!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Holy Spirit that lives within us that we may resist the temptations of this world and have self-control. Amen.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 9TH, 2021**

**READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:8**

**"Self-Control" for Good - Written by Mike Colombo, 2nd Avenue UMC**

In 1976, then Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter did a famous interview with Playboy magazine, confessing that he had committed lust in his heart, echoing Jesus' words in Matthew 5:28 - "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." That interview created headlines nationwide and Carter himself said it may have narrowed his lead in the presidential race. From a Christian standpoint, of course, Carter was correctly discussing the whole idea of thought versus action and how what is in our head often leads to bad behavior. Few bad things that we do "just happen."

Self control is a fruit of the spirit but as humans I think we primarily view self control as a means of keeping us from doing bad things. There is nothing wrong with that, but I think there is a more positive way to look at self control. It also takes self control to do good things. Self control gets us to the YMCA at 6 a.m. Self control gets us to church on Sunday morning when we might not feel like being there.

Self control helps us create a consistent prayer life.

There is wisdom in the alcoholic who knows step one to stop drinking is never walking through the door of the liquor store. The person struggling to lose weight gets a gold star from me when they skip KFC for a healthier meal at Subway. That does take self control. The key to success is changing our desires, but that does not come easy.

About a year ago, my dentist yelled at me for my poor flossing. My gums were bleeding and I seldom ever flossed. So I started doing it. At the age of 61, I made something a habit that was by no means habitual.

If self control can make that happen, it can also lead me to read the Bible more, pray more, be kinder, be quieter, and be more helpful. So brothers and sisters, let us think of self control as a way to practice positive behaviors that bring us closer to God and to our loved ones. It's a fruit, not a harness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to have self-control when temptations draw near.  
Most importantly, help me to have self-control so that I may glorify you  
and bring people to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.





**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10TH, 2021**

**READ: GALATIANS 2:20**

**Written by Rev. Norv Havens, South Broad UMC**

Understanding our gift of Love. After the Civil War, a man very diligently attended to the grave of a man who fell in the battle of Chickamauga. He was once asked if this man had been his brother or a close friend or relative. "No," he said this man is special to me, because he died in my place. I was drafted into the army, but since my family had money, he volunteered to take my place, and he died for me.

This story should remind us of the great love of Jesus Christ, who died for all of us so we might live. You and I, being sinners, should have gone to the cross to die for our sins. Jesus volunteered to take our place. We live because of the gift of Christ's love.

Prayer: Father, may I always realize I live because of the gift of your love for us in your Son, Jesus our Lord. Amen



**THURSDAY, MARCH 11TH, 2021**

**READ: ROMANS 15:13**

**"Joy" - Written by Rev. Norv Havens, South Broad UMC**

In some definitions, joy is an emotion tied to our vibrant happiness. I really don't want my joy controlled by my emotions that vary from day to day. When we hear the word Joy in the Bible it takes on a deeper spiritual meaning of expressing God's goodness in our lives that is there regardless of our emotional status. God is transmitting our Joy by the power of his Spirit so my joy will overflow as a spiritual fruit, not an emotion depending on circumstances.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, allow your joy to come to me that I may recognize it as a gift of fruit given by your Spirit, not an emotion that depends on my circumstances. Amen

**FRIDAY, MARCH 12TH, 2021**

**READ: COLOSSIANS 1: 19-20**

**"Peace" - Submitted by South Broad UMC**

1. Peace with God

Jesus is our peace with God (Romans 5:1). Jesus restored our relationship when He took on our sins and died our death on the cross (Ephesians 2:14).

2. Peace with others

Jesus is our peace with others. In Him, we have reconciliation with others, live at peace with them (Colossians 1:19-20), have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:9) and can live with others in unity and one accord through the bonds of peace (Ephesians 4:3). He empowers us by His Spirit to be peacemakers with our neighbors, friends, and foes.

3. Peace with ourselves

Jesus is our peace within. He is making us whole and complete like Him (Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). When trials come to tear us apart, He is our peace that keeps us together (John 16:33).

-From Words of Faith, Hope & Love July, 2019

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13





## SATURDAY, MARCH 13TH, 2021

**READ: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:14**

**"Patience" - Written by Ruth Havens, South Broad UMC**

Patience - noun - the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.

I don't know about you, but there are times when I find it very hard to be patient. I find it easier to be patient with things - waiting for something to bake, dryer to be finished etc - than with people. It is also easier to be patient with some people over others.

Why? How does one choose who to be patient with? The answer is easy - God tells us to be patient with everyone. In the following versions of 1 Thessalonians 5:14, the wording may not be exactly the same, but it is quite clear we are to be patient with everyone.

New International Version - And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Common English Bible - Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are disorderly. Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone.

King James Version - Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

Revised Standard Version - And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

Newer version or old, God's message is the same - Be Patient with Everyone!

Prayer: O Lord, help me to be patient with everyone. Amen



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



**SUNDAY, MARCH 14TH, 2021**

**READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21**

**REFLECTION DAY - Am I living into being a new creation?**



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.



**MONDAY, MARCH 15TH, 2021**

**READ: EPHESIANS 4:32**

**"Kindness" - Submitted by South Broad UMC**

Kindness is a choice. Sometimes, when we feel happy or prosperous, we find it easy to be kind. Other times, when we are discouraged or tired, we can scarcely summon the energy to utter a single kind word. God intends that we make the conscious choice to treat others with kindness and respect, no matter our circumstances, no matter our emotions. Kindness, therefore, is a choice that we as Christians make every day. When we weave the thread of kindness into the very fabric of our lives, we give a priceless gift to others, and we give glory to the One who gave His life for us.

- From "Living the Psalms Day by Day" by Worthy Inspired a division of Worthy Media Inc. 2017; Prayer by Natalie Regoli

Prayer: Compassionate and gracious God, I ask for Your blessing in the area of my kindness and love that I show toward others. Please guide me to scriptures to pray and then reveal the people in my life who need love and kindness. Change my heart Lord, make it more like Yours. Amen.





**TUESDAY, MARCH 16TH, 2021**

**READ: LUKE 6:35**

**"Goodness" - Submitted by South Broad UMC**

Growing up, we were often told to “be good.” Maybe this looked like helping your mom with the household chores or getting good grades in school. Goodness is the quality of being virtuous or morally good. Goodness is action. The life of Jesus Christ is the perfect example of goodness, as He died on the cross for the sins of humanity in order to give us the gift of eternal life. His ministry and sacrifice is an example of God’s goodness toward mankind.

When we act out of true goodness of the heart, we are obedient to God’s commandments. Our actions come from a place of selflessness. We place the needs of others before our own. We do because it is the right thing to do, not because we expect something in return.

When we show goodness, we bring glory to God’s name. It is in these acts of goodness that we reflect Christ’s character and possess the fruit of the Spirit.

- From Lauren Abraham in Spiritual Life December 2015

Prayer: Father God, we don’t deserve all the goodness you have shown us. Inspire us to show true goodness to those we meet, whether we know them or not. Amen



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17TH, 2021

READ: DUETERONOMY 7:9

"Faithfulness" - Written by Ron Day, Rome 1st UMC

My cell phone rang. Without looking at the number, I pressed answer. "We have been trying to get in touch with you about your car warranty." For the 4th time this week – the same call was received.

Warranty...a guarantee issued to repair or replace if necessary; a contract; a promise.

Have you ever thought about how God repairs, replaces, makes a promise, a contractual agreement and remains faithful? Does God issue a warranty to you and to me? God IS faithful and keeps his covenant – His warranty. Unlike a car warranty, it is not limited. His salvation carries a full "bumper-to-bumper" coverage and comes with comprehensive faithfulness.

Even amid many long and hard miles we put on our travels with deviations and self-direction and the accidents we experience from time to time – we have full coverage with His promise of faithfulness to make things new.

We all from time to time are in need of some type of repair and He is quick to provide complete coverage. The terms of his policy states two things – to love and keep His commandments. Will you seek to love Him and keep His commandments and experience his faithfulness, knowing his promises are true and his grace fully covers you – with God's Warranty?

Prayer : Lord, thank you for your eternal faithfulness. Help me not forget that your promises are true yesterday, today, and forever. Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



## THURSDAY, MARCH 18TH, 2021

READ: MATTHEW 11: 28-30

"Gentleness" - Written by Zach Plants, Rome 1st UMC

I know that I do not speak alone when I say that 2020 was one rough year. I personally had to finish my undergraduate degree and start my graduate program mostly online—an avenue of learning I have never experienced before. Because of this I now have very blurred lines when it comes to work and personal life boundaries. It can be difficult to distinguish when my school/work life and personal life are starting and stopping. This has led to me becoming more and more exhausted way faster than usual which leads to the feelings of inadequacy.

However, when I read the ending of Matthew 11 I am reminded that these feelings of overwhelming exhaustion and inadequacy can be relinquished if we just take the time to be with our endlessly loving and gentle God

A class that I just finished at Candler was titled "Sabbath as Rest and Resistance" and we learned that the practice of intentionally revolving our life around Sabbath will lead to a more fruitful and God-filled life.

We often work so hard to be perfect which tends to end with us to being too harsh on ourselves and others. Actually taking the time to purposefully not do any work and only focus on ourselves, our communities, and our relationship with God is so important and will help us work on being more gentle and loving to ourselves and others.

Prayer: Lord, today we lift up our burdens to your gentle and humble heart. We ask that through your guidance we will become more gentle towards ourselves and our neighbors. We love you so much Lord, thank you for all of the ways you love us. Amen.





# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey

## FRIDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2021

READ: MATTHEW 4: 1-2

"Self-Control" - Written by Winifred Holland, Rome 1st UMC

At the beginning of the year, 2020 and continuing into 2021, we, the people, around the world have been pushed to our limits exercising self control in order to stay safe from the deadly disease, Covid-19. Yet resistances have been exercised against the guidelines that were put in place to help keep us safe from the deadly virus. Would we practice these precautions or look for reasons why not to practice guidelines? The lack of self control began to be apparent. People ignored life-saving guidelines because they failed to fit into their lifestyle.

Now our country is looking at sky rocketing deaths and hospital patients count. With resistance setting in, we as a nation suffered from a lack of self-control. What is the next move to stay safe and secure with an understanding of what our responsibilities are for ourselves and others?

Where do we begin in the practice of self-control?

Self-control maintains three components.

**Monitoring** involves one keeping track of the thoughts, feelings and actions.

**Standards** are guidelines that steer us toward desirable responses, and last

**Strength** refers to the energy needed to control our impulses. (Nathan De Walt Ph D) Effective self control hinges on all 3 ingredients.

We realize that self-control helps us to stay safe, and it is a normal part of our daily routine. We resist rules especially when they can remove us from our normal lifestyle. Self-control can mean we live or die. What are our choices?

We can think of many decisions Jesus made living out his earthly life. Those choices Jesus Christ made gave examples that all could follow. Jesus experienced the test in the Wilderness. Matthew 4:1-2. Jesus exercised all three components of self control as he was tested by the evil spirit. How will we mirror Jesus' acts of self-control in our own life?

Prayer: Dear God, Our Heavenly Father: We give thanks for our ability to make sacrifices that creates an environment of self control for all God's people. We know that the great spirit of love helps us to join hands and hearts in seeking the best for all. May we seek a determination to live and make decisions that enrich our life and lives throughout the world. We know that seeking self-control brings peace and love. Our world will be better for it. Amen.



## SATURDAY, MARCH 20TH, 2021

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 13: 4-6

"Love" - Written by Ivy Watters, Rome 1st UMC

Each year my friends and I give up something for Lent. Often, it's a food that we know would be hard to go without. While the challenge of giving up a favorite food is difficult, I'm not sure if the act really does anything to bring me closer to Jesus. This year I want to try something more meaningful.

My grandmother suffered a major stroke on December 15th and has been hospitalized ever since. Due to the pandemic, I have not been able to visit her. Prior to her stroke, I was often the one to run errands for her or deliver her a favorite treat. Spending time with her was always amusing and enjoyable. I've been thinking about her considerably since she's been away and when I read the first sentence of 1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient, love is kind.", I'm reminded of the kind of love she always shared with me.

To honor my grandmother and to live out the kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us, I am going to give up the things that prevent me from loving well. Love is patient, love is kind. So, for the Lenten season I am going to give up being impatient and unkind. In a world where we expect everything immediately and meanness is often the norm, I will have to be very intentional and prayerful to live out patience and kindness.

Prayer : God, help me to be patient and kind  
so that I can love like you love. Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



**SUNDAY, MARCH 21ST, 2021**

**READ: PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-14**

**REFLECTION DAY - Do I hold onto things or cast them away for Christ?**



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.





## MONDAY, MARCH 22ND, 2021

READ: MATTHEW 6:34

"Joy" - Written by Gaines Dempsey, Rome 1st UMC

There is a new enterprise in Rome called 'Java Joy'. My wife and I have had the privilege of sponsoring one of the first franchises of Java Joy in the country here in our community. Java Joy Rome has its headquarters on the Rome First United Methodist campus. Java Joy is a catering company that employs young adults with disabilities to serve coffee along with their unmatched Joy. Currently there are 20 young adults in Rome who are employed (many for the first time) and are sharing their gifts.

This effort should not be succeeding in the middle of a pandemic, but it is thriving. I believe it is because our community needs to experience Joy in these difficult times. The employees are called 'Joyristas' which is a play on the term barista, incorporating the Joy they give to every customer. The Joy is what keeps people coming back.

One of the common traits that most of the Joyristas have is a superpower to live in the present. Most of us live in constant worry about the future, about politics, about the economy, and so on. We struggle to enjoy the incredible gift of each day that we are given due to anxiety about things outside of our control. Anxiety and worry are the antithesis of Joy.

As with most parts of this project, I have received much more than I have given. I have received inspiration to focus on the task at hand and to appreciate the Joy of the present.

Prayer : Lord be with us in these uncertain times and help us to see the Joy and Beauty that surround us daily. Amen.



## TUESDAY, MARCH 23RD, 2021

**READ: EPHESIANS 2: 11-22**

**"Peace" - Written by Dr. Kirsten Taylor, Rome 1st UMC**

I enjoy traveling but, as much as I love the thrill of visiting new places, travel is also very humbling. I'm keenly aware that I'm the foreigner when I'm exploring an unfamiliar city where I don't speak or read the language. Even so, in most of my travels I've been treated with grace and hospitality, and I've come to understand how similar people are, no matter where they live, what language they speak, or even what religion they practice.

I've not traveled in well over a year, but I've been thinking a lot about belonging and peace lately, especially in our own society where we've experienced so many crises of late. Too many of us today treat those who don't think like us, even our literal neighbors, as unwelcome foreigners. We forget all that unites us, and we dwell on our differences. Peace seems so elusive!

Ephesians 2:11-22 discusses peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in ancient Israel, but its message of unity remains as relevant as ever. The Gentiles were once aliens in Israel, but through Christ, who is "our peace," the Jews and Gentiles were "made into one group." Christ "broke down the barrier of hatred that divided [them]" (v.14, CEB).

Just imagine what work Christ can accomplish here, if we open our hearts!

Prayer : Lord God, help me to break down barriers of hatred and division in my heart and in my community and to build peace and unity. Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24TH, 2021

READ: PSALM 25, ISAIAH 9:6-7, ECCLESIASTES 7:8-9, 1 THESSALONIANS 5: 14-15, JAMES 5:7, 2 PETER 3:1-13

### "Patience" - Written by John Ware II, Metropolitan UMC

We've all been there. What do we think when we have prayed and prayed, but the Lord doesn't seem to answer? As creatures limited by time, we often find waiting very frustrating and puzzling. However, God doesn't perceive time as we do. He knows the end of a matter even before it has begun. His knowledge reaches from eternity past to eternity future, and nothing is hidden from His sight. He sees us and knows our heart, even when we don't think he does.

Furthermore, God's compassion and lovingkindness surround all those who belong to him. . He allows difficult circumstances in our life, not to destroy us, but rather to build up our faith and bring us to spiritual maturity. Sometimes He withholds clarity and answers from us specifically because they are not spiritually beneficial for us.

The Psalmist teaches us that waiting on the Lord requires at least three things:

1. Instead of demanding that God do things our way, we must humble ourselves so that He can teach us His ways.
2. We must trust in the Lord's leadership, knowing that all His paths are established on His lovingkindness and truth.
3. We must be obedient to Him - which sometimes requires waiting and trusting.

If God seems too slow in answering our prayers, realize that He hasn't left us but is redirecting us onto His path.

Isaiah 40:31 tells us..."But those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint"

PRAYER: Lord God of hosts. Grant us the discernment of your wisdom to see that praying and waiting on the enlightenment of your guidance gives us strength and spiritual maturity. Help us to understand that the peace that surpasses all understanding comes from your holy and anointed word tempered with the patience and our continuous worship of you forever. In the name of the Father, who rules and super-rules our universe, the Son, that most magnificent Negro carpenter from Nazareth, and the Holy Spirit that eternally dwells in all our souls, Amen, Amen and Amen.



**THURSDAY, MARCH 25TH, 2021**

**READ: GALATIANS 5:22-23**

**"Are you Nice or Are You Kind?" - Written by Rosemary Shropshire,  
Metropolitan UMC**

Kindness is the quality of being friendly, generous and considerate. Biblical kindness is selfless compassion and merciful.

Love your Neighbor: Show kindness to Everyone. Every day show a smile on your face. Support someone, hold the door, help with packages, pay for a meal or do something good and unexpected.

This past nine to eleven months have been a change for all of us. We have done things different than we could ever imagine. We are home everyday, cannot go out freely, cannot worship at Church, attend meetings, go to work, visit our Family or Friends but in the midst of all we can pick up the phone and call someone and when we are out we can always be kind and considerate, speak, smile, start a conversation with someone you do not know. You never know how it will make someone feel. We are considered nice when we are polite but kindness is deeper. Kindness goes out of its way, a nice person will ask if you are hungry but a kind person will bring you food. Let us be both.

Thought: Be somebody who makes Everybody feel like somebody!

Prayer : Dear Lord help me to speak words of kindness.  
Give me the right words to say and do things you would have me to do.  
Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Amen



## FRIDAY, MARCH 26TH, 2021

READ: GENESIS 1:31

"God's Goodness" - Written by Clyde Spivey, Metropolitan UMC

When you think of the difference between good versus goodness there is a very distinct difference. When you say good you mean kind, virtuous, fine etc.; but when you talk about God's goodness it is some of the same but it is beyond measure. It is something that really can't always be described because God gives us immeasurable goodness. Goodness is the ability to do the right thing in every circumstance.

I had an opportunity to go on a Western Tour about three years ago where we toured about eight national parks. They all have their beauty and splendor as part of God's creation. Some had granite cliffs, waterfalls, clear streams, giant sequoia, groves, lakes, mountains, meadows, and glaciers.

When I think about the goodness of God who created heaven and earth my soul shouts hallelujah! Some of these parks were high in elevation where you felt so close to heaven that you would think you could reach out and touch the sky. A place where you could sit in isolation and worship God all by yourself. Encountering the **glory** of **God** is all about allowing **God** to give you the abundance of His presence.

The more I experienced God's goodness the more I want of Him. This is not a typical statement. For most of us, we are content with the little obstinate relationship that we have with God. Yet after encountering God in such marvelous ways, I long deeply to see more of God's glory.

Prayer: Thank you dear God for your grace, mercy and salvation.  
Your goodness endures forever. Amen.

**SATURDAY, MARCH 27TH, 2021**

**READ: EXODUS 34: 6-7**

**"Faithfulness" - Written by Vanessa Waddell, Metropolitan UMC**

We have been told in our life that when we are given lemons to make lemonade. This somehow teaches me love and patience. If I endure to the end, I will have a sweet and tart treat. God shows us if we have faith and push forward the reward is much greater in the end.

Over five years ago, I applied for a job I was qualified but for some strange reason I was overlooked. Looking back on my situation, God maybe saw I was not quite ready and needed to develop a little more. I understand now we don't always get to choose what happens in our life but when we put our faith in God good things will happen.

The faithfulness of God teaches us the storms in our live will align or cease in accordance with our faithfulness.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your faithfulness!! God I understand that when I give my ultimate "YES" to you, it can be a force for good in all arenas of my life. AMEN...





# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



**SUNDAY, MARCH 28TH, 2021**

**READ: LUKE 19:28-40**

**REFLECTION DAY - Do I shout "Hosanna" or "Crucify Him"?**



Prayer: Lord, let my roots run deep in You. Prune away the things in me that need to go.  
Let my life reflect the fruit of Your Spirit in words, thoughts, and actions. Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey



**MONDAY, MARCH 29TH, 2021**

**READ: PROVERBS 15:1; TITUS 3: 1-2**

**"Gentleness" - Written by Nathalie Nicolay Paris, Metropolitan UMC**

What words come to your mind when you hear the word Gentleness? Kindness? Mild mannered? Softness? Compassion? I realized, while studying the Word, that this Fruit of the Spirit commands love, trust, and respect! Gentleness is a powerful loving way of delivering messages while giving rise to trust and respect. I have come to recognize that I would be way more effective, persuasive, trusted, and respected if I delivered my messages with a kind and gentle voice; I would create better listeners if I learned to become a considerate speaker; I would follow the example of Christ if I acted with a kind and humble spirit; I would become a better witness to Christian Truth if I lived with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). Like a mother who sings gently to her child, let the words of my mouth kindly touch someone today, Lord.



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Let us show benevolence, goodwill, patience, and humility; let us watch our tone and speak decently so that our words convey peace, love, and respect. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen

**TUESDAY, MARCH 30TH, 2021**

**READ: 1 PETER 1: 13-15**

**"Self-Control" - Written by Sandra Copeland, Metropolitan UMC**

In our everyday lives we are met with many temptations. 1 Peter 1: 13-15 tells us to think clearly and have self-control. We constantly fight against the sin of losing control of our emotions, thoughts, and actions. Paul tells us in Galatians 5: 23 that we must have the fruit of the Spirit to have self-control. We need the Holy Spirit living in us.

Self-control is not easy. When we have the Holy Spirit living in us, we make a conscious decision to focus on the principles of the Bible. We avoid temptations when possible, control our anger, lustful thoughts, be kind when treated with unkindness, watch our tongue and care for others. Self-control gives us peace within the chaos of this world.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Holy Spirit that lives within us  
that we may resist the temptations of this world and have self-control. Amen.



**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31ST, 2021**

**READ: MATTHEW 23:37-39**

**"Jesus Weeping" - Written by Rev. Nanci Hicks, Trinity UMC**

Holy Week begins with Hosannahs and waving palms at Jesus, the King!

It ends in horror.

Ann Weems, in her book of poetry, *Kneeling in Jerusalem*, writes these words for reflection:

**JESUS WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM**

There is but one face  
Whose holy eyes  
Won't turn away,  
But focus on us  
And weep...Jesus, you!  
Like a mother hen  
Yearning to gather us to you,  
But we would not...  
For we have killed the prophets  
And stoned the messengers.  
Now abandoned and empty,  
The stones of the temple  
Waiting to fall  
Around our ankles,  
We still do not come  
To you,  
And, even now,  
You weep.

Holy Week can be difficult and significant to experience. Especially difficult is reflecting on expectations built and expectations dashed; culminating in the death of Jesus. The Disciples didn't know - they didn't know what we know. Their expectations were that all that was difficult and painful would immediately be set right through Jesus - on earth as it is in heaven. Reflecting on some of the difficulties and painful experiences in our community and in our world over the past 12 months, I know I have been impatient for everything to be set right. I find myself thinking; this isn't who we are! This isn't really real! Jesus' Disciples didn't know the week would end in horror. And they didn't know; the Holy Spirit would empower them to spread the Good News of resurrection, the Good News of life with Christ following those difficult days. Jesus still longs for His people to live into the hopes God has for us all. And He does indeed, weep even now - for us, with us, and sometimes because of us. How will you and I live into the future God hopes for us even when we don't know now what we will know one day? How will we have faith?

Prayer: Jesus, you are our friend. And we thank you for reaching out to us, being with us.  
Increase our faith that we may know we are forgiven  
and that we may live into the future to which you call us. Amen.



## MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 1ST, 2021

**READ: I CORINTHIANS 11:24-25**

**"Remembrance" - Written by Rev. Norv Havens, South Broad UMC**

Rosemary, a shrub of the mint family, is used for cooking and as a perfume. The ancients thought that it strengthened memory, so in folklore rosemary was a symbol of remembrance. As the name implies, the plant honors Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is good for us to remember. We are encouraged throughout scripture to remember. None is more direct than the words of institution Jesus used at the Last Supper. He gave His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Do we remember?

Yes, though we need not grow rosemary in our gardens to do so. The goodness of God surrounding us every day won't let us forget if we allow it.

The Holy Spirit in our hearts will bring Jesus' promises to our memory daily if we continue in God's Word. We can know what Jesus has done, is doing, and will continue to do, if we but allow him to remind us.

Prayer: Lord, let us remember. Let us remember the breaking of the bread and your body.  
Let us remember the taking of the cup, and the pouring of your blood. Amen.



## GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 2ND, 2021

**READ: JOHN 19:30**

**"So Hard to Say Goodbye" - Written by Rev. Shari Rates, Metropolitan UMC**

I will never forget that rainy night in 2015 as I sat in the pulpit of Rock Springs United Methodist Church in the Buford corridor. My phone which is always muted, kept flashing with an Atlanta telephone number; and I was not particularly anxious, but slightly concerned as we held our Maundy Thursday Service. Upon ending the service, I called the number on the phone and it was my parent's pastor alerting me that he had heard that my father had been taken to Atlanta Medical Center. I rushed in the torrential rain down to the hospital and eventually learned that dad had a broken hip. Devastated to hear this news, in that moment, I started the verbal and mental process of transitioning my parents from their current home - to live with me. But God had other plans for the outcome that Holy week. Dad was operated on Good Friday, and transitioned to Glory early Easter morning as I was preparing for our church's sunrise service.

If you have ever experienced the loss of a loved one; then you understand the inexplicable pain and associated numbness of having to say goodbye to those who have meant everything to us. No one wanted to hear the finite words, Jesus spoke when He said, "It is finished" 2000 years ago; and I did not want my father to have to give up his spirit Easter morning; but there are times and seasons for everything under the sun.

So what do we do with loss? Especially during pandemics, domestic and social unrest, and the fragile moments that call friends and loved ones on? We hope! We cling to the Old Rugged cross and we never forget the eternal promises Jesus left with us. And we claim the power of the Holy Comforter as our sustainer in times of need. We lean on each other and not our understanding and we trust that in the by-and-by all things will be made clear.

Prayer: Lord, though it is hard to say goodbye, we believe your promises in John 14:1-3; that tell our hearts to not be troubled, "believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be." Amen.





## HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 3RD, 2021

**READ: JOB 14:2**

**"By the Tomb" - Written by Rev. Dr. Millie L. Kim, 2nd Avenue UMC**

Almost seven years ago, I had a privilege of going to the Holy Land for the first time. Not on a tour but on foot with a backpack. I felt like just from reading the Bible and deep into biblical archeology that I was stepping into a familiar territory. My goal was to walk where Jesus walked from Nazareth to Capernaum and all over Jerusalem, especially the Old City.

We averaged about 15-20 miles a day on foot and I can show you the pictures of bloody blisters and dangling toe nails, but what I didn't and couldn't capture on camera remains to this day most vivid in my memory: the hospitality of people who hosted us, a Catholic couple who traveled thousands of miles to celebrate their 75th wedding anniversary at the Wedding Chapel of Cana, a whole community harvesting olives together, cactus walls which divided Arabs and Jews, running up the Snake Path to see the sunrise at Masada, etc. I really expected that I would be so attracted and impressed by the ruins of the old, but I was equally wowed by people, new constructions, and museums.

One of the most memorable incidents from this trip comes from an unexpected place, The Church of Holy Sepulchre. I say "unexpected," but what is unexpected about it? After all, it is the holiest site of Christianity. But this mortal, this skeptic went into it thinking, "This can't be the place where Jesus was buried and resurrected! It is too close to the city and too close to the Temple Mount." My head was full of Wikipedia, and my heart was full of doubt.

The moment I walked in, I was completely taken up by the mystery of the place, by the smell of burial spices, a large stone (The Stone of Unction), the way sunshine entered through the window and holes in that dark space, and then by the wailing of women. I found myself on my knees wailing with the women. It took me to the mystery of the very first Holy Saturday.

We are mortal, few of days, full of trouble, limited and ignorant. But when we believe, God takes us from Holy Saturday to glorious Easter!

Prayer: My God, help my unbelief!  
Take me from my darkest place to the glorious Easter! Amen.



# KEYS OF FRUITFUL LIVING

A Lenten Journey

## EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 4TH, 2021

READ: 1 PETER 1:3

**"He is Risen!" - Written by Rev. Robert Brown, Rome 1st UMC**

Easter changes everything! New Life, New Hope, New Beginnings – ALL because of God's Great Love in and through Jesus Christ.

"He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!" – The traditional Easter greeting usually shared at the beginning of the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! Easter 2020 was the first time in my adult life I did not gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus with a group of fellow believers. And this Easter, 2021 – (unless something miraculous happens between having written this and your reading of this devotional), we will not gather corporately to worship and celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

But, even if we do not gather, the lack of gathering does not negate the reality of Jesus' resurrection nor does it deny us the opportunity to celebrate and "be the Church" right where we are!

One of my favorite hymns is "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations" – the chorus of that hymn reminds us – "For the darkness shall turn to the dawning, and the dawning to noon day bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come on Earth, the kingdom of love and light!"

We Do Have a Story to Tell! It is the Old, Old Story of Jesus and His Love, and we have discovered (and will continue to discover and develop) new ways to tell the story from right where we are!

Easter changes everything, even when the familiar traditions surrounding Easter are changed! The power of God's Love that made the resurrection possible is still at work in and through you from right where you are!

Celebrate the GOOD NEWS! He is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed!

Easter changes everything!

Prayer: Help us to remember that We are Easter People, and that your great kingdom has come on Earth through Jesus Christ – a Kingdom of Love and Light! Help us to be love and light! Amen.