

2024 Easter Offering

JESUS' RELENTLESS LOVE

**Nine Holy Week Phrases That
Change Us and Transform the World**

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**EVANGELICAL
FRIENDS MISSION**

Holy Week carries deep significance for Jesus' followers. It is in this week that we remember Christ's suffering and celebrate his resurrection. We hope that by diving into the depths of Jesus' relentless love for the world and for each of us that we will experience a greater work of God in our lives and around the world.

These devotional prompts flow out of the final words Jesus spoke. These expressions of the heart flow out of intense suffering. Jesus pronounces the first seven phrases as his life seeped out of him. The last two he declared wielding mortal scars which emphasize his authority to say them. Each utterance is his commentary of his immediate reality, helping us connect his passion to his teaching as well as Old Testament prophecy. Jesus is practicing what he preached, and he is kind to help us see it. Golgotha is a practical expression of his conviction that a Great Commandment lifestyle - to love God and love others - is the most beautiful way to live. It also foreshadows the Great Commission. These words are a picture of Jesus' relentless love for us and for the world.

This set of writings helps inspire us to live out that same kind of love. Focusing on Jesus' final words, each reflection focuses on a specific characteristic of relentless love. We will see that each saying peels back the nature of relentless love.

The format emphasizes discerning prayer and scripture reading and is designed to aid each participant to dig deep into the soil of Jesus' relentless love. The biblical passages are short and meant to be read three times during each sitting. This allows for careful reading, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us into greater awareness of its content. Next, we seek God's insight for our life and in the end, identify a point of practical application. Each day also includes brief notes to prompt deeper reflection. Notice, there is space to write any of your insights and applications. Recording our observations, insights and applications plants ideas deeper into our souls, helping them to fully integrate into our lives. Scribbling even a phrase or two is usually beneficial.

You might like to engage in this process with a group because it is mutually beneficial to share our experience. The support of other Christians, demonstrated through encouragement and accountability, allows us to more effectively follow Jesus' instructions. Obedience leads to integration. This integration releases us into the abundant life Jesus calls us to enjoy.

The small group experience could revolve around sharing three simple questions: What insights did you receive from your reading? How might you put those insights into practice in everyday life? And, how can we support you - prayer, encouragement, accountability? Spiritual growth thrives in this kind of supportive group.

Finally, you received a copy of this devotional guide because you have supported Jesus' relentless love through the work of Evangelical Friends Mission. We offer it as a gift, grateful for your support.



Stan Leach
Executive Director

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Palm Sunday: Mercy

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Simple Prayer: Teach me the power of mercy and the freedom of forgiveness.

Read for Context (What does it say?): Luke 23:33-34

Read for Insight (What does it mean?)

His Relentless Love: Jesus was innocent. Yet, a pagan Roman governor, a corrupt king, a coalition of jealous religious leaders and a raging mob all conspired to thwart justice. They stripped and beat the “King of the Jews,” mocked him, drove him to bear his instrument of execution up a hill called “The Skull,” hammered nails into his hands and feet and raised him up. They slayed him.

In the midst of this injustice, Jesus poured out mercy on them. In an amazing application of his teaching on prayer (“as we forgive those who trespass against us”), Jesus somehow rose above the injustice of his torture and asked his father to forgive his oppressors.

This is the way of relentless love. It pours out mercy where it is unmerited.

Our Response: Of course, if we look closely, we can find ourselves among the ranks of those who have received mercy. We have abdicated our responsibility to speak out for right, we have behaved in self-serving ways, we have sought control, we have followed the crowd. In our sin, we cry out, forgive our trespasses. We receive forgiveness and find our relationship with God restored. We are free.

The challenge is to follow Jesus into this very practical act of mercy, even against those who have seriously wronged us. Like Jesus, we pray for those who have wronged us. And, because we are forgiven, we forgive. We forgive and are set free.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Monday: Grace

"Today you will be with me in paradise."

Simple Prayer: Deepen my understanding of your grace.

Read for Context (What does it say?): Luke 23:39-43

Read for Insight (What does it mean?)

His Relentless Love: As Jesus hung on that cross, his physical pain was punctuated by verbal barbs and abuse. Many in the crowd, the hardhearted leaders who had manipulated his execution, the soldiers who did the dirty work, hurled insults and verbal darts that mingled together in absolute cacophony. Yet, just to his side, a voice. A voice marked by humility and longing.

The voice came from a hardened criminal receiving his reckoning. He was guilty and he knew it. Yet, in Jesus, he witnessed grace. In a last-ditch effort for absolution, he asked if he could follow Jesus into death.

As the felon spoke, perhaps Jesus heard the words of the psalmist, "A broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise!" Jesus, then, would not refuse him. Today. With Me. Paradise.

This is the taste of grace – the fruit of relentless love.

Our Response: "Jesus, right here, right now" is the motto of relentless love and out of which grace flows. This is the promise of Emmanuel. Our privilege is to walk around in this grace, knowing Jesus is at work all around us. The invitation for us is the same as the invitation for the thief. Jesus says to you, "Right now. With me. I got this."

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Tuesday: Care

*“Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple,
“Here is your mother.”*

Simple Prayer: Let me see your deep care for me and those I love.

Read for Context (What does it say?): John 19:25-27

Read for Insight (What does it mean?)

His Relentless Love: All who read the story of Jesus on the cross agree that his agony was unimaginable. Yet, in his pain, he recognized that he was not the only one who suffered. He saw his mother and his closest friend now crouched at his feet flooded with sorrow, drowning in despair. He saw them. He knew them. He cared.

In the midst of misery, he addressed their need and brought them consolation. As he had through all of his ministry, he defines family as those who together do his will. Obedience is thicker than water. So Jesus committed these two to one another. John became helpful to Mary and she a consolation to him.

Care for those in need is a characteristic of relentless love. Everywhere he went, he met needs – healing, feeding, listening, releasing. At the Last Supper, he began by acting out a parable. He washed the disciple’s feet. His point is simple – to love is to care. To care is to serve.

Our Response: Undoubtedly, Jesus loves us. In his compassion, he has commissioned us be flesh and blood representatives of his love. Because he is wise, he knows that we are our best selves when we express love through practical service. When we serve, we not only find that others experience Jesus’ relentless love, but that his love is changing our heart as well.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Wednesday: Lament

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Simple Prayer: Father, reveal your willingness to hear my complaint.

Read for Context (What does it say?): Matthew 27:45-49

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: Jesus speaks to directly to God three times while on the cross. Two of the times, he cries out, "Father!" Here he does not. At this moment, out of the thickness of an ever-darkening afternoon, Jesus complains.

He did not just pull this phrase out of his head. It is the first line of a Psalm 22. It is shorthand and references the entire psalm. Say aloud this psalm of lament, you'll hear a melody (in a minor key) of anguish punctuated by an unmistakable counterpoint riffing God's sovereignty and redemption.

When we complain to God, instead of offending him, we (in a sort of indirect way) affirm our own mortality. Though counter-intuitive, this admission allows us to recognize God's determined resolve to rescue us. Lament ushers us (through the back door) into an awareness of God's relentless love.

Our Response: Jesus gives us permission to protest. As with everything, there is a healthy way to complain. Lament is helpful when we concede that we grumble to a God who is merciful, gracious, caring, present, sovereign, infinitely powerful, extraordinarily kind, eternally wise. Our lament, then, will emulate the complaint of Jesus. We will move from desperation and despair to a deeper appreciation and expectation. Our faith will grow as will our capacity for love.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Maundy Thursday: Vulnerable

"I thirst."

Simple Prayer: Give me a deeper awareness of the reality of your humanity.

Read for Context (What does it say?): John 19:28-29

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: Jesus was not Superman. Jesus' body was 100% human dogged by hunger, fatigue, injury, aches and pains. And thirst. Simply said, on the cross Jesus became dehydrated. He asked for a drink. His torturers stuffed a sponge full of bitterness into his mouth and snickered at their (cruel) joke.

Jesus said, "I thirst," not to demonstrate that he was human. He was thirsty because he was human. There is a vulnerability to Jesus that is present only because he was a regular human. He was mortal. He was dying a real death.

This chosen vulnerability underlines the depth of Jesus' humanity. It emphasizes the reality that being in very nature God, he made himself nothing, taking on the image of a common, everyday human. He then lived out his days in humility as an obedient servant.

The essence of humility is the willingness of a regular person to pour oneself until empty for the sake of others. This vulnerability is scary. It is also an undeniable characteristic of relentless love.

Our Response: Jesus showed us the way of humility. He invites regular people – like you, like me – to follow him. Paul captures this idea in Philippians 1:1-11. He implores God's people to embrace vulnerability for the sake of the Church and for the cause of the Kingdom. For Jesus it led to eternal glory. For us it leads to humble, unmitigated worship.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Good Friday: Undaunted

"It is finished."

Simple Prayer: May I appreciate your tenacity and resolve to express your relentless love.

Read for Context (What does it say?): John 19:28-37

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: His breathing was sporadic now. His mission was literally at the finish line. Jesus articulated it this way, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." He had served wholeheartedly. Now, he would give his life.

One translation chose to use the phrase "it is consummated" over "it is finished." There is something powerful in that interpretation. It brings to mind the marriage covenant. The relationship between Christ and his People (the Church, his Bride) is now fully consummated. What God has joined together, no man will ever tear apart.

Relentless love brought Christ to this moment. He could see the end that was a beginning, a bit like a groom who sees his bride walking down the aisle. He knows that single life is over and a new, better life is now present. It is for this moment that Jesus is undaunted by his suffering. Jesus says, "I do!" Life with a newly ransomed bride starts now.

Our Response: It is finished, the old life has gone, the new life is consummated. Because Jesus did the work, and did it completely, we live in gratitude and humility, freely and joyfully. Perhaps our greatest response, today anyway, is to bask in this overwhelming service rendered by our King as a reflection of his relentless love to us and to the world.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Quiet Saturday: Trust

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Simple Prayer: Teach me to love you more so that I will trust you more.

Read for Context (What does it say?): Luke 23:44-49

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: It is true that Jesus on the cross was about his love for humans. However, that is just part of the story. Jesus’ work on the cross was also about his love for the Father.

Jesus lived his life in constant communion with this Father. He was absolutely confident that God loved him. Throughout the gospels, the mutual love that Jesus and the Father have for one another is remarkable. Jesus said it this way, “I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”

These last words, “into your hands I commit my spirit,” are a testament to Jesus’ trust in the Father. He was confident that everything he had taught about this endgame – that his death would ultimately result in his resurrection and ascension to God’s right hand – would surely happen. This is why the beloved son could commit his spirit into the hands of his beloved Father. He was convinced that death was not the end of life but the beginning.

For Jesus, when he spoke these final words, he was really saying, “Father, I love you!”

Our Response: We live in a cynical world. Distrust of societal institutions – government, education, health care, even the organized church – grows and expands.

We were never meant to put our trust in these things. We were designed to experience life as a beloved child who loves their father. We, then, order our lives around the joy of trusting God. May our actions – even in response to difficult situations – reflect trust flowing from our relentless love for our heavenly Father.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

Easter Sunday: Glorious

"Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

Simple Prayer: Show me your glory.

Read for Context (What does it say?): Luke 14:13-35

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: What is glory? It is the revelation of a person's character and nature – their deepest identity. When Jesus is glorified, his deepest identity is revealed.

Jesus uttered the previous seven phrases to help us connect his suffering to his identity. In this story, he is reiterating the lesson – to give his life as a ransom, he had to suffer and die. This reveals his true deepest identity. He is a God of relentless love who will go to the most desperate lengths to pay the debt of sin and liberate humanity from the curse of death. He had to die in order to demonstrate the supremacy of the resurrection. He delivered not only an escape from sin but the power to live a victorious life. He ascended to heaven to provide the hope of eternal life.

Jesus has now entered his glory! He is infinitely powerful but chooses to be known as a God of relentless love.

Our Response: Jesus chose the Church to be the embodiment of his identity. It is through his people that the world sees the heart of the Suffering Servant, the power of the resurrection and the hope of eternal life (that starts right now)! Each of us carries the privilege of reflecting Christ's glory by expressing his relentless love right here, right now!

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.

The Monday After: Equip

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Simple Prayer: Through your relentless love, change me and transform the world

Read for Context (What does it say?): Acts 1:1-11

Read for Insight (What does it mean?):

His Relentless Love: Jesus completed step one of making the Kingdom of God available to humanity. Now, this beautiful way of life had to be delivered beyond Jerusalem’s walls and beyond Judea’s borders. Jesus’ vision was that every nook and cranny of the earth would have a gospel witness. Because the best way to pass on this vision of life is to embody it, he commissioned his people to act as ambassadors of this Kingdom.

Because the task seems daunting, he equipped the Church with all it needed to accomplish it. He empowered them by the Holy Spirit. He guided them through the Holy Scriptures. He surrounded them with like-minded Christians to spur one another on. This mission is straightforward, although not always easy. It really boils down to regular people walking through their day, asking the Lord how he is at work in the people they meet and responding to opportunities to serve with joy.

Simply put, this is Jesus’ (only) plan to spread his relentless love to the ends of the earth.

Our Response: God leads all his people to be his ambassadors to those who live “across the street” – in Jerusalem, so to speak. Others, he will call to strike out to another region – to Judea. Some will go to a different culture that is just across town – the modern equivalent of Samaria. Still others he will call to go far away. This is the EFM’s role as a ministry of the Evangelical Friends Churches in North America. We facilitate the sending of Gospel ambassadors to the ends of the earth. (For more, go to our website, www.friendsmission.com.)

Bottom line, wherever Jesus’ people are, that is where they are meant to be witnesses. In this, his relentless love changes us and transforms the world.

Read for Application (How should I respond?)

Notes:

Say/write a short prayer of commitment.



Afterward:

We are grateful to the Lord for all of this. Generous support from God's people is fueling this progress. This Easter season, we invite you to join us in celebrating and advancing Jesus' relentless love. If the Lord impresses upon you to financially support EFM, you can give:

- Online at **<http://friendsmission.com/easter>** or by scanning the QR code below.
- By credit card over the phone at **303-421-8100**.
- By mailing a check to **PO Box 771139, Wichita, KS 67277**.

Please make sure to designate your giving to the 2024 Easter Offering.



We would also love your feedback. If you are willing to share the impact of these devotional exercises, please email **stan@friendsmission.com**.

Here are a few additional resources you might find helpful.

- *Disciple-Making: Simple as 1,2,3, Infinity* provides a short basic approach to disciple-making that is accessible to anyone and can be utilized in any circumstance. Download at **<http://bitly.ws/on7r>**.
- Lectio 365 is a daily devotional app that follows a similar approach to that used in "Jesus' Relentless Love." Find it at your app store.
- Join our monthly Luke 10:2 Prayer Gathering. Sign up at **<https://friendsmission.com/five-year-goal-pray>**.



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