

Lent B • Theme 1: He Comes to Challenge • faithink.com

Use this devotion guide each night — on your own, with a partner, or with your family. Follow the five FAITH5 steps: **Share, Read, Talk, Pray, and Bless.**

Doing these devotions on your own? Adapt any “partner” references to reflect on a meaningful relationship in your life — a friend, sibling, parent, or someone you’re praying for.

DEVOTION ONE

Into the Wilderness

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

“And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.”

— Mark 1:12

3 TALK

Most people today live their lives bombarded by noise. From the first frantic moments when the radio alarm goes off in the morning to those exhausted moments before drifting off to sleep, there is little room for silence. Music plays in your head from dawn to dark. TVs blare. Phones glow. Advertising jumps out at you from billboards. Noise. You run from a house of noise to the car where a radio is blasting. You step from the car to a crowded workplace. Noise. Phones are ringing. Coworkers are talking. The café where you buy your latte is buzzing. Noise. You walk from space to noisy space. In every hallway, elevator, and room, you face the same assault on your senses—the same deafening background music. Noise. In such a world, where is there a moment for the still, small voice of God to break through? Where is there the opportunity to be alone with your beating heart? Where is there a chance to know the silence that centers? Is it planned regularly on your schedule? Or do you simply run from place to place at an ever-increasing pace, avoiding the quiet, healing medicine that your soul so desperately needs?

Jesus escaped into the wilderness before he began his amazing work. Immediately after his baptism, our Lord stepped into the silence of the wilderness. From the sacred space of that lonely place, he was tested, tempted, and tempered. He took the time to meet with the silence. Then he was ready for the world.

How can you know your calling if you never know the silence? How can you find who you are if you live as a stranger to the still? Maybe it is time for you to slow down, turn it all off, and step into the wilderness.

Learn to know the silence and you may begin to know yourself.

Questions:

1. Are you intentional about scheduling quiet times?

2. What can you do to schedule some silence into the noise of your world?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the sound of silence.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for the discovery that comes with silence.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you schedule silence. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful—you'll discover yourself."

— Alan Alda

DEVOTION TWO

Forty Days

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

“He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”

— Mark 1:13

3 TALK

Is wilderness a place to you, or is it more a state of mind? If you and your partner have been together for any length of time, you’ve probably faced some “wilderness” experiences. Chances are you’ve felt alone in the same house.

There is a wilderness of place filled with danger and isolation, but there is also a wilderness of the soul and mind. One can threaten your physical body, but the other is far more dangerous. It can threaten your eternity.

When Jesus went into the wilderness, he faced both physical and spiritual dangers. Hunger, thirst, and wild animals were bad enough, but Satan’s temptations were even worse. Jesus faced the tempter. He held on to his call from God, and when Satan left him, God sent angels to minister to him.

Where do you turn when you are weary? Where do you run when temptations come, Satan entices and the wild beasts of the world are nipping at your heels? You have a friend who has faced it all before and won. In his name and in his power, you don’t have to face all this alone.

His name is Jesus. He’s ready and waiting to face the wilderness with you.

Questions:

1. Tell about a time when you felt like you were in the “wilderness.”
2. Who are some of your angels? Who are messengers from God who help you when you face the wilderness?
3. What is God’s voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for promising to go with you through the wilderness of life.

Thank:

Thank Jesus specifically for the “angels” you mentioned in question 2 above.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you be an “angel” (messenger) of God for someone in the wilderness tomorrow. Bring your partner’s “lows” to God. Close in Jesus’ name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

“May you follow the path of Jesus.”

“Alone, all alone. Nobody, but nobody can make it out here alone.”

— Maya Angelou

DEVOTION THREE

God's Spell

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God..."

— Mark 1:14

3 TALK

Can you remember the first time you saw your partner? Did any sparks fly? Was there a magic between you, or did your relationship take time to evolve?

At the beginning of most relationships, love isn't something that takes any work at all. The attraction captures you like a spell. The love that takes work—the real love—is also the love that takes time. Love isn't magic. Real love is work.

The word Gospel comes from the Old English "gōdspel"—literally "good news" (gōd meaning good, spel meaning tidings or story). It's often affectionately (if not quite accurately) explained as "God's Spell," and in a way the name still fits: God's good news really does work like magic in a life. The Christian Gospel is not a set of words, liturgies, or magic incantations. God's special magic that sets the world free is none other than Jesus himself. Jesus didn't come simply to deliver a message about freedom from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jesus came to deliver that freedom. He didn't come to proclaim a message from God. His life, death, and resurrection were the message.

This "magic spell" of God does not come primarily in a book, although The Book reveals him. It does not come by going through the motions of a set of rituals, although the rituals of the church may bring you closer to him. The "magic" isn't a spell that comes through the repetition of special prayers, hymns, or chants, although prayers and liturgies can honor and reveal him. It isn't a feeling or emotion. Marshall McLuhan once said, "The medium is the message." It could not be more true than with Jesus. Jesus didn't come to talk about God's love. Jesus brought God's love in flesh to a world enslaved by sin and death. It is not following the ritual or practices of this teacher that sets you free. It is taking the message to heart—taking Christ's presence within—that changes and transforms everything.

The gospel is not the story of Jesus. The gospel is Jesus.

Questions:

1. How is your view of love, God, and magic different than when you were a child?
2. What does the last sentence in the devotional thought above mean to you?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the good news that sets the world free.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for being God's good news in flesh.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring Christ from your head to your heart. Ask for power in sharing Jesus with your friends. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"The medium is the message."

— Marshall McLuhan

DEVOTION FOUR

The Kingdom Is Near

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near..."

— Mark 1:15

3 TALK

Are the things that attracted you and your partner in the first place the same things that have kept you together? Did you "find" what you were looking for in that person, or did your partner help you "find" some things in yourself?

When Jesus came into the world, most people weren't looking for what they found in him. Here are some thoughts on what they expected, what they got and what he brought:

They were looking for the kingdom of God to appear. What they got was a mystical carpenter.

They were looking for the anointed Messiah. What they got was a crown of thorns.

They were looking for a powerful king. What they got was a suffering servant.

They were looking for a mighty liberator to crush the Romans. What they got was a teacher who told them to put away their swords.

They were looking for the glory of Jerusalem to be restored. What they got was an empty tomb.

They were looking for the kingdom of God to appear. It did, but they didn't see it because they were looking with eyes. And he brought it only to hearts.

Questions:

1. Are the reasons most couples get together the same reasons they stay together?
2. How was Jesus less than what the people were expecting? How was he more?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for sending a surprise in Jesus.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for being more than an earthly ruler. Thank him for the surprise gifts your partner has brought to your life.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see Christ's entrances to the heart, through the heart. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. God is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts."

— A. W. Tozer

DEVOTION FIVE

Repent and Believe

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"...repent, and believe in the good news."

— Mark 1:15b

3 TALK

"I'm so sorry," said Sheri as she stood in the doorway of her soon-to-be ex-fiancé's apartment. "It wasn't really a 'date.' My coworker and I just went out for dinner and a movie... and a drive in the moonlight."

"I'm sorry," said Tim as he fingered the boxing tickets and prepared to lie to his wife. "I'm going to be working late tonight and can't make it for dinner."

"I'm really sorry," said the car thief standing before the judge. "I'll never do it again." He wasn't really sorry about stealing the car. He was mostly sorry that he had stopped for gas instead of continuing on out of town.

What does it mean to repent? Literally, the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means to change your mind (*meta*=change, *noia*=mind). True repentance has very little to do with the words "I'm sorry." It has much more to do with the actions that follow the words.

When Jesus began his ministry, he tied repentance and faith together in the same breath. One might repent with one's lips, but one can only believe with the heart. If a life isn't changed by repentance, is the repentance real? If a life isn't transformed by the faith one claims, is the faith real?

Words and actions: they must go together. That's what integrity is all about.

Questions:

1. Tell about a time when you were truly sorry for hurting someone. How did your words and actions show your sorrow?
2. How can you tell when someone is truly sorry for something he or she has done?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for offering forgiveness in Christ.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for dying to give you life.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring you to true repentance. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"True repentance has a double aspect. It looks upon things past with a weeping eye, and upon the future with a watchful eye."

— Unknown

DEVOTION SIX

Hearing the Hard Truth

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all these things openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

— Mark 8:31-32

3 TALK

Would your partner describe you as a good listener? Do you hear both the words and the meaning behind the words?

Peter had a hearing problem. He only heard what he wanted to hear. The disciples had just come from the village of Caesarea Philippi where Peter proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah—God's holy, chosen Savior. Think of the joy the disciples must have felt! Their friend, teacher, and master was not simply a famous rabbi and healer. He was the one whom the prophets of old had foretold! This was God's chosen Savior of Israel. Surely, Jesus would soon take the throne, throw the Romans out of the country, and usher in a kingdom that would rival David and Solomon. This was his time, his moment! They, his friends, would certainly be elevated to key roles in the coming government. After all, they were his friends.

At this very moment, with visions of revolution and power in their minds, Jesus immediately crushed their delusions with talk about suffering and death. This was not on their political agenda. You can hardly blame Peter for not wanting to hear such talk coming from his new king. If Jesus' words were true, everything the disciples had hoped for, worked for and left their families for would end in suffering, shame, and death. The cross would be his throne. One can hardly blame him for telling Jesus off. Wouldn't you?

God's Word and will are sometimes very hard to hear. Do you hear it today?

Questions:

1. Talk about a time when someone dear to you didn't hear what you had to say.
2. Talk about a time when you didn't want to hear a hard truth. What happened?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the marvelous, difficult, amazing plan that brought Jesus to die.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for going to the cross to free you.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit for ears to hear the truth. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"I don't want to know the truth. I've already made up my mind!"

— Unknown

DEVOTION SEVEN

Get Behind Me, Satan!

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'"

— Mark 8:33

3 TALK

Do you ever get mixed messages from your partner? Peter must have felt that way in today's text. One minute Jesus was praising him, the next minute he was calling him Satan.

The disciples had been walking through Caesarea Philippi, one of the most beautiful and luxurious areas of Palestine. This ancient city sat high on a terrace overlooking the fertile Jordan River valley and was filled with impressive buildings, temples, and statues to pagan gods. Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27) when bold, bumbling Peter blurted out, "You are the Messiah!" With these words, Peter said what they all were thinking and hoping. The "Messiah" (in Greek, Christ) was the Hebrew word for God's anointed king. If Jesus was the Messiah, then they would all soon be part of God's mighty acts in restoring Israel to greatness. Jesus would usher in an everlasting kingdom, and they would help him rule.

When Jesus started talking about suffering and death, Peter blurted out again. This time he tried to tell his Lord to dispense with the negative language. It wasn't on his agenda. He wanted life, power, and riches out of his association with this amazing rabbi. He wanted Jesus on his own terms—not on God's terms. Now it was Jesus' turn to set the agenda straight. Anything or anyone who tried to get in the way of God's plans was Satan—a word meaning "adversary" or "the one opposed to God." Anyone attempting to turn God's plan into a personal power trip or financial gain was setting his sights too low. The disciples had earthly power on their minds. Jesus had eternal life and salvation for the world on his. They wanted something small and now for themselves. Jesus wanted nothing less than forever.

Questions:

1. When was the last time you said something that unintentionally hurt someone?
2. What can you do if you feel you are getting mixed messages?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for creating people with the capacity to comprehend the divine.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for the ability to look beyond the “here and now” and the power to focus on things that last.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help order your priorities. Bring your partner’s “lows” to God. Close in Jesus’ name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

“May you follow the path of Jesus.”

“Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”

— C. S. Lewis

DEVOTION EIGHT

Gaining and Losing the World

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'"

— Mark 8:34-35

3 TALK

When the Marines tell you they want a few good men/women, they don't promise a rose garden. They say it'll be the toughest job you'll ever love. They make no illusions about how tough the training will be, but they do promise college tuition, skills training, a decent wage, and benefits. Imagine how difficult their recruiting efforts would be if their slogan was, "Join the Marines. Face humiliating and torturous training, lose everything dear to you, watch your buddies fall one by one around you, then die an excruciating death." When Jesus used words like denial and cross, that was exactly the message he was giving his followers. The cross symbolized naked humiliation, excruciating suffering, and death. Why would anyone stay with him on a road like that?

There is a haunting line in William Percy's hymn, "They Cast Their Nets": "The peace of God, it is no peace, But strife closed in the sod. Yet, let us pray for but one thing: The marv'lous peace of God. The marv'lous peace of God."

Why would you follow Jesus to death? Because only Jesus can take you through death. Why would you accept such a radical call to discipleship? Because the grave is not the end. If you believe in forever, life is a blip on the screen, a drop in an infinite ocean, a grain of sand in an endless desert. If you believe in forever, death is not the end. Death is a door. Jesus holds the key.

No. Jesus is the key. Knowing him, following him, is all that matters.

Questions:

1. When you have made a commitment in your life, what did you gain and what did you lose?
2. What would you advise young couples planning a marriage?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the promise of eternity.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for facing the cross for you.

Ask:

Ask the Spirit to help you follow Christ's radical call. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"When our Lord Jesus bids us to come and follow Him, He bids us to come and die."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

DEVOTION NINE

Forfeiting Life

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

"For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

— Mark 8:36-37

3 TALK

Are you and your partner storing up the right stuff? Do the things you value and support you, or do they drag your relationship down?

The Lusitania was sinking. A German torpedo had struck the luxury liner, and the unthinkable was happening fast: in less than twenty minutes, she would be gone. People ran frantically from deck to deck to grab their valuables and find a lifeboat. Crew members shouted over the chaos: "Women and children to the lifeboats!"

In the panic, two women ran into their cabins to rescue what they could of their valuables. One fumbled to open her cabin safe. She pulled out box after box of jewelry, filled her pockets with diamonds, and wound heavy golden chains about her neck. The other woman started doing the same, then paused. A bowl of fruit sat atop her bureau. She dropped the jewels to the floor and filled her pockets with oranges before dashing out. That night one woman entered the near-freezing waters and sunk to the bottom under the weight of her precious jewels. The other swam to a distant boat with food that would keep her alive.

Questions:

1. If your house caught on fire, and you only had time to grab three things as you ran out, what would you take? Why?
2. If someone was to look at your home, lifestyle, and calendar, would they say you were storing up the right stuff? If not, what changes can you begin to make in your home? Your lifestyle? Your schedule?
3. What is God's voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for the gift of eternal life.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for helping you keep your priorities straight.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you organize your home, your lifestyle, and your schedule to reflect godly priorities. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"You can't have it all. Where would you put it?"

— Anonymous

DEVOTION TEN

Shame and Acknowledgment

1 SHARE

Your Highs & Lows for the day with one another.

2 READ

Scripture Verse and Highlight it in your Bible:

“Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

— Mark 8:38

3 TALK

When was the last time your partner embarrassed you in front of your friends? Here’s a parable about shame and love. See if you can see yourself and God in it:

“Drop me off a block from school,” said the teen.

“I can take you to the door,” objected her father.

“No, that’s all right. Just drop me here.”

The father pulled over to the curb. “It’s cold. I can take you closer.”

“Just let me out!” The girl didn’t want her friends to see the old car her father was driving. He had lost his job, and they had to downsize. She was ashamed of their car. She didn’t want her friends to see her father either. Besides, he might do something like kiss her or hug her in front of them. Talk about embarrassing!

“I love you,” said the father as she stepped from the car.

“I know,” said the teen. “Just don’t say stuff like that in front of my friends.”

The father blew his daughter a kiss as she rolled her eyes. Then the man who had cared for her since she was a baby—who had provided her with clothing to keep her warm, food to help her grow, braces for her crooked teeth, and a decent place to live—drove silently away.

Hurt.

Questions:

1. Tell about a time when you were embarrassed. Did anyone else know how you felt? Did that event have any long-term effects?
2. Compare and contrast the story above to your relationship with God.
3. What is God’s voice saying to you in the Bible reading? In the quotation?

4 PRAY

Use a *Praise / Thank / Ask* prayer:

Praise:

Praise God for giving, even when you don't deserve it.

Thank:

Thank Jesus for continuing to love you, even when you don't acknowledge him before others.

Ask:

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the courage to witness to the love of Christ with your partner, friends, and coworkers. Bring your partner's "lows" to God. Close in Jesus' name.

5 BLESS

Bless one another with the sign of the cross and say:

"May you follow the path of Jesus."

"The Gospel is not presented to mankind as an argument about religious principles. Nor is it offered as a philosophy of life. Christianity is a witness to certain facts—to events that have happened, to hopes that have been fulfilled, to realities that have been experienced, to a Person who has lived and died and been raised from the dead to reign for ever."

— Massey H. Shepherd, Jr.