

A Verse to Live by

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

1 John 3:16 (ESV)

April Prayer Focus

This month, consider what it means to lay down our lives for the church family. Pray for God to give you the confidence and clarity to do what He has called you to do. We all have a spiritual gift, a way to serve the church. Spend time praying and seeking God's will for you in service to Him and His church. And continue to pray for God to open doors for our move to Faircrest.

Life Application Challenge

Now, let's take that prayer one step further. Start looking for ways to use your gifts and talents in our church. If you need training, ask members that may know how to do that. If you need guidance, contact Pastor Louise or a board member. Give your church family the opportunity to disciple you and bless you too!

Recommended Scripture Reading

This month read the 4 Gospel accounts of Jesus' last days with His disciples
Matthew 26-28
Mark 14-16
Luke 22-24
John 13-21

BROKEN *for you* Church On Fire!

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It Really Is Amazing Grace

Holy week is some of the most meaningful days for Christians. The week we reflect on and think about what our Savior did for us. Oh, how He loves us. He gave everything up so we could be reunited with our Heavenly Father.

And while it is a beautiful and sacred holiday, many Christians have questions about it. Why did Jesus have to die to reunite us with God? And why such a horrible death? It's hard to wrap our heads around that. Sometimes we may feel that it seems cruel of God, to ask His innocent, loving Son to die for us. Many feel their sins weren't bad enough to warrant that. We haven't raped, murdered, abused, or done other equally evil things. We often hear people say, "I am not a bad person, so why would Jesus have to die to save me?" Let's try to answer some of those questions, and the best place to start is with getting a better understanding of God's love for us.

We hear stories of heroes who've sacrificed their lives to save another. We feel sorrow for the trauma which brought that about, but also a deep respect for the sacrifice. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn. 15:13 NIV) Yet, what so many do not realize is that every one of us has a friend that did die to save us from death. How would it change their lives if they were told that Jesus loved them so much He died for them just so they could spend eternity with Him, and not because they were worthy, but they were WORTH IT to Him. So often, they are first told about how awful their sins are, and that it took Jesus's death on a cross to redeem them. This is true, but to an unbeliever, hard to comprehend. They feel judged, condemned and offended. I think it is better to start with the love story first, because we get enough condemnation from this world and rarely, if ever, any unconditional love. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (Jn. 3:17 NIV) People are definitely not needing more condemnation, but they sure are desperately needing more love.

God loved you so much that He sacrificed His only Son so *YOU* could be reunited to Him. He is truly *YOUR* Abba Father. We weren't worthy; we didn't deserve it. We aren't the top 1%; we may not be the VIPs in this world. The beautiful part is to God, we are so important, we matter so much, that we were worth saving. "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (Jn. 3:16 NLT) Even though that meant sending His Son to die an unfair, cruel death - hated by some of the very people He died for. Let that thought sink in a moment. But why did Jesus even have to be sacrificed? "For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face." (Ps. 11:7) God loves justice, and sin must be punished. "He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how

just and upright he is!" (Deut. 32:4) Justice is rooted in God's character; He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. This is where Jesus comes in, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Ro. 6:23 ESV) Grace - free, undeserved, forgiveness of our sins, no matter how big, bad or ugly they were. That is amazing my friends! How could God sacrifice Jesus, who was innocent and pure? "For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." (Heb. 7:26 ESV) Because God knew the ending! Jesus would rise again, and with Him, all of humanity had the opportunity to be redeemed and live with God eternally. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit." (1 Pet. 3:18 NIV)

But why did Jesus have to suffer a brutal crucifixion? Firstly, it shows us just how much Jesus was willing to go through to save us. That is how much we mean to Him! Jesus endured everything Christians today may face: from asking God to spare Him the suffering He was about to endure and having to accept that God wouldn't change the plan, to social rejection, betrayal by those He loved and did so much for, physical brokenness, being accused unjustly, and public humiliation. There is nothing we face which He has not suffered Himself. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15 ESV) Christians who suffer emotional or physical persecution for their faith can be assured that there is victory for them no matter the end. His example teaches us how to endure persecution and gives us hope that just as He suffered and was restored, we will be too, "After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you his eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever." (1 Pet. 5:10 TLB) Even in death we have victory, "... Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55 NIV)

Why did Jesus die for our sins if to us it didn't seem to really hurt anyone? One thing I have learned as I get older is that sin always hurts us way more than we realize, and hurts others. Our sins have a domino effect, and we don't always see all those consequences. We may tell a "little white" lie, and never realize the person we told that to found out and was deeply hurt by that. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Ro. 6:23 ESV); that could be the death of a relationship, trust, or even eternal. Thank God for the second part of that verse, "...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." And for that we proclaim, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15 NIV)

Watching God Work,

Carolyn Abel