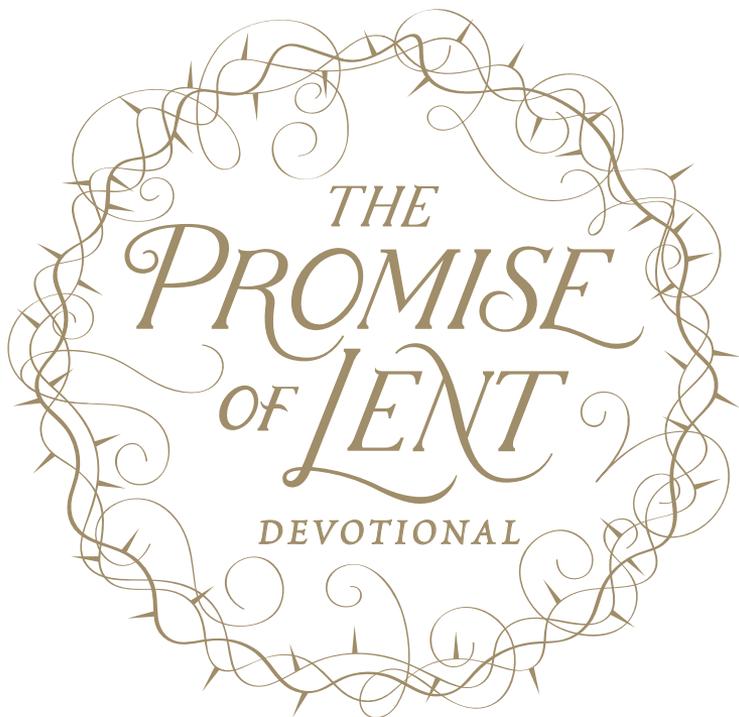


THE
PROMISE
OF LENT

DEVOTIONAL

A 40-DAY JOURNEY
TOWARD THE MIRACLE OF EASTER

CHRIS TIEGREEN



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The Promise of Lent Devotional: A 40-day Journey toward the Miracle of Easter

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INTRODUCTION

MANY EARLY CHRISTIANS prepared to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus with a season of repentance. Their practices varied widely from place to place and from time to time, but by the fourth century, the idea of spending forty days in preparation for Easter had crystallized into common practice. This Lenten season became a time of sobering reflection—on sins, on the death and decay of a world gone wrong, and on the hopeless condition we would be in without the intervention of God in Christ. Believers were encouraged to feel the full weight of these concepts by expressing repentance and denying themselves. It is perhaps the most solemn time of year for many Christians.

Lent is not meant to be depressing, however; it is meant to be reorienting.

Repentance is never an end in itself in God's Kingdom; it always leads to joy. It is an entry point into a new way of seeing, the beginning of an inner transformation that changes our vision and the direction of our lives. It may remind us of our disappointments for a moment, but it is meant to move us quickly into the light, where our eyes are filled with awe, wonder, and anticipation. Even the most sober-minded believer contemplating the themes of Lent realizes the ways God has turned them all toward his glory and our ultimate good. When we gaze at his true nature, everything changes. The past fades away, and our hearts are filled with hope.

That is the purpose of this devotional: to stir up the hope that God has given us in the midst of a fallen world. As believers, we are in continual transition between the trauma of the old creation and the glories of the new. We may feel the full weight of the old for a time, but it is temporary. The new will last forever. Lent is a time of transition, when we turn our eyes away from fading disappointments and toward the brilliant promises of God.

You will see many contrasting themes of the Lent and Easter season in these readings: death and resurrection, decay versus growth and life, frailty and weakness

becoming strength, temptation and the power to overcome it, temporality versus eternity, the old genesis and the new creation, our helplessness and God's provision, our faults under his forgiveness and mercy, and humanity's rebellion of pride versus Jesus' victory of humility. In many cases, these are more than a difference in perspective; they are issues we wrestle with every day.

This devotional follows the Lent calendar most commonly used in the United States, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, with Sundays celebrated as resurrection "breaks" in the forty-day period. Each reading is based on a brief biblical passage and is followed by a prayer, some reflection questions and thoughts, and a related quote from the church's long tradition of Lenten and Easter music. The prayers are simple, but if you will go through the process of sincerely voicing them, you will find God answering in subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways. Your times of reflection, even if brief, can be genuinely life-transforming.

Throughout these readings, let yourself both feel the experiences of the first Holy Week and see the big picture of God's redemptive plan. The "micro" perspective puts your senses into the story; the "macro" will inspire you

with the enormity of it all. This season is a special time on the calendar and certainly more than a ritual. It's a time to experience the wisdom and mercies of God. May he fill your heart, mind, and spirit with the fullness of his presence each day.

Ash Wednesday

DAY

1

CREATURES of DUST

GENESIS 3:17-19

You were made from dust, and to dust you will return.

GENESIS 3:19

THE HUMAN HEART is full of eternal hopes. Many people don't recognize them for what they are—longings for the Kingdom of Heaven and anticipation of living with God and his people forever—but everyone dreams. We were designed for such things; God put eternity in our hearts for a reason (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We *ought* to be filled with hope. But in spite of all our longings and desires, in spite of all the promises we have been given, Scripture reminds us of a fundamental truth from

its earliest pages: We are made of dust. And, as a consequence of humanity's primeval rebellion, to dust we will return.

Scripture portrays our creation from dust and explains why we must return to it, but even without reading its explanations we know the fact of our mortal condition. We are painfully jolted into awareness at every funeral and nagged with a reminder at every ache and pain that comes with age. We may be able to put our transient nature out of our minds for a surprisingly long time, especially when we're young, but eventually the quickening years overcome our denial. Like Abraham, we come face-to-face with God and are reminded of our materiality (Genesis 18:27). We know our innermost beings were made for more, but our outermost will return to earth. It's inevitable.

That thought has plagued humanity for centuries and driven many to despair. For those who believe in the Messiah who came to save us, however, it is merely a reminder of what our fate would have been without him. It's a remnant of the fall, not a lasting legacy. We have no

reason to be depressed anymore—not because we have overcome death and decay but because he has. The season of Lent is not a lamentation with no answer; it’s a reflection on what could have been but isn’t, a sobering celebration of how tragic losses are being redeemed. For the heart of faith, Lent reflections take the “bitter” out of bittersweet while reminding us it was there.

That’s a healthy balance. We don’t want to dwell on the painful side of redemption constantly; the gospel places a heavy emphasis on celebration and joy. But we’re always grateful for what the Messiah’s sacrifice saved us from and mindful of what it cost him. Our broken bodies came from dust and will return to it. But our true selves—the people we were created to be—will rejoice forever.

PRAYER

*Lord, remind me of my frail condition during this season.
Remind me even more of how you overcame it. May this be a
time of deep repentance and even deeper gratitude. Amen.*



REFLECTION

How often do you think about your mortality? In what ways can those thoughts encourage your faith rather than undermine it?

Further reading: Ecclesiastes 3:18-20



When once I must depart, do not depart from me;
when I must suffer death, then stand thou by me.

“ST. MATTHEW PASSION” BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH,
WORDS BY CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH HENRICI (PICANDER)