

# Grace & Peace (February 19 – 23)

Lenten Devotions 2024

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*Note: Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.*

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## First Week of Lent — Monday, February 19

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Ephesians 1:7-10

### **The Mystery of His Will**

Do you like to read mystery books or watch mystery shows on TV? It can be fun to pit our detective skills against the hero of the book or show and see if we can unravel the mystery before the solution is revealed.

St. Paul said that God has a mystery and that He has shared it with us. This mystery is like a gem with many facets—Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah; God sending His Son to save us at just the right point in human history; the outpouring of the spiritual blessings we began to look at last week. Another facet of the gem shines into the future when God will wrap up human history and bring all things together under the authority of Christ.

This multi-faceted mystery means that you and I, as God's redeemed children, are part of something much, much bigger than our personal faith stories. We are among those who will bow the knee and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and King of all. Our voices will join to the praise of His glory, to the honor of His name. What a privilege!

If you ever doubt your worth or value, remember this: You have been bought with a price, the blood of the Lamb, and your voice will echo through eternity declaring the greatness of our Savior.

**Jesus, Lamb and Lord and King, may Your praise always be on my lips. Amen.**

## Tuesday, February 20

*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

Ephesians 1:11-12

### **The Gift of Hope**

We often use the word hope lightly. When we say, “I hope you have a good day” or “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow,” we are simply saying we wish it turns out that way. But when we *hope in Christ*, as today’s Scripture reading says, we are building on solid ground. The foundation for our hope is the completed work of Christ that delivers us from sin and reconciles us to the Father.

A few verses after today’s reading, Paul prays that the believers will know the hope to which they have been called. Later in his letter, Paul contrasts the time when the Ephesians had no hope with the joy and confidence they now have through their faith in Christ.

We, like the Ephesians, have every reason to be hopeful people. We can be full of hope because our status and our future are secured. We are children of God, and we are headed to heaven.

But what about in the meantime? What do we do when disappointment smacks us in the face or when illness or accident knocks us down? How do we stay hopeful then?

Paul shared a clear answer in his letter to the Christians at Corinth. **We view this life in light of the life to come.** *“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever “* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NLT).

**Dear Savior, Help me to keep my eyes on You so that my heart can be full of hope. Amen.**

## Wednesday, February 21

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

Ephesians 1:13-14

### **An Inheritance For All**

Do only the children in rich families receive an inheritance? If the parents are poor, they probably have nothing left at the end of their lives to leave to their children. So, some lucky folks get an inheritance and many, maybe most of us, don't.

But that's not the situation Paul is describing. The inheritance he is talking about is for all God's children, not just the rich or the firstborn or the favored. Everyone who trusts in Christ will receive the inheritance: eternal life—rich, fulfilling, sorrow-free life that will never end and which we will enjoy in the presence of our wonderful and faithful God.

And Paul says we don't have to worry about receiving this inheritance, because the Holy Spirit is our pledge, or down payment, guaranteeing the full salvation that is to come. The writer to the Hebrews explains that those who die in faith—from the Old Testament believers listed in Hebrews 11 to your loved ones who have gone before—have had a foretaste of the inheritance and will surely receive it fully in the heavenly city. *"These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar .... They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city"* (Hebrews 11:13, 16).

What a wonderful future we have to look forward to, to anticipate with joy, to await with patience. The waiting can be hard. The sorrow we feel when we think of loved ones who have passed is real. Yet our inheritance is coming—guaranteed!

**Dear Jesus, Thank You for securing my inheritance and reminding me that I can trust You to bring me into it at the right time. Amen.**

## Thursday, February 22

*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

Ephesians 1:15-16

### **Praying for Others**

“I’ll remember you in my prayers,” we often say to others. It is a promise that, I confess, I sometimes fail to keep. Of course, we pray when a crisis impacts someone we care about. Our prayers come quickly and naturally then. But later, when the crisis has passed, when things get back to normal, when we are caught up in our daily routines, we can forget to pray for others. Perhaps that is because we aren’t sure just what to pray for them.

The apostle Paul offers help. He wrote down what he prayed for the first-century believers, and we can pray in a similar way. Interestingly, his prayers didn’t focus on restoring physical health or overcoming calamities. Rather, he prayed for their spiritual wellbeing. Listen to his prayer requests. He prayed they would have:

- Spiritual wisdom and insight to grow in the knowledge of God
- Hearts flooded with light to grasp the hope God gives
- Understanding of the incredibly great power God has for those who believe

What excellent prayer starters! We can use them—and personalize them—as we pray for others.

And so, for you, my friend reading this today: **I pray that God will give you a fresh awareness of the depth of His love for you so that, whether you are sick or healthy, walking in joy or through sorrow, you will be comforted by the love of our Savior that brings you grace, mercy and peace. Amen.**

## Friday, February 23

*[God] raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*

Ephesians 1:20-21

### **Easter and Beyond**

It is only the first full week of Lent and yet, here is a glimpse of Easter! Writing after the Resurrection and Ascension, Paul declares that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him in heaven's highest place of honor, at God's own right hand. Not only is Christ our Risen Savior, He is Lord of everything. Every authority, any power, any other name, must bow in submission to the King of kings.

But Jesus isn't just sitting around in glory; He is active among us. Ephesians 1:22 continues: *"[God] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* This makes the reign of Jesus very personal; it includes you and me, everyone who is part of His body, which we call the church.

As we continue through the book of Ephesians, Paul will have more to say about the church and how we each have an important role within the body of Christ. For today, though, let's simply pause and be thankful that we know the rest of the story! On our Lenten journey, we walk with our Lord through His suffering and death, but we do so with absolute confidence that Christ is living and reigning over us, overall.

**Living Lord, Reign in Your church around the world, reign in Your people at Peace, reign in my heart. Amen.**