

LENT DEVOTIONS

DRAWN

to the

CROSS



INSPIRATION FROM

**HENRI J. M. NOUWEN**

## Ash Wednesday

# A CONTRITE HEART

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The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

*Psalms 51:17*

*The Kyrie Eleison—Lord, have mercy—must emerge from a contrite heart. In contrast to a hardened heart, a contrite heart is a heart that does not blame but acknowledges its own part in the sinfulness of the world and so has been made ready to receive God’s mercy. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 32)*

Merciful Savior, soften my heart and grant me your forgiving love. Amen.

## Thursday after Ash Wednesday

# THE WORD

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And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.

*John 1:14*

*Jesus is the Word, and his words are everlasting life. His Word is the bread that takes our hunger away, the light that dispels our darkness, and the life that allows us to face death without fear. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 80)*

Heavenly Father, reveal to us the fullness of your grace and glory, as revealed to us in your Son, Jesus. Amen.

## Friday after Ash Wednesday

## NO COMPARISON

God is love. ... In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:8, 10

*The simple statement, "God is love," has far-reaching implications the minute we begin living our lives based on that statement. When God who has created me is love and only love, I am loved before any human being loved me.*

(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now*, 77)

We use that one word *love* to mean such different things: "I love sunsets." "I love pizza." "I love my kids to the moon." Or simply "I love you." Much of the love people express tends to be superficial, shallow or self-serving.

God is love. There is no comparison with even the loftiest human love. Our best efforts to reflect his giving and forgiving love to others are only a shadow of God's all-embracing love, which led him to offer his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

And yet the more we experience the incredible love of God in our lives, the more we are moved to love others as he has loved us—with a love that keeps on giving and forgiving, long after others have given up. Thankfully, God never gives up on us. And we must not give up on others.

God of love, fill us to overflowing with your incomparable love, so that others around us may come to love you and trust in you with all their heart. Amen.

## Saturday after Ash Wednesday

# NO MATTER WHAT

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See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

1 John 3:1

*The basis of all ministry is the experience of God's unlimited and unlimiting acceptance of us as beloved children, an acceptance so full, so total, and all-embracing, that it sets us free from our compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired and frees us for Christ, who leads us on the road of service. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 58)*

My dad had just persuaded the college president not to expel me for setting off some large firecrackers. At lunch, I asked my dad why he hadn't read me the riot act. He replied, "I think you've learned your lesson. And I'm your father. I'll always be there for you, no matter what."

One of the wonders of our faith is our heavenly Father's unlimited acceptance of us, no matter how badly we may have disappointed him, messed up our life or hurt others. Having been freed from the consequences we deserve for our countless transgressions by Christ's redeeming sacrifice on the cross, we can't help but marvel at the all-encompassing love with which God embraces us. We are his beloved children—no matter what.

As we grow in faith and experience more and more of God's unlimited acceptance, we eagerly follow his road of sacrificial service, no matter how challenging it may look, knowing that our heavenly Father will always be there for us, no matter what.

Forgiving God, we are eternally grateful that we can count on you to be with us always, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## First Sunday of Lent

## THE SHAPE OF GOD'S PLAN

I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, ... to give you a future with hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

*Actions that lead to overwork, exhaustion, and burnout can't praise and glorify God. What God calls us to do we can do and do well. When we listen in silence to God's voice and speak with our friends in trust, we will know what we are called to do and we will do it with a grateful heart. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, Can You Drink This Cup?, 100)*

Our devotions this week will focus on God's plans and purpose for our life. This verse from Jeremiah is often used by those who claim that God has a very specific, detailed plan laid out for each of us. God does have a plan for our life. But God has given us the free will to develop the shape of his plan, through the guidance of his holy Word and Holy Spirit.

The specific shape of God's plan evolves as we listen to the still, small voice of God. He speaks to us primarily through the inspired Scriptures. But we also gain an understanding of God's purpose for our life through the insights of fellow believers.

God's plan for each of us will vary according to the variety of gifts God has given us. But it is always designed to give us and those we serve a future with hope. Our hope-filled future is based on what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. And it takes shape as we carry out the good works which God has prepared for us to do.

All-wise God, help us to discern what we are called to do, and to do it with a grateful and trusting heart. Amen.

## Monday, the First Week of Lent

# OUR MESSAGE AND MISSION

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By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. ... For we are ... created in Christ Jesus for good works, which [are] ... to be our way of life.

*Ephesians 2:8, 10*

*The great message that we have to carry, as ministers of God's word and followers of Jesus, is that God loves us not because of what we do or accomplish, but because God has created and redeemed us in love and has chosen us to proclaim that love as the true source of all human life. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 17)*

Three prepositions spell it out clearly. We are saved *by* God's grace, *through* our faith in Christ, *for* a life of good works. That is the message God has chosen us to proclaim. It begins with the good news that we are put right with God, not through anything we do or accomplish, but only by God's unmerited grace, which we receive through our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Now comes our mission. We are saved to serve. Each new day gives us the opportunity to do some of the good works which God desires us to do. He even supplies us with the gifts to accomplish them. But always they are to be done for his glory—and not for ours.

Where Christ's mission will take us—only God knows. But as we follow Christ in faith, his pathway will become ever clearer, as well as more fruitful and fulfilling.

Our Creator and Redeemer, you have gifted us with your grace and our faith in Christ. Grant us the gifts and resources to do the good works that are to be our way of life. Amen.

## Tuesday, the First Week of Lent

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, ... God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9

*The sacramental quality of the word makes God present not only as an intimate personal presence, but also as a presence that gives us a place in the great story of salvation. The God who becomes present to us is not only the God of our heart, but also the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 48)*

We may know the special place that the patriarchs and matriarchs, from Abraham to Leah, played in God's plan of salvation for all people. But how could someone like me, as insignificant as I feel, possibly make a difference in carrying out God's plans and purposes?

You may have heard the story of the child on the beach, picking up starfish stranded by the tide and throwing them back in the ocean. When a parent suggested it was foolish because there were so many, the child tossed one more into the waves and replied, "I made a difference for that one."

We can't share God's light and love and saving grace with everyone. But we can be God's presence and make a life-saving difference for someone who is drowning in their guilt and shame, or is living in the depths of despair. We can point them to Christ, and invite them to live with us in God's marvelous and eternal light.

Jesus, Light of the World, give me the faith and courage to reach out to someone living in darkness and despair, and help me to make a difference for their eternal life. Amen.

## Wednesday, the First Week of Lent

# A COLORFUL MOSAIC

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We, who are many, are one body in Christ. ... We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

Romans 12:5-6

*Community is like a large mosaic. Each little piece seems so insignificant. One piece is bright red, another cold blue or dull green, another warm purple, another sharp yellow, another shining gold. ... When, however, all these little stones are brought together in one big mosaic portraying the face of Christ, who would ever question the importance of any of them? (Henri J. M. Nouwen, Can You Drink This Cup?, 58)*

Many Christians feel there is little that they are qualified to do for Christ's mission. Some have told me, "When the gifts were passed out, I was passed by." However, all of us have been given a unique variety of gifts and abilities by our Creator. Some of them may seem more valuable or attract more attention. But no gift that God gives is useless. And no human being that God creates is worthless.

In fact, each of us is worth so much to God that he was willing to do whatever it took to bring us back into his family and kingdom. It meant that he himself, in the person of his Son, became the sacrificial lamb.

God's plan for all of us is to combine our spiritual gifts and skills to form a magnificent mosaic—filled with the beauty of Christ's kindness, compassion and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit uses our colorful mosaic to attract people to see the glory of God shining in the face of Christ.

Loving God, you have given to all of your people an assortment of gifts and abilities. Blend our gifts into a mosaic that will bring glory and praise to you. Amen.

## Thursday, the First Week of Lent

# OUR MUTUAL MISSION

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If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord.

*Philippians 2:1-2*

*Compassion is daring to acknowledge our mutual destiny so that we might move forward, all together, into the land which God is showing us.*  
(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 89)

One might expect that everything would have gone smoothly in the congregations founded by St. Paul. But as you read Paul's letters to these churches, you witness the same fussing and infighting that many of us have experienced in our own congregations.

However, when God's redeemed and sanctified people humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, swallow their pride and put Christ's plans and purposes first and foremost on their agendas, amazing things can be accomplished for the good and growth of God's kingdom.

This doesn't mean that everyone in the congregation will suddenly agree on every issue. But when we all have the same first love—our Lord Jesus Christ—and have the same priority—carrying out his mission to seek and to save the lost—then his Spirit can remold us into a faithful and fruitful family of believers. Through the Spirit's encouragement and guidance, we are able to set aside our personal feelings and agenda for the sake of our mutual mission.

Holy Spirit, unite our hearts and minds in full accord to seek and to save the lost, and to bring back those who have strayed. Amen.

# DRAWN to the CROSS



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Henri Nouwen was one of the most innovative and influential spiritual writers of the past century. His vision of spirituality was broad and inclusive, and his compassion embraced all of humankind. Nouwen wrote 39 books on spirituality and the spiritual life that have sold millions of copies and been translated into over 30 languages. The passages quoted in this booklet are taken from certain of his published works, listed here, all of which are available through [www.henrinouwen.org](http://www.henrinouwen.org).

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