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WEEK ONE



WEEK ONE CELEBRATION
ASH WEDNESDAY



If you're going through this devotional with your family, you can visit uncoveringthelove.com, print out the questions and Scripture readings on separate slips of paper, and distribute them among your family members in order to involve everyone. Most of these components are simple enough for even small children to read alone or with help.



OPEN WITH A SIMPLE PRAYER.

LIGHT ALL SEVEN CANDLES ON YOUR LENTEN WREATH, IF USING ONE.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES ALOUD:

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” — Colossians 2:13–14

SOMEONE ASKS:

Why did Jesus have to die?

SOMEONE RESPONDS:

Jesus died to forgive us of our sins and cancel our debt.



TO SYMBOLIZE JESUS' DEATH, SNUFF OUT ONE CANDLE ON YOUR LENTEN WREATH, IF USING ONE.

TAKE TURNS READING THROUGH THIS PART OF THE GOSPEL STORY:

John 1:1–18



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

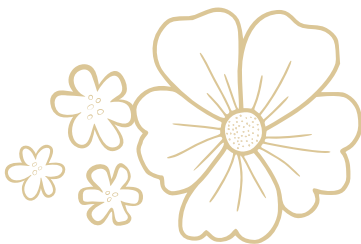
1. Today's text tells us that the law came through Moses; but Jesus brought God's grace and truth and invites us to become God's children. What does this tell us about God?
2. Whenever we break God's law, that's called sin. But Jesus offers us forgiveness through His death on the cross. What sins do you need to confess and ask Him to forgive?
3. What do you want to say in response to Jesus?



SING THE FOLLOWING SONG TOGETHER:

"Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" by Robert Lowry (1876)

As you begin reading the daily devotions this week, light all but one of the candles and thank Jesus for the ways He demonstrates His love toward you. After you've finished your daily reading and prayer, blow out the remaining candles.



JESUS LOVES PERFECTLY

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted by the devil.*

MATTHEW 4:1

Love never fails.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8

READ THE STORY: MATTHEW 4:1-11

From the first moment of creation, Jesus loved the humans He created. In the garden of Eden, God dwelled with them in perfect harmony. And even when Adam and Eve chose to rebel and disobey, He didn't stop loving them, but promised to redeem humanity and all of creation, so that we may live together again in perfect fellowship for all eternity. But between that promise in the garden and the fulfillment of that promise stretched thousands of years—of wandering, waiting, and wondering when God would come and make His home with humans again.

You likely know many stories of God's people longing for this relationship to be restored and botching attempts to maintain a loving relationship with God in the meantime. Think of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. Think of Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the many priests and kings who tried to lead God's people into a perfect relationship with God.

One failed attempt after another. One dashed hope after another. Who would come to rescue God's people from their sin? Who would restore humankind's relationship with God?

The question hangs in the air, unanswered for one generation after another.

And then Jesus enters the scene. After His public baptism, at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry on earth, the Spirit of God led Him into the wilderness for forty days of fasting, prayer, and obedience-training. Throughout Scripture, God's servants often faced this kind of extensive testing and preparation before public ministry. Consider Moses's fasting forty days and nights before receiving the law or Elijah's forty-day journey to the mountain of God before encountering Him in the whisper. But mostly, this wilderness experience would have called to the original hearer's mind the Israelites' forty-year wandering: they were in the wilderness because of their disobedience, and they failed test after test.



The tempter challenged Jesus to turn bread into stones, to jump off the temple, and to skip the pain and rejection He would endure by just bowing to him in worship. Jesus was famished, weak from hunger, heat, and thirst, and lonely from isolation. Yet at His most vulnerable point, Jesus declared His continuous trust in His heavenly Father, ending with an exclamation of love for Him:

“Be gone, Satan! For it is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” (Matt. 4:10 ESV)

The hell of hunger and loneliness would not affect Jesus’ love, loyalty, and trust in His Father’s provision.¹

Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Father’s purpose for His wilderness testing, because where God’s people failed to obey God time after time, Jesus demonstrated perfect trust and obedience every time.

And He did it all for love.

With that private victory in the wilderness Jesus launched His public ministry. He had won the first in a series of battles against the enemy of our souls, and He was establishing God’s kingdom so that everyone—young and old, poor and rich, sick and healthy, Jewish and pagan—would be welcomed in.



CHALLENGE

As you begin your own forty-day wilderness experience this Lent, take some time to consider: what are your expectations of God?

Of yourself?

Of your experience?

What role do you expect prayer and fasting to take? What questions do you have? What fears or uncertainty are in your heart?

How can you rest in Jesus' perfect obedience rather than trying to muster it up on your own?

Lastly, what does love have to do with your Lenten journey?

End by expressing your thoughts to Jesus in a written prayer, asking Him to help you uncover His perfect love in the weeks to come, helping you more fully accept His love for you and extend His love to others.

PRAYER

Precious Jesus, thank You for the great love with which You have loved me. You have perfectly accomplished what every human has failed to do, and so You've opened the way for me to experience God's perfect love. I confess my fears and uncertainty. Holy Spirit, lead me in my own wilderness journey; teach me perfect love and obedience. Reveal to me Your perfect love for me in Christ Jesus. Amen.



FOR FURTHER STUDY

Exodus 34:27–35; Deuteronomy 8:1–18; 1 Kings 19:1–21;
Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13; John 14:9–31;
Hebrews 4:14–5:10



JESUS INVITES US CLOSE

He appointed twelve that they might be with him.

MARK 3:14

“I have called you friends. . . . Love each other as I have loved you.”

JOHN 15:15, 12

READ THE STORY: MARK 3:13-19

First-century Israelites were familiar with this model of teacher and disciple. Bright young men who showed promise in their Torah studies could choose to apprentice themselves to a rabbi whose interpretation of the law best matched their own. It was a competitive career field that came with long hours and no pay, but also with the hope that a disciple would someday become a respected rabbi with his own disciples.²

But Jesus turned this whole system on its head.

He chose unqualified men—who, according to the customs of the day, had failed to advance in their religious education and



instead pursued vocational careers. Far from the model students most rabbis accepted as disciples, these twelve men were ordinary and unremarkable.³ But Jesus hand-picked each one of them: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16a).

As Creator of the universe, Jesus could have chosen any number of ways to establish His kingdom. Of all the possible options, one-on-one relationships seem to be the most inefficient method, from a pragmatic point of view.

But personal relationships with messy people is the way of love.

Jesus chose these twelve men not just to learn His doctrine but to experience His perfect love, because love changes people. Jesus bestowed on them honor and dignity that exceeded their merit, station, and education, even calling them His friends (John 15:15).

Jesus gathered these twelve men to *be* with Him. Day and night, mile after dusty mile, Jesus poured into them thousands of hours together, doing everything from mundane daily chores to teaching and healing and proclaiming God’s kingdom come on earth. Other people only had access to Jesus for a brief moment; a few others traveled with Jesus occasionally; but these twelve got to spend three years of their lives within arm’s reach of Jesus.

Yes, through His incarnational ministry on earth, Jesus brought healing and blessing to every person who sincerely sought Him. But to these twelve, Jesus revealed far more than He entrusted to

any of His other followers. He invited them behind closed doors to witness private miracles. He explained hard teachings to them. He answered their questions. And He even miraculously provided for them, from calming the angry sea to paying Peter's taxes.

Time with Jesus up close and personal changes us. You cannot spend hours with Love Himself and remain untouched. Even Jesus' opponents recognized this truth, for notice their reaction when Peter and John defend themselves after their arrest: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13 ESV). These men had been with Jesus. And it changed everything.

As humans, we are limited by time and space in giving our time to people we love. Being fully human, Jesus also limited this invitation to His twelve disciples during His public ministry on earth. But through His death, resurrection, and ascension to His Father, Jesus invites each of us—His disciples today—to experience the love of His presence through the gift of His Spirit within us, until the coming of that glorious day when He returns and we will see Him face-to-face. Oh what grace! Oh what love!





CHALLENGE

Of all the resources we have been given, time is the most precious. It seems basic to give someone your time and focused attention, but it also feels costly in some ways, doesn't it? To invite someone to share in your life, to see you behind closed doors, and to be your closest friend—that's a precious expression of love. Who is one person you can love in this way today?

PRAYER

Beloved Jesus, thank You for the privilege of being called to You as one of Your own. Thank You for Your Spirit within me, inviting me into fellowship with You. Though I have not seen You, my heart knows You, and I long for the day when I will see You face-to-face. Until then, fill me with the joy of Your presence. Make my heart hunger and thirst to spend time with You. And free me to love others freely with my presence and attention. Forgive me for the times I've been distracted, withholding the gift of my presence from those I love. Help me set aside anything that distracts me and to be fully present with the people You've placed in my life, to love them well. Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

John 1:1–18; 15:9–17; 1 Corinthians 13:12;

Hebrews 4:14–16; 1 John 1:1–4

JESUS DOES NOT BOAST

The master of the banquet tasted the water [Jesus had] turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

JOHN 2:9

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

MATTHEW 20:28

READ THE STORY: JOHN 2

Jesus and His disciples had been invited to a wedding, likely that of a close friend or family member. In Jewish culture, wedding celebrations lasted for days and days, even up to a week, and while some guests came and went, others would stay the whole time.

Of paramount importance to a feast is, of course, the food and drink. In a culture that emphasized hospitality, inviting as many



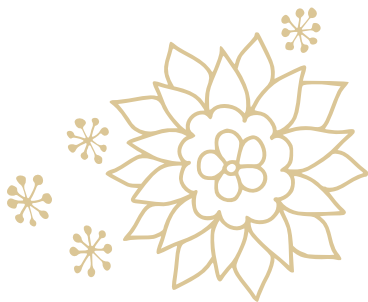
guests as possible brought honor to the bridal couple, but running out of food and drink would bring grave shame. However involved Mary was in the food preparations, she was quick to realize they had run out of wine and brings the matter to Jesus' attention.

Much has been made of Jesus' response to His mother, but what's clear is that He's establishing clear boundaries for His ministry: He takes orders from no one but His heavenly Father, and He will act only on His divine timetable. Yet, out of love, Jesus miraculously turns water into wine, saving the groom from public disgrace and humiliation, and also solidifying His disciples' faith in Him. Symbolically, Jesus is ushering in a new era, but few had witnessed the miracle to recognize the importance of the event.

What's fascinating in this narrative is that Jesus doesn't seek public recognition for His first miracle. When the master of ceremony tastes the new wine, he calls the groom aside and remarks on how much better this wine tastes compared to what had first been served. But the text explicitly states that he "did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew" (John 2:9). We don't even know if the groom knew where the wine came from. Because that wasn't the point. Not yet. There would be many miraculous signs and wonders to come that would publicly reveal Jesus as the Son of God who has authority over all of creation, yet this first miracle was purposed to reveal His glory to a select few, and also to save His friend from the public embarrassment of running out of fare for his wedding guests.⁴

If anyone had reason to boast, it was Jesus. If anyone would have been justified to make a grand entrance into public ministry with a grand miracle, it was Jesus.

Instead of manipulating people and events to orchestrate a grand entrance into public ministry, Jesus quietly provides for His friends' needs. Jesus didn't seek the spotlight; He didn't chase recognition or applause. He stayed in the shadows, quietly serving and providing, thus setting the tone for His public ministry to come: He had come to serve others, and He would do so at the cost of His very life.





CHALLENGE

Do you struggle with wanting public recognition for the ways you serve others? Do you find your heart longing for praise, likes, and follows? Or are you content to have your acts of love remain anonymous, known only to your heavenly Father and the handful who witness them? Choose someone to encourage or serve today, anonymously if possible, and relish the truth that your act of love is known by God—and that is enough.

PRAYER

Precious Jesus, Your call to humble love is convicting. I confess my desire to be seen and known and recognized. I confess the times I've boasted in my own sacrificial love instead of hiding in Yours. Help me be quick to recognize the needs of those around me, and to serve them without fanfare or expectation of thanks. May Your love fill me to overflowing, and may I bring much joy to You and those You love through me. Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Matthew 20:20–27; Luke 22:24–30; John 13:12–17;
Philippians 2:5–11





WEEK ONE ACTIVITIES

Ever wonder how to keep Easter centered on Jesus? The activities below range from hands-on crafts that help you better understand Scripture to new spins on ancient disciplines like fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. They can be used by adults or adapted for children. Pick one or more activities to prepare your heart to celebrate Jesus this Easter.

*** Ask God to reveal your hidden sins,** and write them on slips of paper, confessing each as you write. Acknowledge the gravity of your sins, then burn the papers in a jar and declare Christ's forgiveness over your life (1 John 1:9–10). Crush the ashes and mark ash crosses on your wrists to remember that Jesus bore your sins on the cross. Pour a little oil on a paper towel and wipe the crosses, reading Isaiah 61:1–3. Save the leftover ashes for next year's Ash Wednesday.

*** Create a Lenten candle wreath to use during family devotions.** This can be as simple or as elaborate as you'd like, with a single large pillar candle or seven small votive candles. Find multiple options and tutorials at uncoveringthelove.com.

✱ **Give up eating at restaurants** for the duration of Lent, opting instead for simple meals like soup and bread. Read Isaiah 58:6–7 and discuss the true fast that God wants from us. Place the money you save in an offering jar to buy grocery store gift cards for families in need.

✱ **Read through psalms of lament** (Psalms 12, 13, 44, 86) and use them to express to God what grieves your heart right now in your own life and in the world around you. Journal through the hurts you've experienced this past year, and allow our Great Physician to open the wounds and inspect them that He may heal them.

✱ **Talk to a professional Christian counselor to address deep hurts.** Find someone you trust to walk you through the deep and murky waters of sins committed against you, so that you may learn to forgive and heal and love again. Allow yourself to cry over and mourn the hurt and pain. Sin grieves God, and it can grieve us too.

BONUS CONTENT



Go to uncoveringthelove.com to find step-by-step tutorials, download a free printable activity sheet, and discover other helpful resources to observe Lent together as a family.