

40 Days

OF PRAYER AND FASTING

An Easter devotional and
fasting guide based on
Journey to the Cross
by Paul David Tripp.



Introduction

In the coming 40 days, we want our church to come to the understanding of what it means to lament over the days leading up to the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These 40 days will culminate with the celebration of his resurrection on Easter Sunday. This celebration is such a refreshing and exciting time in the life of believers. However, to fully understand the gravity and grace of this Christian holiday, we must first wade in the muck of the events that led up to this great day.

What is lament? A passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

The key word in this definition is not grief or sorrow, but passion. When we truly understand the graveness of our sins, there really should not be any other reaction than passionate grief.

Our prayer and hope for our church is that these 40 days will be a lovely journey in our spiritual lives. We want to learn the proper, passionate response to our sins during this journey. BUT, just like the journey to the cross did not stop with the sufferings of Christ, our response to sin does not stop with sorrow. His mercies are new every morning. As we will see, we have much to celebrate!

Section One

Fast social media for the next seven days. Every time you feel the need to pick up your device and click on an app, STOP and pray for the sins in your life; that Christ would help you to turn from them.

Day 1

"God is holy, so sin is serious. God is gracious, so sin can be forgiven. On the cross his holiness and grace kiss.(13)" — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalms 51:1-12

Most of us that have been raised in church know the drill. We know about God, we know the Bible stories, and we can most likely quote scriptures from memory. We are mostly faithful members of a local church and believe in the importance of the body of believers. Our Christian life is made up of the necessary spiritual disciplines including scripture, prayer, and maybe even fasting. However, most of us (if courageous enough) would admit that we do not talk or concede to the idea of one necessary part of our spiritual growth...confession of sin. We pray for health, our finances, our safety and for others in the same way. But if we are honest, how much time do we spend in prayer over our sins? When was the last time you were so aware of your sin that it broke you? We have all heard the way that David participated in one of the "worst" sin events recorded in the Bible and was still considered a man after God's own heart. What we do not hear much about is how David responded after he admitted his guilt. In the passage you read for today, we see a man grieving his sins from birth until present day. We see a man begging God not write him off, but to give him back his joy in this terrible time in his life.

Spend time in prayer today asking God to:

- 1. Reveal the sin in your life that is keeping you from becoming closer to Him.*
- 2. Break you over this sin so that you will understand the depth of your wickedness.*
- 3. Open your eyes to the mercy and grace that awaits you at the foot of the cross through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Ask yourself if you have other brothers or sisters in Christ in your life that you can confess your sins and have a healthy response in prayer with.

Day 2

“When the shadow of the cross hangs over us, we are not surprised by sin, and we are not afraid to look at what has already been forgiven (17).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 130

As believers, it is easy to look to the world when we face difficulties that may come into our lives. It can be tempting to look to people and things around us to find out what we think we SHOULD be doing with our lives to find joy and contentment. How many times when searching for answers to problems, or maybe the correct path that we think may lead to ‘success’, do we use those same people and events to compare our lives to? We use these things as sorts of measuring sticks of who we are, where we are, and how should we act. It is so easy to forget that the measuring stick we should be using is the life and death of Jesus. When we look at His life and look at His death, what we see in that reflection is sin. Compared to Jesus, that is ALL we should see. In Jesus, we are reminded not only of our sin, but of how gracious He is. Think about this...If we believe that God is truly Sovereign, then we must reconcile the fact the He knowingly sent His son to suffer an excruciating death FOR US! What does that say of the grace that he pours out on us every single day? Jesus’ perfect life shows us where all of our problems come from in our own sin and the sinful world we live in. It gives us the example of holiness and what we should be imitating. Jesus’ death shows us where the answers for our life should come from in his grace and mercy towards others when they sin against us.

Ask yourself today:

What do I think about my own sin compared to those around me? Do I see myself as the better person compared to those around me?

Pray that God would show you daily that you are the worst sinner that you will meet, and then pray that God would show you His grace that is so freely given.

Day 3

“Keep reminding yourself that you live in a world that is groaning, waiting for redemption, but remind yourself also that the cross guarantees that the groaning will someday end (21).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 74

When asked what you might think about sin, you would most likely reply, “bad”, “evil”, or “messy”. However if someone were to catch us in the act of sin, before the remorse or conviction set in, we would probably describe it as “fun”, “fulfilling”, or even “needed”. In the act of the sin, we do not see the damaging effects that may be waiting for us on the other side. This is a part of the cosmic problem we find ourselves in; living in a fallen state in a fallen world. There is a constant tension of worshiping sin while also being convicted of our sin. We see this in scripture described as the groaning of the world waiting on Christ’s return. Tripp writes, “Part of the deceitfulness of sin is it’s ability to make what is destructive appear attractive (23).” This is our lives. We live in a world that is continually calling us to be more like the world; while as Christians, our call and our mission is to separate ourselves from this world. We are to live as exiles, just like the Israelites. But so often in our current predicament, just like the Israelites, we look like we fit right in. We must ensure that our groaning is fixed on the redemption that has been won and will be fully restored in Christ’s return. If our groaning is over our sin but never turns to this glorious promise to be fulfilled, then even our groaning over our sin can be unhealthy. Our sin is where our plight begins, but for believers is it NOT the end. Our future is glory to glory and, oh, what a day it will be!

As you read the Psalm for today, how do you see both groaning or lament from Israel, but also a reason to be filled with hope?

Pray and ask God to break your heart over your sins. Call a brother or sister in Christ you can trust and confess these sins to them. Then both of you spend time in a prayer of thankfulness that this groaning and lament will NOT last. Redemption has come and glory will come.

Day 4

“God intends suffering to pry open our hands so we let go of the things of this earth and hold more tightly to Jesus (28).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Luke 9:23–25 and Romans 6:1–14

What is it that you have to control in your life? Finances? People’s attitudes or efforts? Your own health? Take out your phone and set a timer for 5 minutes. In these 5 minutes, write down everything that you find yourself getting frustrated or angry over. If we are honest, most of this list (if not all of it) are people or things that we want to be able to control. When we feel out of control, fear sets in and that fear leads us to secondary emotions that include anger and frustration.

Next, reset the 5 minute timer and begin writing down things that make you feel content or fulfilled. Is it a certain amount in your bank account? Is it a good report of health? Is it being able to sleep at night because of the new security cameras you installed? This list is going to show you what means the most to you, and most of it will likely be synonymous with security and comfort. Our lives as Americans are built around the idea of comfort and control. Look at our hotels, our vacation experiences, the amount of self-care coaches and financial investment plans all available to us. All of these things, while not evil in their own right, breathe into our souls the idea that we are and should be in control of our own destiny. It is the mantra of Hollywood and the algorithm of social media.

What happens when we track down these things in our life is we begin to see a pattern of things that have in one way or another become more than things...they have become idols. The late pastor Tim Kellar once said in a sermon, “All sin stems from idolatry of these four idols in which we put our hope in, instead of Christ.”

Comfort, Approval Power, and Control – these are the source idols. And as Paul David Tripp explains, “Here’s the core of the struggle: as long as sin still resides in our hearts, we will have an inclination to ask the physical creation to do for us what the Creator alone is able to do.(26)”

When any of these idols are taken from us, most of us would admit that, even if it's just for a bit, it leads to suffering. Suffering is both revealing of what is important in our lives and also necessary for our growth in our walk with Christ. Without suffering, we are without the mechanism to recenter our efforts away from the pull of this world and back to the holiness of Christ. Just as our sin led

Christ to suffer on the cross, our suffering illuminates the pathway back to that same cross. The same cross where we see our sin reflected in His perfection, and that hopefully opens our eyes to see the grace of Christ.

Ask yourself today: When suffering comes, do I pray that God would show me how to grow with Him in the suffering? Or do I just want it to go away?

Where do you feel like you have already experienced suffering this year?

Pray that God would comfort you in the suffering that may come, and also show you the sin in your life that may be causing the suffering so that you can let go and make your way back to the cross.

Day 5

“Prayer is abandoning my righteousness, admitting my need for forgiveness, and resting in the grace of the cross of Jesus Christ (29)” — Paul David Tripp

Read Matthew 6:9–13

Stop and take just a moment and say a prayer before you move forward in today's devotional.

Now, try to write down exactly what you prayed as best as you can remember. What was it? Personal needs met? Maybe praying for your health or someone else's? Maybe you're making a difficult decision in your life and need God to give you guidance? All of these things are worthy of prayer but must not be the only thing we pray for. Our prayer life is a healthy indicator of what we think about God and what our relationship with God is for.

Imagine meeting someone on this earth that you thought did everything close to perfect. A mentor or maybe a leader in the things you are most interested in. Would you immediately ask that person to do something for you? Or would you begin by telling that person the reasons why you sort of worship the ground they walk on? Most of us would do the latter. Then why are we so tempted to treat the creator of the universe like a genie in a bottle or a welfare agent? If God is who we say He is, then the language we use to talk to Him should reflect His character. Concerning our sins, our prayer life should be a constant state of asking, as the Psalmist wrote, to blot out my sins before Him. There should be some language of asking God to forgive us, to not look on the shameful things we may have done, and then being thankful for who He is and what He has done for our sins. Our prayer is a form of worship and our worship should be cloaked in humility before our King.

During these 40 days leading up to Easter, let us be intentional in our prayer life. For the remainder of this devotional, commit to praying in a way that shows remorse, humility, obedience, and thankfulness to God. Challenge yourself to pray prayers with spiritual substance, submitting to the holiness of God instead of prayers to meet your demands. Allow the confession of sin to be the theme of your prayers alongside thankfulness for how God shows love and mercy to us in spite of those sins.

As you end the devotion today, write out your prayer to God. See if intentionally writing your prayer affects how you pray.

Day 6

"The empty tomb stands as an eternal promise to you that God will always finish what he has begun in you and for you (33)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Romans 12:1-2

Death is a complicated subject. It brings a bag of mixed emotions. As Christians we know that we should not fear death but that does not always equal emotions of contentment or joy when we lose a loved one. If we look through scripture, death is a part of the redemptive story of Christ. From God telling Adam and Eve there will be finality to their lives after their sin, the killing of Abel, the passover in Egypt, the sacrifices that God instructed of the Israelites, to the death of Christ and the deaths of the apostles; death is an essential part of the Gospel that saves us.

Not only does the Bible give us story after story of death being necessary to the story of redemption, we also see death as a part of our everyday lives in our walk with Christ. We see an incredible amount of scripture calling us to die to our sinful human characters and to take up the new abundant life in Christ. We have all heard these verses if we have attended a church for any length of time. The call to action is clear in scripture. But what does that actually look like?

For the past few days we have been reading about how sin serious, and that it is something we should treat seriously in our personal spiritual growth. We have identified idols that keep us from being closer to Christ today than we were yesterday, or the day before. For believers, turning from these idols is to die to ourselves and to be raised in Christ. Make no mistake, this process of death that must happen is not something that happens overnight. It is a daily, hourly, constant part of who we are and what we should do as we pursue the holiness of God.

When we read Romans 12:1-2, Paul is instructing and calling us to be living sacrifices. What does that mean for you today? What must you sacrifice today to live as Christ has called you to?

Day 7

“In this broken world we won’t get paradise now, but the empty tomb guarantees us that a new heaven and new earth are in our future (37).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Revelation 21:1-7

How many times have you had a dream of a perfect vacation, a big team win, a career milestone, or any other dream goal? Maybe it happened, maybe you fell short? In either scenario there can be let down. The win was not the pinnacle you thought it would be. The vacation you so diligently planned was not what you expected. The point is that we all have a fantasy of this perfect scenario that, if it happens the way we dream, could make us extremely happy. They could be THE things that helps us catapult ourselves to that affirmation we need or maybe gives us the time of peace we have been longing for.

Unfortunately, on this earth none of this will quite measure up. The bible is clear that our lives here will be filled with disappointment and heartache. In this chapter of Revelation though, we see a promise of paradise fulfilled. It is only until Christ’s return that we will get to experience this epic utopia we have all longed for. So what do we do for now? We continue in the call from this guide we have been reading to lament. We must groan. We keep our eyes fixed on running the race well until Jesus returns and rights all the wrongs we have experienced on this earth because of the effects of our sin.

What does your attitude in the midst of disappointment say about who you worship? As you pray today, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength you need to have the attitude of Christ’s call in the sermon on the mount: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matt. 5:4

Section Two

Fast one meal per day for the next seven days. Every time you feel hungry, STOP and pray that the physical pain you feel from hunger would remind you of the pain Jesus suffered for our salvation.

Day 8

"It's good to be poor. It's the only pathway to the riches of grace (40)."

— Paul David Tripp

Read Ephesians 2:1-22

As we enter Day 8 of this Easter devotional, you can see the theme running deeply through these pages. We cannot escape our sin. We **MUST** recognize it is woven into us from Genesis 3. And the only way to turn from it is to admit it's there, and then learn how to lament it while also living in the grace provided to us through Christ if we are Christians. It is necessary that we heed the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where he tells us we are blessed if we are poor in spirit. Jesus is not referring to our financial net worth here. He is addressing that those who follow him need to understand the grave danger in thinking we are good people; and the danger in being jealous of the ones who seem to have it all together in their walk with Christ. Neither one of these situations are profitable for the Christian life. Our lives as disciples **MUST** be centered around an understanding of our sin and our great need for Jesus, our Savior.

Here is an eye-opening thought: How many funerals have you been to where people were mourning that the one who died was not a Christian? The answer is probably none. As humans, we are very quick to believe that our eternal security is held in our own good deeds and righteousness. This is a dangerous lie that the enemy sneaks in on us. Those of us who would admit and believe that not all humans go to heaven still are very hesitant to think someone we know might actually be in hell. Our transparency of our own poor spirits should pour out to those around us on a daily basis.

How do you portray the type of transparency about your life that says "I know I am a sinner"? Do your actions say "I am self-righteous," or "I am poor in spirit"?

Day 9

"Where you point the finger of blame is where you will be convinced that the most help is needed (44)." – Paul David Tripp

Read 1 John 1:5-2:6

What is our first response when things go wrong, get difficult, or maybe fail? Defensiveness? Do we look inward first, or do we tend to immediately look for ways to blame our circumstances on other things or people? At times, we may come around to the fact that it is our sin, and other times we may never admit it. How many times have we been hurt by someone and instead of thinking about how we could have done things differently, we just live in the "right to be mad" because this person has wronged us?

Our sin and corruption runs so deep in us that we have a difficult time being able to admit our sin because we actually are sinning in not admitting the sin! Say that again 3 times fast! Any time we experience things in our lives that do not go our way, or maybe people hurt us, or we experience a failure; our tendency is to find something or someone to blame. Scripture, however, tells us we should do otherwise. In the scripture from today, we read that if we do not admit that sin is in our lives then there is not light in us and we cannot call ourselves followers of Christ. In other words, without Christ, we are left to nothing but our sin. So if we are not willing to admit that we are sinners and in need of a savior, or admit our sin in our everyday lives, then it is impossible to say we are Christians. Humility in recognizing our sin is key to our spiritual health and life. Pride, especially concerning the lack of confession of our sin, is a key indicator that a person is living in darkness.

During these 40 days, our goal is to center ourselves on admitting and confessing sin and then turning to the grace of Jesus Christ. It is the same cycle of what Christ did for us by suffering in His death and then being resurrected to rule at the right hand of the Father.

Think about a recent time that you maybe blamed someone or something for a difficult time in your life. Is there a sin you could admit to that might provide a path to becoming closer to Christ?

Day 10

"Jesus did what he did for us because there simply was no other way."

— Paul David Tripp

Read Romans 5:1-21

We are all saturated in a microwave culture. Everything is instant. Companies like Amazon have taken our lack of patience and elevated it to a level of which we likely do not understand the full consequences. This lack of patience has overflowed into our lives when dealing with long term processes. We do not have the ability to sit and wait. Problems come and we want a fix now. The quick fix is the only fix. That is why devotionals and seasons like Easter are so good for us as Christians. It is a time to stop and reflect on the goodness, in the midst of the pain and difficulty, of who God is and why He has us in this season. It is an opportunity for us to focus and center our minds on the suffering that Christ had to endure in order for us to be able to have access to the Father eternally. There was no quick fix for Jesus, and there is no quick fix for us. This world will remain difficult and painful until Christ comes to restore His order and establish his new creation.

Think about the suffering that Christ had to endure. The days leading up to the crucifixion were terrible and unthinkable. Pray that we would not want to move quickly through the problems of our life but focus on why we are enduring.

Day 11

"The cross of Jesus Christ purchased more than forgiveness for you (52)."

— Paul David Tripp

Read Romans 2:1-16

Has someone ever done anything to you that really hurt you? Have you ever hurt someone? Forgiveness is most always a long process made up of many hurdles to work through. Forgiveness is not the final step in the process of restoration though. It is being able to trust that the person won't hurt us or the offended again. This is not easy because we know that as humans we typically fail and can hurt people repeatedly. Especially those of us that are married. The cross of Christ makes a way though.

When Christ died for us, he did not die just to forgive our sins. He died so that, as a part of the forgiveness process, he would change us. The story of redemption does not end with forgiveness. It starts there. The sanctification process that comes after forgiveness is the process that turns us away from our sin so that when ask for forgiveness from others, it is not just empty words. His work in us and through us gives us the power and the courage to stand on our apologies and actually be changed.

Is there someone in your life you know you have hurt? Pray that the Lord would give you an opportunity to ask for their forgiveness by confessing your sin to them and then trusting the Lord will change you.

Day 12

“Your emotional life is a window into what is truly important to you and what you are really living for (56).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Colossians 3:1-10

So many of us reading this devotional right now grew up in the life of a church. Most of us possess an extensive amount of what Tripp calls, “habits of religion (58)”. An inspection of our lives would show church attendance, service in and outside of the church, some sort of devotional life, bible study/small group attendance; we could go on and on. But what if we took a look at our emotions? What would we find? Would we find a Christ centered joy that is not built on the “highs” of our life? Would we find a peace that surpasses all others? Or would we find fear? Anxiety? Anger? What kind of person are we when we are in the quiet moments of lives by ourselves or with our close family? Just like our bank accounts can show us what is important to us, our emotions can also show us what or who we really worship.

Do we say we trust God for the outcomes of this world and yet spend time worrying over the political climate of our country? Do we say that we love others but spend most of our time casting blame and being upset because people have not lived up to OUR expectations? Do we say we are thankful for the blessing of our family and friends and yet spend most of our time speaking to them in anger? Do we say that we have a peace eternally because of what Christ accomplished on the cross and yet spend the majority of our time anxiously saving and planning financially so that we can feel safe and comfortable? Our emotions are a direct window into what we worship as Christians. How we respond and react to the events of our lives show a picture of who and what we really hold tight to in worship. The habit of religion is not why Christ died for us. He tells us in Hebrews that the sacrifices and the offerings are not enough. Jesus wants our heart, mind, and soul not our religious habits. During these 40 days leading up to Easter, once again, we must confess the sins that are keeping us from truly worshipping Christ. When we are not willing to confess sin and focus on what is keeping us from becoming like Christ, we cannot be near Christ.

*Think about which emotion you deal with the most. Fear? Anger? Anxiety? Worry?
Ask God to show you the root of that sin and turn from it.*

Day 13

“Every piece of Christ’s suffering was suffered for you, and every victory accomplished by that suffering was accomplished so that you can now live in victory too (60).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Isaiah 53:1-12

During these 40 days we have been asked to sacrifice something each week. These things are mostly superficial things that are not necessary to sustain life. However, that does not mean that it is not difficult at times. We develop habits in our daily lives that can be very difficult to break when asked to for one reason or another.

Jesus’ death and resurrection was the fulfillment of the prophecies and meant to be the substitutionary event for redemptive history. His death became the substitute for the original Adam. Jesus became the second and better Adam by living a life of no sin. Jesus’ death was the substitute for the animal sacrifices that had to be made in the Old Testament to cleanse the Israelites of their sin before the Levitical Priests entered the temple. Jesus’ death was also the substitute for these same priests. After His death, we no longer need these priests to approach his throne in confession, prayer, and worship.

So we see that because of the sacrifice through Jesus’ death, He became the replacement. The question is, how willing are we to sacrifice things in our lives in order to replace them with Christ? What things are we worshipping that need to be sacrificed in order to draw nearer to the throne of Christ? Maybe we are not sacrificing at all. Maybe we need to confess the sin of simply not be willing to sacrifice idols in our lives for the sake of Christ.

Write down what would be the most difficult or has been the most difficult thing to sacrifice over the course of this devotion so far. What made or would make this one thing such a difficult part of our life to sacrifice?

Day 14

“One of the scariest, most destructive aspects of sin is its ability not only to blind us, but to blind us to our blindness.” — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 139

“You see, if sin blinds—and it does (see Heb. 3:12–13)—then I will not have an accurate view of myself as long as there is sin remaining in me (65).” What a sobering thought this is for ourselves. We would all agree that until Christ’s return we will always deal with sin in our personal lives to one degree or another. So this blindness that Paul David Tripp refers to is inescapable. If we cannot even see some of the sin that is in our lives because of the blindness sin causes, how do we repent? How do we repent for something we do not know exists? This is yet another reason that seasons of fasting, praying and seeking God are so important as a regular spiritual discipline in our lives. It is a time we can REALLY focus on not only the sin we know we struggle with, but also ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of the sin we are blind to.

Another indicator that we can watch for in our lives is how receptive we are to our brothers and sisters approaching us about sin they may see in our lives. If every time someone says something to us we immediately get defensive and ignore their encouragement, we can definitely see some blind spots in our lives. Gospel community is meant to be difficult and confronting. Yes, it should be done in gentleness and in the right context. But, more importantly, it should be done. So our attitudes as disciples of Christ should be of humility to these rebukes that may come from others.

Think about your relationships with other Christians. Do you have the type of relationship with a brother or sister in Christ that you can confront each others sin in love in order to mature in your walk with Christ? Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to the sin-blind spots you may have right now in your life.

Section Three

Fast from sleep: Set your alarm 1 hour early for the next 7 days. Use this time to specifically read scripture and pray over your family.

Day 15

"The core enemy in our struggle with sin is not wrong behavior, but the idolatry behind the behavior (68)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Ephesians 6:10-18

When we think of the word 'idolatry' most often, as Christians, we think of the golden calf the Israelites worshipped or some other man made object. Maybe some think of something like a wooden buddha statue. The point is, many of us have strong idols in our lives that we do not even think about. Most of our idols, as the good followers of Jesus we are, are somewhat unassuming things. Maybe you have a show that are drawn to, or maybe its Facebook or Instagram. Maybe you love to workout, eat healthy, and be active. Those things do not seem like idols. In fact, they appear like you are taking care of your temple, your body, as God has instructed you to do. Idols in our lives most often look good on the surface. However, if we were to take a closer look at the time we spend planning and doing these type of things compared to the time we spend participating in any sort of spiritual disciplines, we might be shocked to see what we really worship. Our minds and our attention are preoccupied with so many things that the world throws at us. So, anything that can capture us in a way that distracts us from spending time in prayer and scripture could become an idol very quickly. For many, even careers can become an idol.

When you break down you day in terms of time, what consumes you the most? What 'good' things are taking you away from better things in your life? How is satan distracting you with seemingly responsible habits that are causing you to be weak in your faith and trust in Christ?

Pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes to the good things that distract you from being more disciplined in your walk with Christ.

Day 16

"No sacrifice is more pleasing to your Lord than the sacrifice of words in the form of humble, honest, heartfelt confession (72)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Romans 3:10–18

Confession may be one of the most humbling things we can do as people and Christians. We are not made, in our sinfulness, to desire confession. Any time we are at fault for something, we immediately start rationalizing in our heads why exactly it is not our fault. Kids are born with this trait. It is not taught. Finger pointing comes natural. When it comes to confession, it is so incredibly difficult. Think about something though. For a Christian, is it easier to confess a sin to God in prayer or to a brother or sister in Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book *Life Together*, challenges Christians in this thought. This is a paraphrasing, but he says that we find it so much easier to admit our sin to the most Holy being ever to exist and yet confessing that same sin to the person standing right next to us, who probably acted out the same sin recently, is almost impossible. Shouldn't this be the other way around? This idea shows how little we comprehend of the holiness of God. Regardless, confession should be a regular part of our daily lives. No, standing up in front of the church and confessing a lie you told this week is not exactly what we are referring to. As Christians though, we should be living in such a way with others in community that we have those people we can go to and confess these sins. Then they can join with us, on our behalf, crying out to a holy God to forgive us and give us the strength to repent.

Read the following prayer aloud. At the end, ask God to bring someone to you that you can establish a relationship with where regular confession can take place in your lives. If you have this person already in your life, ask God to continue to give you the strength and desire to meet with them in prayer and confession.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

—Book of Common Prayer, Seabury Press, 1979

Day 17

“The Christian life is a battle of treasure. Whatever treasure captures your heart will control your life.” — Paul David Tripp

Read Matthew 6:19–34 and 13:44–46

The notorious pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It is literally what movies are made of. We all deep down chase it; the treasure that will never fulfill us. It can make us obsessed. Chasing the world, the so-called rat race, giving all of our effort to the world so that we might find that missing link that will ultimately give us contentment and happiness. As we see in the reading today, we cannot be a servant of two masters. If our desire in life is this world's treasure then it is impossible to also serve God with our whole heart, soul, and minds. We are definitely made to seek out treasure. We are made to desire hope and joy. But we get so distracted with the things of this world because they are physical. We can see them, touch them, interact with them. It entangles us into a web of desire for things that will never fully fill us. Only Christ can do that. Only Jesus can give us the everlasting treasure that we long for.

It should be our hope in these 40 days of seeking Christ for the Easter season that we will center our aim on the only treasure that will sustain us. No matter how flashy and tempting the things of this world can become, we must stay the course. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment for the things we ache for in this world.

What is it, in your life, that you treasure? What are you seeking from this life? Do you find yourself looking for ways to serve God and others or do you find yourself seeking ways to become more affirmed and secure in the present world we live in?

Day 18

"The story of our redemption is historical proof of the unstoppable sovereignty of God (80)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Isaiah 46:5-13

How many times have we been surprised by events in our lives? All of us can say there have been surprises that have led to joy and surprises that left us devastated. Our lives are literally built on these surprises because we simply cannot see into the future to know what happens next. Frankly, there are also numerous times that not only do we not know what is coming next, but even after it has happened, we are left wondering what we should do. The good news is that God is never caught by surprise. Read this poem from Paul David Tripp and meditate on how good our God is.

Surprised again.
Quiet conversation erupts into heated debate.
Surprised again.
Sickness interrupts well-being.
Surprised again.
A loved one is unexpectedly lost.
Surprised again.
A long-trusted leader falls.
Surprised again.
An unexpected gift alleviates need.
Surprised again.
Opportunity's doors open wide.
Surprised again.
A sleepless night plunders rest.
Surprised again.
Sudden conflict crushes peace.
Surprised again.
An emergency alters day's schedule.
Surprised again.
Divine provision propels a plan.
Surprised again.
Sudden mystery sows confusion.
Surprised again.
Grace proves too big to grasp.

(Continued on next page)

It is the story of
my life.
I am surprised again
and again.
Surprised again,
reminded again
and again,
that I am not sovereign.
I am surprised again but not afraid.
My surprise,
my misguided expectation,
the mystery I live with,
my lack of control,
does not mean
my world,
my life,
my present,
my future,
is out of control.
I will be surprised again
and again,
but I am not afraid,
because you, Lord, are incapable of being
surprised (80-82)."

*Pray a prayer of thankfulness that God is Sovereign and He
alone is never caught by surprise.*

Day 19

“You and I have three problems that only the Redeemer has the power and willingness to solve (83).” — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 51

Tripp explains in his book, *Journey to the Cross*, that the nature of sin is a 3 prong problem. It consists of transgression, iniquity, and sin (85).

Transgression is the willing action to cross over into a sin. It is the act of crossing the line, if you will. Sometimes we do it knowing full well what we are doing and other times, not so much (85).

Iniquity is the thing in our spirit that causes us to be rebellious in the first place. It is not so much the action but the psychology of why we act on the sin. Iniquity is what shows us that sin is something we are born with. It cannot be escaped as it is in the very makeup of who we are (86).

Sin is the specific action we have committed that has gone against God. It is the lie we tell, the paper we cheat on, the specific argument where we yelled at our spouse. It is THE moment of weakness in our lives.

As you read Psalm 51, use this confession from David as a model to pray a prayer of confession in your life today. Although David commits a grave sin that has consequences that will ripple through time, his confession to God is what Christians should understand should be a part of our own prayer lives on a daily basis.

Day 20

"It is good to silence complaint in your life by sitting down and taking the time to count your blessings (88)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 103

Over the last nineteen days we have been focused on defining sin, identifying sin, confessing sin and fighting sin. During a focused time like this devotional is, it is good to also stand back at times and not lose sight of all the characteristics of God. Talking about sin can be very hard and very emotional because it seems like it is a fight that we cannot win. And we can't! But God...He is so very good. He is our victory and He is the ONE thing that does not change in our lives. As we have reached the half way point of this 40 day devotional, stop, and write down 20 blessings that you have in your life right now that you can show gratitude for.

Recently there was a worship song written called, "Gratitude". The song tells us that even when we do not feel like we have anything to be grateful for, we can be thankful that we are able to praise God for who He is! Listen to this song today and focus on the words that are a powerful description of our spiritual lives at times.

Day 21

"It is impossible to excuse, deny, or minimize your sin without telling yourself that you do not need the grace of Christ Jesus (92)." — Paul David Tripp

Read Psalm 62:5-8

Have you ever looked at another person and thought, "Man, I'm glad I'm not that bad of a person..." For those of us that have kids, how many times have we scolded one child for them only to tell us how someone else was doing something way worse? Sin is a funny thing. As we said a few days ago, not only does sin come out in our lives, but we also have a tendency to be blind to our own sin. In the world of social media, humans are constantly comparing ourselves to others like never before. Sometimes it's thoughts of how we would like to be like other people or sometimes it's a thought of happiness because we are not quite as bad as another person. Regardless, anytime we have an attitude that someone else's sin is worse than ours, we are missing the whole point of why we are able to live in the grace of Jesus Christ. The grace of Jesus Christ does not coincide in a world where we are defensive or have a tendency to blame our sin on actions we are not in control of. Excuses are a humans way of elevating ourselves to a platform that does not need the grace of Christ as much as we would say we need. There is nothing fair about the world we live in. Our sin being not as bad as our neighbors does not make the gospel more fair for us than others.

If we understand the grace of Jesus Christ, we must get rid of the excuses in our lives and the attitudes of defensiveness about the sin that is so prevalent in our lives. As we celebrate this coming Easter, lets be the type of people that are not looking to level the playing field of sin. Lets show others the great gift we have to be able to live under the grace of Jesus through confessing and turning from our sin no matter how small it is.

Pray today that you would not give in to the temptation to compare yourself to others, and go and live unashamed in the grace of Jesus Christ.