



THE SERVANT KING

2026 NAB LENT
DEVOTIONALS



Weeks 1-3



THE SERVANT KING: WEEKS 1–3

Whether it was Paul who wrote it or he was simply transcribing a hymn or poem he'd heard from others, Philippians 2:5–11 is one of the oldest pieces of poetry written specifically for the Christian Church. It speaks of Jesus's divinity, but rather than simply framing it through the lens of his kingship over all creation, it paints a picture of the Son of God as a humble servant – a servant king.

This poem isn't just important for our Christology – how we understand the person, nature, and role of Jesus – it's important for how we live our day-to-day lives. After all, Paul reminds us that this servanthood of Jesus is the exact same attitude we should have in our interactions with others and how we engage with the world around us, shaping what kinds of people we are to be.

Over the seven weeks of Lent, February 18 through April 4, join the entire North American Baptist Conference as we look at these seven verses, reflecting on and praying over each in turn as we prepare our hearts for Good Friday and the celebration of Easter Sunday.



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WEEK 1

February 18

The Heart of the Matter

By Michael Benson

**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
(Philippians 2:5)**

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. [. . .]

“And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”
(Matthew 6:1–6; 16–21 NLT)



If we are to “have the same attitude as Christ Jesus,” as Paul exhorts us to in Philippians 2:5, there seems to be no better place to start our Lenten journey than with the words of Jesus.

This passage in Matthew, like much of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, is focused on the heart, or motive, of our actions. Do we pray so we might be seen as people who are connected to God, or do we pray to align our hearts to his? Do we fast so we might be known as pious people, or is it out of a desire to grow in our reliance on the Spirit? Do we give to the needy or perform acts of charity so we might be seen as kind and caring, or are they acts that flow out of love of Jesus and neighbor?

The truth is, most of us likely fall somewhere in the middle of the two end points; rather than acting out of selfish ambition or acting purely altruistically to love and serve God and others, most of us perform these acts with a mix of both motives. This can make it easy to categorize others as hypocrites and ourselves as pious. We become like the child told to clean his room, who, after working for some time, goes to his mom to show off his results. When she arrives to check on his progress, she finds the mess tossed under the bed or shoved in the closet; there are certainly parts of the room that are clean, but in the mind of the parent, the room is still a mess, even if the kid only sees the parts that are spotless.

When we ignore those parts of ourselves that are hypocritical and focus only on the pious bits, we are being like that child.

In addition to Matthew 6, another passage part of the lectionary reading for today is Isaiah 58:1–12, where God castigates the Israelites for their supposed piety and humility when there are people who have been wrongly imprisoned, those who have been oppressed, and others who are homeless and hungry. Correcting these injustices is the kind of fasting God wants.

Jesus reminds us at the end of today’s passage, “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.”

Read Isaiah 58:1–12, then reread today’s passage in Matthew. What is your treasure? Where is the desire of your heart? Do you seek appearance of intimacy with God? Intimacy for its own sake? Or an intimacy that shapes us and drives us to act, addressing the wrongs of our world?

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

February 19

The Dust of the Rabbi

By Michael Benson

**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
(Philippians 2:5)**

One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him, and he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other ancient prophets risen from the dead.”

Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Peter replied, “You are the Messiah sent from God!”

Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was. “The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things,” he said. “He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.”

Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?” (Luke 9:18–25 NLT)

There is an old saying found in the Mishnah – a collection of rabbinic thoughts from the centuries around the time of Jesus – that translates to: “Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise; and powder thyself in the dust of their feet; and drink their words with thirstiness.”

Throughout the years, many scholars have talked about this passage as a picture of a person who invites the rabbi into their home, to sit at their feet and learn from them. Many other scholars, because of the specific meaning of the Hebrew word translated into English as “powder,” say it is a description of following so closely after your rabbi as he traverses the road between towns that you are covered in the dust kicked up by his feet.



Since it is impossible to know the original intent of the author of this saying, which version of dust-covering he intended, most modern commentaries on the Mishnah mention either reading is possible.

A better understanding, though, is that both meanings are crucial to being a good disciple.

We should be inviting Jesus into our homes so we might sit at his feet, like Mary in Luke 10, eagerly drinking up his words. We should be students, hanging on his every word, asking him questions, yearning to glean more of his wisdom, to take in more of his essence into ourselves.

But we should also be like the twelve, following Jesus around from town to village to city as he proclaimed the Good News through teachings and healings. They followed close after him on the road through the everyday moments – what Eugene Peterson calls “your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life.” They learned not just by listening but also by watching what he did, who he talked to, how he reacted to both the smooth roads and the potholes.

It is incredibly easy for us to say we are trying to be like Jesus, but truly seeking to follow him as if we were disciples requires much of us. Even as we glorify the time the disciples had with Jesus, many times we fall back into a rhythm in our own lives of being like Mary. It is great to sit at the feet of Jesus, to learn from him, but we must also follow him where he leads us, beyond the safety of our own home. We must venture out into our communities, and possibly even beyond them, to where God is inviting us, his twenty-first century disciples. We must follow where he is leading us.

To paraphrase Luke 9:23, we must give up our own way, take up our cross daily, and follow Jesus.

Are you willing to get up off the floor at Jesus’s feet and follow him out the front door into your community? What is causing you to second-guess setting aside your own plans and following his?

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

February 20

In Your Relationships with One Another

By Stu Streeter

**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
(Philippians 2:5)**

Shout out; do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they want God on their side.

“Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day
and oppress all your workers.

You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,



to undo the straps of the yoke,
 to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke?
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover them
 and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
 and your healing shall spring up quickly;
 your vindicator shall go before you;
 the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
 you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.” (Isaiah 58:1–9a NRSV)

As I write this, the world feels unbearably heavy. We are only days removed from another killing in Minneapolis involving immigration enforcement. A decade of unrest continues in our beloved Cameroon. Ukraine and Russia remain locked in violence. And my brothers and sisters in Canada feel the strain of an America whose rhetoric increasingly threatens their sense of freedom. This is only a fraction of the conflict and suffering unfolding across our beautiful world.

I want to be clear: I have no great wisdom to offer on these complex realities. I don’t pretend to have prophetic clarity or tidy solutions. But this much I do know—*having the mindset of Christ Jesus in my relationships*, as the NIV translation of Philippians 2:5 puts it, *feels especially challenging right now*.

If I’m honest, when I was reading the verse, my instinct was to rush ahead. “Tell me how, Paul. Give me the steps. Show me what to do.” But instead, I sensed the Spirit gently whisper, “*Stay here.*”

Stay with the question.

What would the mindset of Christ actually look like in your relationships?

That question has been quietly unsettling me.

I think of how I’ve spoken—sometimes dismissively—about a friend who sees immigration very differently than I do.

I notice my indignation toward those who seem unmoved by the suffering of our Cameroonian sisters and brothers.

I feel the weight of the American arrogance I know I've carried into conversations with Canadian friends.

I could list more. But even this small exercise reminds me that instruction from God's Word only bears fruit when my heart is softened enough to receive it.

One of today's lectionary readings comes from Isaiah 58, where God confronts a people who are very busy with religious activity but resistant to inner transformation:

“You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist. [. . .]
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?”

The questions keep coming—not as condemnation, but as a gracious invitation. God's corrective whisper calls me beyond confession alone and into submission: a willingness to be set on a new course, one that more faithfully walks the narrow way of our Savior.

Philippians 2 will eventually lead us to the stunning humility of Christ—his self-emptying, his obedience, his cross. But verse 5 stops us first and asks whether we are willing to *think* like him before we try to act for him.

As we continue this Lenten journey and prepare our hearts for the feast of our resurrected King, it is wise—for me, especially—to pause and ask:

Is my mindset truly that of Christ Jesus?

Are my religious practices, fasting included, forming humility within me?

Are they loosening the bonds of injustice and breaking yokes of oppression?

May the peaceful, self-giving way of Christ transform us all.

Stu Streeter is the VP of Church Multiplication and Ministry Advancement.

February 21

No Undesirables

By Karen Wilk

**You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.
(Philippians 2:5)**

As you begin, pause, take a deep breath, invite the Spirit's leading, and focus your attention on the text.

What words or phrases stand out to you (is the Spirit highlighting)? Why do you think they are catching your attention?

What are you wondering about as you ponder the text?

Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

Later, Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests also ate with them. But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with such scum?"

Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent." (Luke 5:27–32 NLT)

In Jesus's day, the Pharisees and the Sadducees expected people to obey all 613 laws – and their interpretation of them – if they wanted to be considered part of so-called 'true' Israel. In other words, to be acceptable, you had to do things *their way* – wear clothes, do your hair, listen to music, pray, eat your lunch, wash your hands, etc. – or else! Those who fell short, like Levi and his friends in this story, were labelled 'scum' and, as such, were excluded, rejected, and condemned. It was as if the religious leaders had posted a sign in bold letters around their holy huddle that read: NO UNDESIRABLES!



Yet, when Jesus comes among, welcoming and eating with *those* kinds of people, we discover that God’s ‘chosen’ don’t necessarily fit within our boxes or boundaries. In fact, according to Jesus, God’s Kingdom was and is quite different from how we often frame and package it – both then and now. For example, God’s Kingdom, as it turns out, is not about the love of law but about *the law of love*.

This contrary understanding was a hard reality for the religious leaders to embrace, perhaps a bit like us acknowledging that our computer is almost as outdated as wall phones, even though we just got it! It can’t really be so, can it? But the One calling is the One who “though he was God, did not think of equality with God as something to cling to” (Philippians 2:6).

And Jesus’s call in Luke 5:32 is not only an invitation to healing and an inclusive and abundant Table but to a leave-everything-and-follow contrary way of life, through which we discover and participate in God’s Kingdom near at hand, the redemption of all things.

It’s like Jesus was adding something to the sign that changed everything. It read: THERE ARE NO UNDESIRABLES in the Kingdom of God. This was the good news Jesus embodied, taught in word and deed, and died to secure for all time and all people.

The question is: where are we in this story – and which sign are we posting?

Love Eternal, Love Divine.
 Love pursuing a heart like mine.
 The Christ.
 Grace though disgraced.
 Robbed yet rich in acceptance.
 Extending Generosity before repentance.
 Securing Relationship not the law.
 Compassion never to withdraw.
 Undeserved. Unearned. Undeniable.
 No one labelled undesirable.
 Relentless. Agonizing.
 Reliable.
 Love Eternal, Love Divine.
 Love pursuing a heart like mine.

Dr. Karen Wilk is on the NAB Missional Initiatives Team in the area of Neighbourhood Life.



WEEK 2

February 22

Sabbath: Luke 4:1–13

As we mark the weekly sabbath rest during this Lenten season, take time to meditate on today's passage, reflecting on how it relates to Philippians 2:5–11. Read it over a few times, being mindful of where the Holy Spirit invites you to pause to consider what he wants to speak into your life today.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11 NLT)

Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone.'"



Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say,

‘You must worship the Lord your God
and serve only him.’”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you.
And they will hold you up with their hands
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’”

When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came. (Luke 4:1–13 NLT)



February 23

Be Holy

By Zach McAlack

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

The LORD also said to Moses, “Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. [. . .]

“Do not steal.

“Do not deceive or cheat one another.

“Do not bring shame on the name of your God by using it to swear falsely. I am the LORD.

“Do not defraud or rob your neighbor.

“Do not make your hired workers wait until the next day to receive their pay.

“Do not insult the deaf or cause the blind to stumble. You must fear your God; I am the LORD.

“Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly.

“Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people.

“Do not stand idly by when your neighbor’s life is threatened. I am the LORD.

“Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18 NLT)



The recurring command, “Be holy, for I am holy,” serves as the motto of the Book of Leviticus, echoing throughout its chapters. Holiness is often thought of as piety or moral integrity—a careful organization of one’s life around certain principles. We might picture a holy person as someone who chooses isolation to devote time to God, equating strict devotion with holiness.

However, the holiness presented in Leviticus 19 is not about withdrawing from the world but about engaging with it. The chapter opens with a call to be holy as God is holy, then lays out two pictures of what that means. The first section describes how God is to be worshipped, focusing on sacrifices and ritual. The second section, beginning after verse 8, shifts to responsibility for caring for the needy. This section repeatedly reinforces the laws with the phrase, “I am Yahweh your God,” emphasizing that God’s character sets the standard for human behavior. Each law is tied to God’s identity, confirming: “This is who I am, and this is why you are.” The chapter concludes with, “Observe my statutes and my rules and do them. I am Yahweh.”

By combining laws for ritual with statutes for social care, Leviticus redefines holiness—not as an abstract or mystical idea that leads to detachment but as a way of seeing God in all things and worshipping God through everyday actions, especially in how we treat others.

Jesus later echoes this theme in his ministry. When describing who is welcomed into his Kingdom, Jesus does not focus on personal piety or isolation. Instead, he defines holiness by how people treat their fellow humans—especially those who are hurting, vulnerable, or defenseless. For Jesus, the proof of holiness is not found in internal righteousness but in outward acts of justice and compassion. In other words, Jesus views the heart through the actions of the individual; holiness is demonstrated in how we act toward others.

Zach McAlack is the lead pastor of Table of Life Church in Easton, Pennsylvania.

February 24

The Attitude of Jesus

By Cam Roxburgh

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. [. . .] Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.” (John 15:1, 6–16 NLT)

When I was 21, I was playing soccer on tour in Romania. Romania was still under communist rule, so our team from the West was heavily guarded. We were assigned a chaperone who had been an elite soccer coach by the name of Victor. Everyone knew his incredible status. More than once we benefited from that status when he would get what he wanted by declaring, “*I am Victor*,” in the best Romanian accent you can imagine.



On one occasion, we were taken to the top soccer game of the season. Victor cleared out a row of people with the best seats in the house. They had paid for the tickets, where we had not. They had to move because he declared, “*I am Victor!*” When we were pulled over by the police, we received the same benefit. No ticket and no hassle because – “*I am Victor!*”

In the beautiful Christological section of Philippians 2:5–11, after being exhorted to have the same attitude as Christ, Paul describes that attitude in verse 6: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (NIV).

Paul is clear – Jesus is divine. That is his status. He does not need to strive to become like God, because he already is God. It is in that divinity that we see an attitude or a posture shine.

By not using his status, Jesus sought to glorify the Father. He could have used that status for his own glory, but instead he fought to maintain the glory of the Father. At the beginning of the Gospels, Jesus is tempted to use his divinity to make himself known but resists for the sake of the Father and the Kingdom. At the end of his time on Earth, we see him go to the cross and have the same attitude. He chose not to glorify himself so that the Father would be glorified.

And we are to have the same attitude. From the beginning of time, we as humans have been the opposite. We’ve sought to be like God in reputation. Empire sought to replace Kingdom in Genesis 3. This attitude is on display in at least three ways even today.

First, we seek status or reputation. We name drop or climb the ladder by putting others down. We seek our own reputation, though this attitude is opposite to that of Christ Jesus.

Second, we desire to use our power to control. This was on full display every time Victor declared, “*I am Victor!*”

Third, even when we have little status or power, we demand our rights, thinking this is normal. A 1950s missionary book by Mabel Williamson entitled *Have We No Rights?* discusses the very issue that our attitudes in the West, when we demand our rights, flies in the face of the example Jesus was setting for us in Philippians 2:6.

May we seek to have the attitude of Christ in all we do. May we remain in Jesus so we might produce good fruit, not for our own glory but for the glory of the Father.

Cam Roxburgh is the VP of Missional Initiatives.



February 25

Positions of Service

By Terry Okken

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.”

This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!” The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes. Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city:

“No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. People and animals alike must wear garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.”

When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened. (Jonah 3 NLT)

I’ve had the privilege of knowing two people who, despite being in positions where they could be seen as important or held power over others, could often be found taking on tasks “below their status” or helping people in need.



Tom would park two blocks from his office to ensure the close parking spaces were available for visitors. On his way to his office, he would pick up any garbage that was on the grass or sidewalk and put it in a garbage can. If he were stopped on his way to his office by someone asking for directions, he wouldn't just point them where to go; he would take them to their destination, even if it meant he would be late for an appointment. Tom was the president of the university I worked for.

Dale offered me my first real, paying job. In the morning, he would assign the different tasks we needed to tackle that day. As the hired hand, I expected to be given the jobs that were not very glamorous and usually hard and dirty. But on more days than not, Dale would give himself the dirty jobs and let me have the air-conditioned tractor or the “easier” jobs for the day. Dale owned a dairy farm, and he could have given me all the menial jobs and kept the easier ones for himself. After all, he owned the farm and had put in his time.

Both men modelled for me the essence of Philippians 2:6 and the idea of Jesus being a servant King. These men didn't take their positions – one being the president of a university, the other the owner of a dairy farm – as something they should exploit. Instead, they modelled humility and self-sacrifice. Their examples inspired me and others to live our lives in similar ways.

I have held many different roles and positions, and I have tried to remember that my role or position does not elevate who I am and I should be quick to serve rather than expect to be served.

Today, as you reflect on this week's verse and today's passage, what do you sense God asking you to pay attention to? Has an attitude of entitlement crept into your life? Are you looking for opportunities to serve those around you? Where are you demonstrating a similar heart attitude as Jesus, exhibiting humility, self-sacrifice, and a willingness to be obedient to the will of God?

Terry Okken is the NAB director of Ministry Advancement.

February 26

Humility over Power

By Michael Benson

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

“You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

“Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:7–12 NLT)

Jesus did not come to Earth thinking of himself as better than the rest of us. Of course, being that he is fully God and fully man, he *is* better than all of us. However, he did not walk around basking in his divinity or rubbing it in our faces; in fact, he often worked to keep that facet of himself unrevealed for as long as he could. In Matthew 8, Jesus instructs a man he heals of leprosy to tell no one how he was healed. In Mark 8, after Peter professes his belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the disciples are told not to tell anyone. A chapter later, as Peter, James, and John are following Jesus down the mountain after his transfiguration, he repeats that command: “he told them not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (Mark 9:9).

Even as he was illustrating the power of the Spirit manifest in his life through teachings, active love through embracing even those rejected by the most religious, and miracles beyond what even Elijah and Elisha could boast, Jesus appears to be adamant that his humanity be at the center of attention rather than his divinity.



Yet, how easily could Jesus have put his power and majesty on display, answering for all time any questions about the source of his miracles and who exactly he is.

There is a scene in J. R. R. Tolkien's first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* wherein Frodo, the one who bears the "One Ring to rule them all," and his companion, Sam, are with Galadriel, the queen of the elves of Lothlórien. Near the end of their exchange, Frodo, seeing the goodness of this elven queen, offers to give her the One Ring, to free himself from the burden of carrying it and the nigh impossible task before him of destroying it to keep it out of the hands of evil Sauron. She responds by saying, "In place of a Dark Lord you will set up a Queen. And I shall not be dark, but beautiful and terrible as the Morning and Night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lighting! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love me and despair!"

Ultimately, she rejects Frodo's offer, choosing the better path for herself, her people, and Middle Earth, even if it ultimately means the end of elves in the world.

Both Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings* and Jesus in the Gospels are illustrations of restraint: people with great power given the chance to wield that power over others for their own good but who, instead, choose another path, one of sacrifice.

When Jesus instructs his followers to "do to others whatever you would like them to do to you," it is a command to show love and respect and humility. It is a call to think of the needs of others through a lens that centers their wants and needs rather than centering our desires or perspective.

It is a command to be humble and sacrificial in our actions, even when – or maybe even especially when – we wield power over others.

May we be like Jesus today, tomorrow, and all our days, choosing the path of humility over that of power.

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

February 27

Overflowing Redemption

By Nathan Solak

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

From the depths of despair, O LORD,
I call for your help.
Hear my cry, O Lord.
Pay attention to my prayer.

LORD, if you kept a record of our sins,
who, O Lord, could ever survive?
But you offer forgiveness,
that we might learn to fear you.

I am counting on the LORD;
yes, I am counting on him.
I have put my hope in his word.
I long for the Lord
more than sentries long for the dawn,
yes, more than sentries long for the dawn.

O Israel, hope in the LORD;
for with the LORD there is unfailing love.
His redemption overflows.
He himself will redeem Israel
from every kind of sin. (Psalm 130 NLT)

Lent is a season of paradox. The Word came to earth to dwell among us. The Savior, God's rescue plan, and the Father's only Son leaves the throne room of heaven to come down and

take on the form of a human. He does not hold onto or cling to the fact that he is God incarnate. He is truly man and truly God. What a paradoxical statement! The Son of God was born in an unexpected, but fully expected, place; lived a very unexpected, but fully expected, life; and died a very unexpected, but fully expected, death.

The words of Psalm 130 remind us of the paradox we live with daily. We find ourselves in the depths of despair far more often than we admit. Yet, we have a God that David says overflows with redemption. When a diagnosis is shared, when someone wounds us, when a relationship is broken, or when our reality is shattered, how quick we are to go down to the depths of despair. Psalm 130 is a raw look at our standing with God. When we cry from the depths, there is no reason he should answer us based on our standing. Yet in the depths of hurt, heartache, and hardship, God offers us forgiveness.

In the depths of life, our hope is in the paradox that an all-powerful God not only listens to his sinful people but that he forgives and redeems us. As Jesus comes and empties himself, he brings the overflowing redemption, flowing right from the very veins that bled on the cross. The paradox that red blood washes sin white as snow cannot be understated.

Twice David says that even though he is in the depths, he is counting on the Lord to show up. His language here reminds me of the three young men in Daniel who say to the king, we know our God can save us, but even if he doesn't, he is still God. Whether or not God's rescue aligns with our plans of rescue is not guaranteed. As we sit in the depths, we reflect: how did I get here? How will I get out? And what will I do when I get out? David simply says, I count on God.

Perhaps as we take this season of Lent to heart, we need to proclaim that same truth to our lives – I will count on God, however he shows up. Counting on God means trusting that God is who he says he is and that he has given us an overflowing redemption that can bring great hope in times of great despair.

Nathan Solak is the lead pastor at Ridgewood Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin.



February 28

Love Is the Final Fight

By Michael Benson

**Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
(Philippians 2:6)**

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43–48 NLT)

When he was still a young man, John M. Perkins held his brother in his arms as he died after being shot by a deputy marshal. He himself was badly beaten by the Mississippi Highway patrol. In the preface to the 2014 printing of his book *Let Justice Roll Down*, Perkins writes, “For repentance and forgiveness to work in my life, God had to see me through months of agony and pain after being beaten almost to death.” He needed that time of intense soul-searching to mature and grow in Christ. He continues, “I have overcome that sense of bitterness in my own heart—even though it was caused by my enemy. God had to replace it with His love.”

There are many of us who have real and pronounced reasons to hold in our hearts a deep bitterness – even hate – toward another who has unjustly wronged or damaged us. John M. Perkins certainly had good reason, but after allowing the Holy Spirit to work in his heart and soul in the midst of his agony and distress, rather than hate, he allowed God to fill him with love.

As followers of Jesus, we are so good at reminding one another that we are to love our neighbors, but that’s the easy part. The hard part is actually following through, and harder still



is loving those who don't see us as neighbors, who see us as enemies. Yet, if we are truly to be "Good Samaritans," that is exactly what we are to do.

When Jesus tells the story of the Samaritan rescuing the beaten Jewish man and paying for his care, it was not just about a man showing compassion and love toward someone who had a differing opinion of theology than he did; it was the story of a man who, if the roles were reversed, might not have been rescued or shown any concern or care because of his heritage and religious beliefs.

It's a story of a person from an oppressed group showing love and compassion for someone who was part of the group that had historically been his oppressor.

This is enemy love. This is showing kindness to the persecutor.

As backward – and as overwhelmingly difficult – as this is, it is exactly what Jesus expects of us and invites us into. He calls on us to be "perfect," mature and full grown in our love so that it is directed not just toward the people who are easy to love but toward everyone, even those most difficult to love, just as he has done.

And ultimately, as John M. Perkins says it, "Love is the final fight." Love of neighbor – friend, stranger, and enemy alike – is the only way the world changes for the better. Even more, it is the only way we can truly say we are being like Christ.

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

WEEK 3

March 1

Sabbath: John 3:1–17

As we mark the weekly sabbath rest during this Lenten season, take time to meditate on today's passage, reflecting on how it relates to Philippians 2:5–11. Read it over a few times, being mindful of where the Holy Spirit invites you to pause to consider what he wants to speak into your life today.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5–11 NLT)

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”

Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

“How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

“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. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”
(John 3:1–17 NLT)



March 2

The Prince Is a Pauper

By Michael Benson

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes.

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed:

“O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.

“Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame. This is true of all of us, including the people of Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, scattered near and far, wherever you have driven us because of our disloyalty to you. O LORD, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the LORD our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets. (Daniel 9:3–10 NLT)

There is a common trope in certain kinds of literature where the king – or prince or princess – disguise themselves so they can wander among their subjects, unknown and without the trappings of their nobility to hide behind or keep them safe. Sometimes they switch places with a lookalike who lives at the opposite end of the societal ladder from them, ala Mark Twain’s classic *The Prince and the Pauper*, but often in these stories they simply put on an old



coat, sneak out the back door of the castle, and wander the stalls of the market, relishing what it must be like to live free of the responsibilities intrinsically linked with their station in life.

In contrast, our King didn't sneak out the back door of heaven to slum it with us for a few days before returning to the comfort and safety of his throne. He was one of us. He lived with us. He "moved into the neighborhood," as Eugene Peterson puts it, and made his way in the world as a rabbi with no home to call his own.

Since the first betrayal in the Garden of Eden, God has been at the receiving end of some of the worst actions humanity has committed. We are liars, cheats, thieves, adulterers, racists, killers, and so much more and worse. During the thirty-three years of his life on Earth, Jesus saw all those vices, flaws, and broken aspects of our nature at eye level. For many of them, he was on the receiving end; it wasn't just that he was betrayed, beaten, and killed in the last days of his life – it was very likely he was betrayed, mocked, lied to, cheated, and stolen from throughout his life.

Our God doesn't know what it's like to be us because he went on a mission trip one summer; he became one of us and experienced for decades all the highs and lows of what it means to be human.

The King of kings became a peasant. The Prince of peace lived as a pauper.

And the world is better for it. *We* are better for it, for if God had not given up "his divine privileges" and taken up "the humble position of a slave," we would be still under the law, still living in a world that has not experienced the hope and redemption of the cross.

As Christians, we talk a lot about the incarnation – God becoming flesh and bone and living among us as fully human and fully divine. We even talk about needing to follow his example, to be incarnational in how we love our neighbors, entering into their suffering with them instead of simply showing compassion from afar. Yet, too often our idea of being incarnational is more akin to a prince sneaking out of the palace to be "with" the people for an afternoon rather than living among them as one of them.

Consider your attempts at living incarnationally. As you try to be like Christ in how you love others, what have you gotten right? How have you missed the mark?

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

March 3

The Action of Jesus

By Cam Roxburgh

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

“Don’t let anyone call you ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one teacher, and all of you are equal as brothers and sisters. And don’t address anyone here on earth as ‘Father,’ for only God in heaven is your Father. And don’t let anyone call you ‘Teacher,’ for you have only one teacher, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:8–12 NLT)

The story is told of an older man who was being harassed by three younger “tough guys.” They insulted him, even though he was well dressed, and attempted to start a fight. The older man said nothing and refused to be goaded into violence. When his stop came, as he stood to exit the bus, he was a far more imposing figure than was seen when sitting down. Leaving the bus, he handed one of the tough guys, his business card, which read, “Joe Louis – Former Heavyweight Champion.” This man, one of the greatest boxers of all time, did not act as he could have but rather acted in humility, restraining his power.

In Philippians 2:5, Paul exhorts us to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. In verse 6, he describes the attitude of Jesus, who is divine but sought the Father’s glory instead of using his status for his own glory. In verse 7, we see how this attitude of Christ played itself out in action:

[R]ather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness (NIV).

Christ did not give up his divine nature (although he did not use it to his advantage); rather, he underlined it, putting it on full display for the Father’s glory. First, he demonstrated his



divinity in taking the nature of a servant. In God’s story (Kingdom), divinity is expressed through servanthood. This is opposite to the story of the world (Empire), where we seek to be served. Second, earthly kings show power by force, but Christ demonstrated who he is through surrender. He was 100 percent divine but also became 100 percent human.

We are to have the same attitude and to act as Christ did also.

As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are not to seek status and become equal to God but to act as Christ acted so Christ is seen in us. We are to serve rather than be served. We are to demonstrate a level of humility that demonstrates what it means to be fully human. There are many ways this can be seen, but here are a few ways we might consider.

First, we practice restraint. Without thinking, I find myself having to one-up another. I will not seek to listen but seek to be heard. I correct others when their information is incorrect and try to demonstrate intelligence by having “the last word.” There is no servanthood in any of these.

Second, I can choose to go the extra mile with someone. I found it incredibly motivating when someone went the extra mile for me recently.

Third, we need to keep short accounts with one another. We all know the consequences of not dealing with tension because we do not want to create conflict. The truth of the matter is that we thereby create far more. We need to be humble and make amends.

Fourth, we need to be the ones who go and seek forgiveness. I find it is true that I am most often annoyed with others because I see myself in their behaviours.

May we grow in our Christlikeness.

Cam Roxburgh is the VP of Missional Initiatives.

March 4

Instead . . .

By Deb Judas

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, “Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.” So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over.

Then the LORD gave me this message: “O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand. If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned. And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, but then that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.

“Therefore, Jeremiah, go and warn all Judah and Jerusalem. Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am planning disaster for you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and do what is right.’” (Jeremiah 18:1–11 NLT)

Instead . . .

Philippians 2:7 begins with a word that indicates something is about to change. It points to an alternative way. The prior verse tells us that Jesus was indeed God, and now as we move into verse 7, we see that Jesus is choosing to give up his divine privileges. I think it’s important to note that Jesus was not giving up his actual divinity but rather the privileges attached to it.

This is intriguing to me. I think it would have been easier for Jesus to give up his divinity entirely rather than giving up only the privileges attached to it. If Jesus had given up his divinity, he would have no omnipotence (power), no omnipresence (being everywhere at once), no omniscience (all knowing), or any supernatural authority. This would mean he would have no access to it at all. He would now be fully human. Done.

Instead . . . giving up his divine privileges means he still possessed all the power, wisdom, and presence and chose not to use them. They were still there, but he did not touch them.

Instead . . . he became a slave. Not even just an average, middle-class human. He went even further and took on the position of the “least of these.”

I think of Prince Harry of the British royal family, who, for the sake of his wife and children, gave up his royal position in the family. Harry seemingly had it all, but because of those he loved most dearly, he instead became one of us. He could turn back and work things out with his royal family, but instead he daily chooses to live a seemingly lesser life in order to give his family a better life.

I recognize this is a flawed example as Harry is still living a somewhat privileged life. However, it does highlight, even more starkly, the sacrifice Jesus made for the sake of humanity. He fully surrendered everything, even his own life, to bring us new life – life in abundance.

So how are we to respond to this gift?

I think of the story of Jeremiah responding to the Lord by going down to the potter’s house and seeing the potter smash the lump of clay he was working with because it didn’t turn out the way he had hoped. It causes me to wonder about my own life and all the times I wandered off, turning away from God and not turning out the way he had hoped. Those decisions always led to difficult seasons of life.

Finding my way back to Jesus required me to surrender my way to his way, which is only possible because he sacrificed his life for me. Rather than merely living a good life, what if our response to Jesus’s redemptive gift was to:

Instead . . . take on a posture of humility in order to discover the heart of God?

Instead . . . allow the Lord to shape us into becoming more like Jesus?

Instead . . . being willing to sacrifice a comfortable life to receive life in abundance?

Instead . . . proclaim his Kingdom come, his will be done?



I thank the Lord daily that he is willing to start over and over again to remake me afresh in his image and that he would give his very life in order for this to be accomplished.

Deb Judas is the administrative assistant and director of Formation for the Missional Initiatives Team

March 5

The Unthinkable

By Michael Benson

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

Jesus said, “There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man’s table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores.

“Finally, the poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the heavenly banquet. The rich man also died and was buried, and he went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side.

“The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.’

“But Abraham said to him, ‘Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.’

“Then the rich man said, ‘Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father’s home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don’t end up in this place of torment.’

“But Abraham said, ‘Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.’



“The rich man replied, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.’

“But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19–31 NLT)

This is one of Jesus’s most interesting parables. Every other parable is set within the agrarian society of the first century audience. In stark contrast, this parable takes place mostly in the afterlife from the perspective of a rich man in hades.

Another reason this parable is interesting is how differently people understand it. For some, this is a glimpse into what the afterlife will look like. For others, the only truth being illustrated is the meaning of the parable, not the experiential reality of heaven and hell. This is also one of the few parables that doesn’t include Jesus ending with a one-line synopsis or explaining the meaning to his disciples, leaving it a bit more open to interpretation than others.

What is particularly poignant about this parable is how well it points ahead to the days and weeks after the resurrection, while also calling out the religious leaders in the moment of its telling.

After all Jesus had done – all the teachings, miracles, healings, and proclamations – the Pharisees and Sadducees still refused to listen to the truths of Jesus’s words. Instead, they seemed to double down on their shallow, hollow religiosity rather than embracing the new life found in following the way of Jesus. No signs from on high would change their minds. Even the raising of the dead – whether Lazarus, a young girl, or Jesus himself – would not change the closed minds of the religious elite.

To them, the idea of God becoming man to show us the way to salvation – to BE the road to salvation and redemption – was not just unthinkable, it was blasphemy. To them, God is above and man is below, and to claim the divine would become mortal would be to defame God and make him lesser.

And yet, that is exactly what he did. The divine became mortal, even as he kept his divinity. The unthinkable became reality.

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

March 6

Mirror Stories

By Michael Benson

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

He called for a famine on the land of Canaan,
cutting off its food supply.
Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them—
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
They bruised his feet with fetters
and placed his neck in an iron collar.
Until the time came to fulfill his dreams,
the LORD tested Joseph's character.
Then Pharaoh sent for him and set him free;
the ruler of the nation opened his prison door.
Joseph was put in charge of all the king's household;
he became ruler over all the king's possessions.
He could instruct the king's aides as he pleased
and teach the king's advisers. (Psalm 105:16–22 NLT)

The story of Joseph is familiar to most Christians – as well to musical theater fans due to the popularity of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (but that's beside the point). For those who aren't familiar, today's lectionary passage from the book of Psalms provides an excellent summation.

The story of Joseph is an amazing, God-ordained tale of a person living at the top of the world, falling to its depths, then rising again, higher than before.

For the first section of Joseph's life, he was the favored son, a particularly poignant label given the sheer number of brothers he had, and the fact he wasn't the firstborn by a longshot – a

role generally considered the favored one during that period. After he was sold into slavery by his brothers, he found a little bit of favor before falling even lower by being jailed for a crime he didn't commit. Yet, God ordained that he should be rescued from the pit his life had fallen into and made second in command over all Egypt.

Similarly, the story of Jesus is an amazing, God-ordained tale of a person living at the top of the world (above it entirely, even), falling to its depths, then rising again, higher than before.

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, existed before the creation of the world in perfect unity with the other two persons within the Trinity: the Father and the Spirit. When he took on the flesh and blood of humanity and lived among us, he “gave up his divine privileges” and “took the humble position of a slave,” the end point of which was his death on a cross next to criminals. Except, it wasn't the end point, as three days later he rose from the dead and has been exalted to the highest place and given the name above all others.

When we read in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus “understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin,” we can be confident that he understands the pain points in our stories, the struggles we've experienced in our personal histories. After all, we see in Joseph an antecedental mirror to Jesus's narrative; though Joseph came centuries before Jesus, his story points toward the Christ and the cross and this central spoke around which all of history turns.

In the same way Joseph's story points ahead to Christ, our stories can point back toward him, but for that to be true, we must be willing to submit ourselves to the path God sets before us, regardless of the difficulties that arise. God willing, we won't experience the same level of extremes in our stories that Joseph did, but our call to follow in the steps of Jesus through humility and love of others is still just as powerful a testimony.

Michael Benson is the communications director for the North American Baptist Conference.

March 7

How Do We Glorify the Lord?

By Wayne Stapleton

**Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form [. . .]
(Philippians 2:7)**

Let all that I am praise the LORD;
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.
Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

The LORD gives righteousness
and justice to all who are treated unfairly.

He revealed his character to Moses
and his deeds to the people of Israel.
The LORD is compassionate and merciful,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.
He will not constantly accuse us,
nor remain angry forever.
He does not punish us for all our sins;
he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve.
For his unfailing love toward those who fear him
is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.
He has removed our sins as far from us
as the east is from the west. (Psalm 103 NLT)



God is so good in his very character, and that character has expressed itself in many and various blessings.

We are forgiven for our many sins. We are healed – and healing! – in many ways. We have been saved from eternal death. We have been given love and tender mercies. We have experienced his compassion. We have benefited from his unfailing love. We have not been punished for all our sins; his wrath does not remain on us.

If we only look, we can see beauty in our lives that has come from him and only him.

God deserves all the glory, honor, and praise. How then do we glorify the Lord for all he has done and is doing and even promises to do? (For we know his promises are good.) What is our right response?

We praise him. We glorify his name. We give him honor. But not just with our lips.

What about our hearts? Our bodies? Our choices? How do we glorify the Lord?

By centering our lives on Jesus to respond in faith to his many gifts.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By loving the triune God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By loving our neighbor as we do ourselves, and as we do our families.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By seeing Jesus not just as our Savior but as our Model, by making choices that reflect his love and character.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By seeing his life as not only useful for our salvation, but beautiful in its grace and mercy.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By purposing to have the same attitude Jesus did when he took on a body of the other for the redemption of the other.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By moving beyond lip-service to serve from our hearts, with our bodies, through our choices.

How do we glorify the Lord?

By living out the love God has shown us so those around us may know him, experience his love, and worship him full-bodied as well.

How do we glorify the Lord?

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