

# Lenten Devotional

# Do you love me?

## Ash Wednesday and Week One

*If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.* (Isaiah 58:10)

Isaiah sees the hurt of the people of Israel who feel forgotten and neglected by a God who claims to love them. The Israelites are seeking God's guidance during their time of confusion and darkness. Isaiah encourages the Israelites that through genuine compassion for those without food or comfort, they will again find the peace of God.

### PRAYER

Gracious God, in this season of Lent give us courage to seek those who do not have all that we do. As we reflect on the sacrifices Christ made for us, show us the sacrifices we can make so that everyone can see the light of your goodness and feel the warmth of your presence. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

Like the Israelites, we look for ways to see God's light once again amid economic struggles, health care challenges, and ongoing fighting overseas. The answer? Through One Great Hour of Sharing, we can give food to the hungry and help the afflicted. By our actions we will recognize our own potential for being a holy beacon of light.

## Week Two

*Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.* (27) (Matthew 25:40)

In this passage, Jesus equates two groups of people: "the least of these" and "those who are members of my family." Jesus declares that those who are without food, clothing, good health, or a place to call home are not just people in need, but our sisters and brothers. These strangers and have-nots of the world are the people most beloved by Jesus. This begs the question of how we respond to those who are strangers to us yet are most dear to Jesus.

### PRAYER

Holy God, we see strangers all around us in this world. Open our ears to hear the cries of the homeless and the sick. Open our hearts in compassion to those who are most precious to you. Guide our steps to those whom we can serve in your name. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

Because we have been equipped by God, we have the resources to connect with people who are currently strangers, but whom we will soon recognize as brothers and sisters in Christ. As donations go to provide housing or food through One Great Hour of Sharing, we will see a transformation of those around us from the hurting unknown to beloved neighbor.

## Week Three

*And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."* (Luke 15:6)

Why would we join in a celebration with a neighbor who has found one sheep when she never lost her other ninety-nine? When we have a plethora of goods and resources in our lives, we don't always remember the lost sheep of God's flock. Throughout Scripture, the metaphor of shepherd and sheep repeatedly describes God's relationship with us. Each person is a precious sheep to our shepherd-God who will search and search for those who are lost, and God will host lavish celebrations when the lost are gathered home.

### PRAYER

Shepherd God, we praise you that you search for lost sheep because they are so valuable to you. Send your Spirit into the world, teaching us to identify and to respond to those who are in desperate need of our hospitality and your grace. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

How do some people focus on the unconditional love of God when poverty and natural disasters are all around? Before we can celebrate over the lost sheep of God's flock, we must find those who feel lost and nurture them. With your friends and neighbors join with One Great Hour of Sharing to extend the feast so that we can rejoice together as those whom God has gathered in.

## Week Four

*So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.* (2 Corinthians 5:20a)

Teresa of Avila wrote, "Christ has no body on earth now but yours; no feet but yours; no hands but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion looks out into the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he is to go about doing good." If we answer "yes" when Christ asks us, "Do you love me?" then we must also answer "yes" to his next command: Feed my sheep. Although we are already reconciled to God through Jesus' sacrifice, we are called to continue to be the body of Christ in this world, discovering ways to reach out as ambassadors to all people.

### PRAYER

Loving God, we know that you deeply care for all the people of this earth. Give us the courage necessary to reach out to others as the body of Christ, fully committed to creating a people who glorify you with all we do. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

Sometimes it takes serious reflection to recognize ourselves as ambassadors of Christ. We must search for ways to become part of the tangible body of Christ. One Great Hour of Sharing is a visible way in which we participate in the ministry of Christ to our world.

# Lenten Devotional

# "Feed my sheep."

## Week Five:

*I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:4)*

Jeremiah conveys the promise of God to gather those who have been scattered by war and famine. God promises to gather together all those who are scattered and to give them a leader who will bring peace and remove fear. Most important, Jeremiah declares that no one shall be missing. All will be accounted for and valued by the God who makes these magnificent promises: those with whom we worship, as well as those in distant parts of the world whom we may never meet.

### PRAYER

Holy Spirit, let our hope that God will bring justice to the world wake us every morning. Let our hope that God will erase all fear put us to sleep every night. May our actions be constantly invigorated by our undying faith in the promises of God. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

We know that all of the sheep of God will be brought together where we will no longer experience oppression, exclusion, prejudice, and fear. Let our lives be a witness to this knowledge. One Great Hour of Sharing seeks to gather God's sheep around food, clean water, homes, and love. Let us ensure that no one is missing from the kingdom of God.

## Holy Week

*But David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep. (1 Samuel 17:15)*

When God used David to defeat the Philistine giant Goliath, David wasn't training to become a great warrior. As far as we know, David had no military experience whatsoever before saving the Israelites from the Philistines; no one expected bravery from him. However, because he stepped forward, God used a boy who was simply feeding his father's lambs and tending his father's sheep to bring salvation to the Israelites. For God, a lack of preparation has never been an impediment to achieving great things. When someone has courage in their faith, God can use them to change the world.

### PRAYER

Holy God, remove any doubts we have about the gifts, resources, and abilities you have given us. Help us to find ways in our daily lives to take care of your people and in doing so, may we transform the world for your sake. Amen.

### FAITH AND ACTION

Our society values money, education, and social status, but God does not. None of these is a prerequisite for participating in service to God's people. Let us challenge ourselves to set aside our excuses about why we can't make a difference to the people of God. Let us take this opportunity to participate in One Great Hour of Sharing, which provides assistance and resources to people across the world.

## Easter:

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34)*

We learn sacrificial, relentless, unconditional love because Jesus entered this world as a human, like us, and showed us how to love and be loved. Jesus taught us to heal the sick, to welcome the child and the foreigner, to forgive others, and to embrace those who are different from us. If we let it, the love that Jesus demonstrates can be revolutionary for our lives, ensuring that we learn not only to receive love, but also giving us a deep desire to transmit that love to all in God's world.

### PRAYER

Loving God, help us to follow your commandment to love one another. Focus us on your love so that we may enthusiastically live out your commandment our whole lives long.

### FAITH AND ACTION

Jesus' death and resurrection prove that God will not give up on us. Let us not give up, either, and recommit ourselves to provide for the future of people who are too often forgotten: those who are struggling, homeless, and hungry. Through programs such as One Great Hour of Sharing, we can use our energy and resources to respond in hope and trust to the God whose love never leaves us.

*Lent is a season of reflection, often associated with fasting and prayer. It is a time to take stock of our lives in light of Christ's life given for us.*

*Use this as a guide for Lenten prayers in your home, at meals, or at some other regular time of day.*

**Directions:** *Fold the paper into a triangular cylinder and stand it on end. Hold it in place with a paper clip. Use one panel for each of the weeks of Lent, turning it and refolding it as Lent progresses.*

